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## A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF INTERNATIONALIZATION IN FAMILY FIRMS: A COEVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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## ≈ INTERACTIVE PAPER ≈

**A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF INTERNATIONALIZATION  
IN FAMILY FIRMS: A COEVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE**

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**Principal Topic**

The internationalization process of family business has received increasing attention from researchers in the last two decades since the seminal work by Gallo and Sveen (1991). Most studies have focused on examining the internationalization differences between family and non-family firms and little research has been undertaken to understand how family firms internationalize. Our goal is to address this research gap and shed further light on internationalization in family firms by adopting a coevolutionary stance to understand family firms and their internationalization over time.

Coevolution is based on the assumption that different interdependent systems coevolve over time, reciprocally influencing each other's development. We propose a coevolution framework to study the family-business interactions longitudinally and decipher their influence on the internationalization process of the firm. While firm internationalization is recognised as a dynamic process, yet little is known about the role of the family in the evolution of internationalization process of family firms. The fundamental insight is that both the family and the business are constitutes of each other's environment and therefore influence each other's evolution. Understanding these dynamics will provide a new lens to examine, and subsequently explain, the process of internationalization in family firms.

**Method**

A sample of five Irish multi-generational family firms is used to form a multiple case study approach. Thirty-four in-depth interviews were carried out with family and non-family executives and board members active in the firms across multiple industries, departments, and generations. To triangulate the data, interviewers also gathered secondary data from websites, annual reports, company and industry reports, and newspaper articles. The empirical material was coded and analysed to distil general patterns. Patterns were then applied to a coevolutionary timeline by mapping main family events and international strategies and noting the influences between the two.

**Results**

Our multiple case study analysis indicates that certain family events have a direct impact on the internationalization process of family firms, specifically, the speed and pace at which internationalization occurs. We describe and represent the parallel evolution of the family and the business, through the most relevant events in both contexts from the business foundation until now.

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