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WHAT OUR PhD FELLOWS ARE DOING

Learn about **Angèle Marinelli's** research!

Executive summary and practitioner insights by Angèle Marinelli, PhD Fellow, and Cécile de Lisle, Executive Director, Dieter Schwarz Foundation Family Business Center, based on a chapter from the doctoral dissertation of Angèle Marinelli, funded by the Center.

This summary draws on the core findings of Marinelli's dissertation, with interpretation and application developed independently by Angèle Marinelli and Cécile de Lisle for a family business audience.



RESEARCH TOPIC

Identity Diagnosticity and Stakeholder Backlash

Why do family firms face stronger backlash when they engage in **corporate political advocacy**?

When a company takes a public stance on an issue, stakeholders **don't only react** based on whether they **personally agree** with the position. They also ask: **does this stance fit with who the firm is?**

To make this judgment, stakeholders rely on what Angèle calls **identity diagnosticity**: how **easily** they can **interpret the firm's identity** from the **information available**, which depends on two factors:

- **Information accessibility**: the depth of identity cues stakeholders can observe
- **Information complexity**: the number of identity dimensions against which advocacy can be judged.

For family firms, **complexity** is especially **high** because they embody a hybrid identity: simultaneously pursuing business goals and family-centered goals.

This hybrid identity makes **advocacy both riskier and more consequential**. Misalignment across either dimension is more easily spotted and more harshly sanctioned.



EMERGING HYPOTHESES

FAMILY FIRMS' DUAL IDENTITY HEIGHTENS REACTIONS

Because family firms combine **business** and **family** goals, stakeholders judge advocacy across **multiple dimensions**. This hybrid identity makes both **authenticity** and **misalignment** more visible and more **consequential** than in **single-identity** firms.

INSIDERS REACT MORE STRONGLY THAN OUTSIDERS

Internal stakeholders, such as **employees**, have **deeper access** to the firm's history and values. They are more sensitive to **whether advocacy** fits the firm's **identity**, rewarding alignment and penalizing missteps more strongly than external audiences.

THE STRONGEST EFFECTS OCCUR WHEN BOTH FORCES COMBINE

When **insiders** evaluate a family firm's **advocacy**, they have rich **access to complex identity cues**. This creates the conditions for either an **especially strong authenticity buffer** (when fit is high) or the **harshest backlash** (when fit is violated).

GET IN TOUCH

DO YOU FIND THIS RESEARCH INTERESTING OR RELEVANT TO YOUR FIRM'S EXPERIENCE?

If you're navigating political engagement in your organization, this study may shed light on the unseen symbolic dynamics at play.

Feel free to reach out to Angèle at angele.marinelli@hec.edu to discuss this further. She would love to learn from your insights and perhaps even gather data at your company—which would provide you with unique insights!

