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Editorial

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The dominant theme of this issue is comparative and consists of two sections. The first is a special section focused on internationalization of family firms, comprising two competitive papers, which was managed by two invited guest editors: Drs. Tanja Kontinen and Arto Ojala. The second section, also comprising two competitive papers, forms the balance of the issue. Similarly, the editorial comments consist of two parts: those of the guest editors appear at the beginning of this editorial and are followed by those for the remaining papers and the issue as a whole.

From the guest editors: Tanja Kontinen and Arto Ojala

Family firms form the majority of all firms around the world: about 85 % of all the firms in the EU and USA (IFERA 2003) and an even a greater proportion in the developing countries are family-owned. The family is the original economic unit: all other economic organizations are derived from it (Schulze and Gedajlovic 2010). As recently as the start of the twentieth century, all businesses were family-owned and there was no need to label them as a family business. The world has changed dramatically since then, but family firms are still of great importance to most economies.

Management researchers are particularly positive about family governance (Schulze and Gedajlovic 2010). The unified ownership and management enables the CEO to make opportunistic investments and rely on intuition (Gedajlovic et al. 2004). Hence, family firms have the potential to better adapt to changing environments, launch products, and enter markets that investor-controlled or managerially led firms are unable to address (Dyer and Whetten 2006) as quickly. In adverse economic conditions, family firms have been found to sustain more profitable businesses than firms with other ownership structures (Sirmon and Hitt 2003).

Scholars in international entrepreneurship have studied the internationalization of family-owned firms only to a limited extent (Kontinen and Ojala 2010). Recently, however, there has been a call for international entrepreneurship research to expand its coverage beyond the early and rapidly internationalizing firms (Dimitratos and

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Jones 2005; Young et al. 2003). The research in this section is responding to this call for internationalization processes of family-owned firms.

We would like to thank all the authors who submitted manuscripts to JIEN for this special section. We conducted a double-blind review process and asked for two to three rounds of reviews and revisions before our final decisions. We would also like to thank the journal and its Editor-in-Chief, Hamid Etemad, for their support and help for this focused section. Finally, we thank the 34 reviewers for their comments and insights. They helped authors to develop their papers further and informed us on our editorial decisions. In favor of time and space, however, we will not list their names here.

The articles in this special section

The first article, co-authored by Piva, Rossi-Lamastra, and De Massis, compares the internationalization of family and non-family entrepreneurial ventures in high tech industries in Italy. The findings indicate that the family entrepreneurial ventures in high tech industries exhibit a higher internationalization propensity than their non-family counterparts.

The second article, co-authored by Swoboda and Olejnik, examines the interplay of international family firm's culture, strategy, and structure. Based on the analysis of 504 small- and medium-sized family firms based in Germany, the authors suggest that there are four groups of firms: domestic-focussed traditionalists, global standardizers, multinational adapters, and transnational entrepreneurs. These configurations are clearly distinctive in terms of their structure, orientations, and performance but differ less in terms of their strategies. The authors conclude that superior international performance tends to be driven by decentralized entrepreneurial approaches.

The articles in the balance of the issue

The two articles in the second section of this issue were submitted to journal for potential publication and were subjected to the journal's routine double-blind peer review process. In the third article of this issue, Jiatao Li compares the impact of the environmental and institutional contexts on entrepreneurial activities in general, and the rapidly changing institutional context in the emerging economies on entrepreneurial opportunities in particular. After a review of the literature on opportunity creation, discovery, identification and exploitation, he posits that the transitional nature of these economies offers high entrepreneurial opportunities; but not all potential entrepreneurs perceive them similarly. Initially, entrepreneurs with relatively intensive network-connections with the government authorities and establishments are prompted to the pending opportunities. However, as these economies transform through their transitional stages and become market-oriented and competition-intensive environments, entrepreneurs with higher competitive acumen, innovative ideas and market-based competitive advantage are more likely than others to exploit the emerging opportunities. Drawing upon the three pillars – regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive – of the institutional theory, he conceptualizes the institutional transition in a three-stage model and articulates three respective propositions for each transitional stage regarding strategic choice for internationalization of entrepreneurial firms followed by the discussion of implications and recommendations.

In the fourth article of this issue, Oyvin Kyvik, Willem Saris, Eduardo Bonet, and J. Augusto Felicio explore the relationship between the global mindset and the entrepreneurial firm's internationalization in two countries, Norway and Portugal. This research began with the authors' curiosity as to why some small firms in internationally oriented industries see international market opportunities and internationalize to exploit them while other comparable firms do not? They suspected that the difference in the attitude, international orientation, international experience, and mindset of the firms' decision makers could explain the observed behavioral difference and they set to examine it. The paper develops a theory-based conceptual model of the decision makers' global mind set and its corresponding measurement instrument to analyze cross-sectional data collected from Norwegian and Portuguese small firms. Using structural equation modeling, the authors estimated their proposed model and found that not only was there a casual relationship between the global mindset and internationalization behavior, but also the main drivers of internationalization would operate through the global mindset of decision makers in small firms in their two-country sample. The analysis also revealed differences between the international behaviors of firms in the two countries and pointed out to what would influence the decision maker's global mind set.

In summary, the above four articles compare the impact of different aspect of the firm, its decision maker's characteristics, and its environment impacting the firm's respective choice of internationalization strategies and processes. The range of firms, their decision makers' characteristics, and environments spanned from decisions in family firms and in small firms in internationally oriented industries in advanced economies to emerging entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial firms in transitional economies. The papers in this issue clearly point to the need for further comparative thematic research to elucidate and advance our knowledge of various characteristics in comparative settings and from different perspectives. The journal invites research papers with rich comparative frameworks and perspectives.

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