
Editorial: Developing a research question in family business management research

Editorial

1

Research questions are important in family business management research as they provide a foundation for a study. Generally, they are included in the introduction section of a paper as a way of positioning the study in the literature but can also be included in the methodology section. Usually, one research question is sufficient but sometimes they are divided into sub-research issues that are related to the overall research question.

In family business management research, we want research that is engaging. This means it needs to relate to existing literature but offer something new and unique. Research questions offer a way of challenging the assumptions in theory by engaging with practice. A research question should differ significantly from past research, and yet be connected to past research. Research questions that ask pertinent and relevant questions are likely to be more highly regarded.

To write a research question, some consideration needs to be undertaken about the reason and purpose for the research. This means identifying the problem that is being answered in the research study. To do this can be time consuming as simple and well written research questions require much consideration. Good research questions are clearly written in a way that others understand.

A research question should extend the literature and focus on areas that have not been comprehensively studied. This means spotting a gap and then reinforcing why the research is useful. Some research questions add minor suggestions to existing studies thereby taking an incremental approach, but other research questions can question existing studies in a radical way.

Most research questions concur with existing research thereby solidifying the status quo. This is to be expected in research studies based on existing theories and literature. Research questions that digress from existing research are rare. They do exist but can be harder to publish due to their novelty. When they are successfully published, they are likely to lead to new theories or research ideas. This has occurred with seminal studies on family business in new contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic and in times of war.

There are no formal ingredients needed to write a good research question. There are though expectations about the wording, tone and language used in research questions. The wording should be easily understood and not contain too many jargon or academic words. This can be hard to do due to set writing conventions used by many researchers. The tone should comply with a question being understood as being a research question and not another kind of question. To do this it can be helpful to specifically state why and how the research question originated. This means including relevant facts and statistics that justify the research idea. The language should comply with professional standards in terms of simplicity. Thus, not over-complicating things.

In conclusion, writing a good research question in the family business management context takes skill. When reading a family business study, the research question might be overlooked and the reason for this is due to it being well thought out. Nevertheless, for family business management researchers, it is crucial to spend time writing a good research question as it lays the foundation for everything else in a research article.

Vanessa Ratten



Journal of Family Business
Management
Vol. 14 No. 1, 2024
p. 1

© Emerald Publishing Limited
2043-6238
DOI 10.1108/JFBM-03-2024-304