

Conveners: Christina Lubinski, Harvard Business School/German Historical Institute Washington DC
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Time/Place: 18-19 February 2011 in Washington DC

Going Global: Internationalization Pathways for Family Firms during the 19th and 20th Centuries

Over the last decades, family businesses have started to gain more and more scholarly attention. Instead of conceptualizing the family firm as an historical relic or in opposition to the “modern managerial enterprise” (Chandler), research today investigates the dynamics and challenges that family businesses face during their entire life cycle. Scholars and practitioners are therefore interested in the competitive advantages and disadvantages of family businesses in different national and historical settings.

The conference will contribute to this emerging field of research by focusing on family businesses as international actors. Since the 19th century, family businesses have addressed global challenges and have competed in international markets. Therefore, adjustments to their corporate governance have been necessary. Family businesses opened up to external knowledge and capital, often while exploring new strategies to maintain the family’s influence. Whereas some family firms have succeeded — for example, as “hidden champions” or successful niche producers — others have experienced severe setbacks or have failed.

This conference will gather international scholars in order to discuss different strategies and pathways for internationalization that family businesses pursued during the 19th and 20th centuries. While contributors are welcome to suggest additional topics related to the overall theme, the conference will address the following questions:

- 1.) What competitive advantages and disadvantages did family businesses have in their international ventures? To what extent was the focus on longevity and the long-term family influence an obstacle or an advantage to the internationalization processes? Which role did family, gender, and generation relations play in the process of internationalization?
- 2.) How did different family businesses go global? Which structures and strategies did those businesses that internationalized successfully employ, and which concepts proved to be less effective? What differences existed between family businesses on different continents in their international activities (e.g., import/export, agencies and production facilities abroad, licensing, joint ventures) and in the choice of target countries?
- 3.) Internationalization depends to a significant extent on the availability of venture capital. Family businesses, which strive to remain independent, have limited access to external capital. How, then, did family businesses react to the capital needs of internationalization? What relations did they have to banks, creditors, and the equity market in different national economies; and how did these relations change over time?
- 4.) Finally, we believe that globalization builds on local conditions. What framework for internationalization did family businesses rely on in different countries? What role did local

learning processes and regional and national communities play for internationalization processes?

Paper proposals (two pages maximum) are welcome for all sessions from both young and established scholars from different countries and disciplines, including business history, economic history, economics, sociology, and psychology. Each session is devoted to international comparative studies that will identify and evaluate internationalization pathways in different family businesses and countries.

Proposals should include an abstract of the paper and a curriculum vitae in English. The proposals should be submitted via e-mail (preferably in pdf format) by July 1st, 2010, to Baerbel Thomas b.thomas@ghi-dc.org. Please address questions to Lubinski@ghi-dc.org or palomafernandez@ub.edu.