

## **Defining Professionalization and Managerialization in Family Firms: A Bibliometric Analysis and Systematic Literature Review**

**Damiano Petrolo<sup>1</sup>, Luca Gnan<sup>2</sup>, Wim Voordeckers<sup>3</sup> and Frank Lambrechts<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> *Management and Law Department - School of Economics, Tor Vergata University, Via Columbia, 2 – 00133 – Roma, Italy, Contact: [damiano.petrolo@uniroma2.it](mailto:damiano.petrolo@uniroma2.it)*

<sup>2</sup> *Management and Law Department - School of Economics, Tor Vergata University, Via Columbia, 2 – 00133 – Roma, Italy, Contact: [luca.gnan@uniroma2.it](mailto:luca.gnan@uniroma2.it)*

<sup>3</sup> *Hasselt University, Hasselt, Belgium. Contact: [wim.voordeckers@uhasselt.be](mailto:wim.voordeckers@uhasselt.be)*

<sup>4</sup> *Faculty of Business Economics, Hasselt University, Hasselt, Belgium. Contact: [frank.lambrechts@uhasselt.be](mailto:frank.lambrechts@uhasselt.be)*

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this review is to map the intellectual structure of professionalization and managerialization in family firms, to explicit the implicit link between them, and to investigate why considering them together should be important for future research. In doing so, we used both bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review methodologies on articles published in the last ten years. This study is built on and expands existing literature on professionalization and managerialization in family firms by considering all different streams of research on those topics and setting a useful point for future research. Addressing one of the most contentious issues in family businesses research, the results of this review are directed to both scholars and practitioners by enlightening the importance of professionalization and managerialization in family firms.

**Keywords:** *Bibliometric analysis; Family firms; Managerialization; Professionalization; Systematic literature review*

## Introduction

For a long time, family firms have been considered as homogeneous entities. Nevertheless, recent literature recognizes that family firms are heterogeneous forms of organizations because of their patterns of structures (Chua et al., 2012). Structures are generally described as designing formal positions, roles, and responsibilities of people involved in an organization (Quinn et al., 2018). Different patterns have been linked to different degrees of professionalization in family firms (Stewart & Hitt, 2012).

Traditionally, professionalization in family firms considers the introduction of non-family managers as professional actors for their education and previous organizational experiences (Dyer, 1989). Challenging the traditional view of professional managers, Hall and Nordqvist (2008) argue that they require both formal and cultural competences. Consequently, both family and nonfamily managers can be professional. Finally, recent studies argued that limiting professionalization to the introduction of professional managers, as nonfamily managers, lead to a simplistic vision of professionalization, which instead should be considered as a multidimensional construct (Dekker et al., 2015; Chua et al., 2009).

Nonetheless, focusing only on professionalization could lead to losing a piece of the story. We should also include the systems. Indeed, systems support and control people carrying out their structurally defined roles and responsibilities in a professional way (Quinn et al. 2018). Systems manage interdependencies and reciprocal influences between context, processes, and outcomes. For a comprehensive understanding of how systems support structures and vice versa, Pettigrew (2012) asks for investigating them jointly. Consequently, designing effective systems challenges professionalization (Chua et al., 2009).

The paper links professionalization to managerialization. Managerialization is the process which aims at introducing formal systems, such as strategic management, human resource management, accounting, marketing, and operation management systems (Songini et al., 2015; Levenburg, 2005; Hatum & Pettigrew, 2004; Mustakallio, 2002; Upton et al., 2001; Moores & Mula, 2000), to challenge the typical informal atmosphere of family firms (Songini, 2006).

Both professionalization and managerialization are overlooked topics in family firms (Songini et al., 2015). Moreover, the several streams of research on professionalization (Stewart & Hitt, 2012) led to a paucity of knowledge regarding the consistency between professionalization and managerialization in family firms. We aim at enlightening the issues. *What is the actual state of the art of professionalization*

*and managerialization in family firms? How do family firms integrate professionalization and managerialization processes?*

The first section of the paper presents a brief introduction to professionalization and managerialization in family firms. In the second section, we describe the literature review methodology, based on both a bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review. In the third part, we present and discuss the results. Finally, we present research gaps about professionalization and managerialization in family firms, conclusions, limitations, and future research implications.

### **Introducing Professionalization and Managerialization in Family Firms**

A mutual relationship characterizes structures and systems (Pettigrew, 2012; Teece et al., 1997). Structures design formal positions, roles, and responsibilities of people in organizations, while they need systems to support and control people carrying out those positions, roles, and responsibilities in a professional way (Quinn et al., 2018).

Family firms are often described with a lower level of formal structures and systems than their counterparts (Songini et al., 2015; Stewart & Hitt, 2012). Formalization requires specialization, routine operating tasks, rule-based control and monitoring, written procedures, and use of action planning systems (Songini et al., 2015; Zhang & Ma, 2009).

The transition to more formalized structures and systems is recognized as professionalization (Dekker et al., 2015; Stewart & Hitt, 2012) and managerialization (Songini et al., 2015; Songini & Vola, 2015). The transition mainly occurs in response to organizational challenges to environmental changes, which require modifications to informal structures and systems of family firms (Gedajlovic et al., 2004; Zahra & Filatotchev, 2004; Daily & Dalton, 1992). Informal structures present not formally defined positions, roles, and responsibilities due to a concentration of the decision-making processes on the founder or family, a small middle line hierarchy, and less widespread adoption of formal managerial systems.

Moving to more formalized structures and systems asks for professional managers and mechanisms (Songini et al., 2015; Gedajlovic et al., 2004; Moores & Mula, 2000; Daily & Dalton, 1992). The transition reveals that firms survive to early changes of their existence copying with the acquisition or development of new competences that fit opportunities and threats they are likely to encounter (Gedajlovic et al., 2004; Zahra & Filatotchev, 2004; Daily & Dalton, 1992).

Therefore, we define professionalization as the introduction of professional competences, acquired by individuals through their educational paths and business experiences, regardless of whether they belong to the family or not, and needed to manage formal managerial systems. Managerialization is the introduction of formal managerial systems.

## Methodology

To investigate professionalization and managerialization in family firms, we defined three different research strings: Family Firm Research String (FFRS); Professionalization Research String (PRRS); Managerialization Research String (MARS).

FFRS: (*"family business\*" OR "family firm\*" OR "family enterprise\*" OR "family SME\*" OR "family run" OR "family organisation\*" OR "family compan\*" OR "family venture\*" OR "family owned business\*" OR "family owned firm\*" OR "family owned enterprise\*" OR "family owned SME\*" OR "family owned run" OR "family owned organisation\*" OR "family owned compan\*" OR "family owned venture\*" OR "family controlled business\*" OR "family controlled firm\*" OR "family controlled enterprise\*" OR "family controlled SME\*" OR "family controlled run" OR "family controlled organisation\*" OR "family controlled compan\*" OR "family controlled venture\*"*);

PRRS: (*Professional\* OR ((professional OR management OR managerial OR accounting OR HR OR HRM OR "human resource\*" OR "human resource management" OR technical OR "strategic management" OR marketing OR operation\* OR procurement OR professional OR "managerial accounting" OR MAS OR MA OR "management control" OR MCS OR "strategic planning") AND (competenc\* OR skill\* OR capabilit\* OR abilit\* OR knowledge\*)) OR ("non-family" OR nonfamily OR "non family" OR family) AND manage\*);*

MARS: (*Manageriali\* OR ((professional OR management OR managerial OR accounting OR HR OR HRM OR "human resource\*" OR "human resource management" OR technical OR "strategic management" OR marketing OR operation\* OR procurement OR professional OR "managerial accounting" OR MAS OR MA OR "management control" OR MCS OR "strategic planning") AND (System\* OR practice\* OR tool\* OR mechanism\*))*).

To obtain queries, we used AND operator of Boolean algebra on Scopus and Thomson Reuter ISI Web of Knowledge (Web of Science) databases as follow: FFRS AND PRRS; FFRS AND MARS. The search has been carried out on “Titles” and “Abstracts”. Finally, we considered only peer reviewed English articles (Caputo et al., 2018) published from 2008 to 2018 (Table 1).

**Table 1: Queries’ Results and database cross validation**

	Scopus	Thomson Reuter ISI Web of Knowledge
FFRS AND PRRS	1487	1372
FFRS AND MARS	434	487

Total\*

1552

1443

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\* The two queries present several papers in common

Since the criticism regarding which is the best database is still going on, and research is producing countervailing evidence on that (see Aghaei Chadegani et al., 2013; Bakkalbasi et al., 2006), our choice was to use Scopus because of the higher number of articles.

To obtain an objective perspective, each author read all the papers individually to define which should be included and which not. Our criteria were to include only documents related to family firms' professionalization and managerialization processes coherent with our definitions.

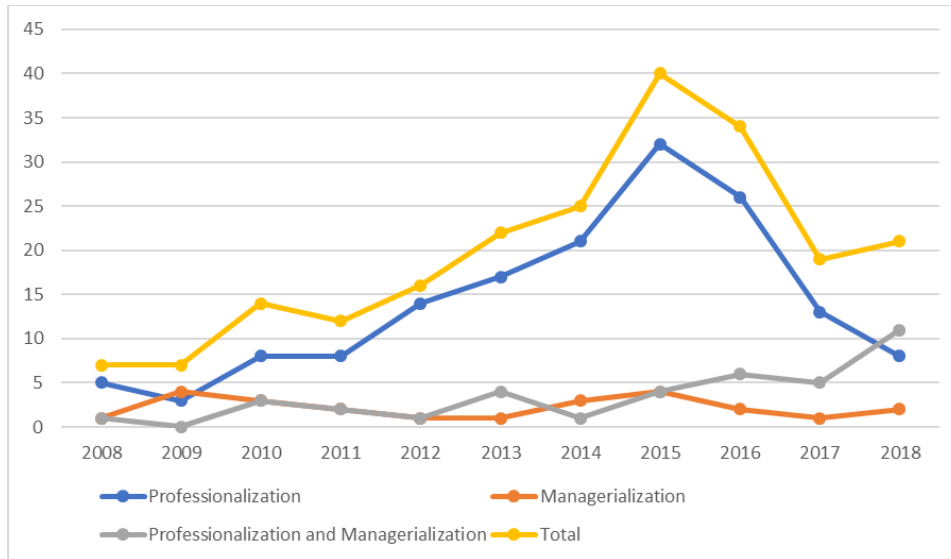
Preliminary findings were discussed, and several face to face conversations were had to confront the authors' conclusions. Then, following the comparison between the authors, we obtained the final database for our review composed by a total amount of 217 documents, 193 resulting from the query "FFRS AND PRRS", and 62 from the query "FFRS AND MARS". Notably, 38 articles were found in common between the two queries.

Finally, we conducted both bibliometric analysis, "particularly suitable for science mapping at a time when the emphasis on empirical contributions is producing voluminous, fragmented, and controversial research streams" (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), and systematic literature review, to map and assess the relevant intellectual territory is the key to success for a systematic literature review to obtain a theoretical contribution (Tranfield et al., 2003).

## Results and Discussions

In last ten years, Professionalization (71.43%) received more attention than managerialization (11.06%). Furthermore, 38 papers (17.51%) are in common between professionalization and managerialization (Figure 1 and Table 2).

**Figure 1: Papers per year**



**Table 2: Papers distribution among years**

Years	Prof*	Man*	Prof and Man*	Overall*
2008	5	1	1	7
2009	3	4	0	7
2010	8	3	3	14
2011	8	2	2	12
2012	14	1	1	16
2013	17	1	4	22
2014	21	3	1	25
2015	32	4	4	40
2016	26	2	6	34
2017	13	1	5	19
2018	8	2	11	21
Total	155	24	38	217

\* “Prof”, “Man”, “Prof and Man”, and “Overall” refer to, respectively, professionalization, managerialization, professionalization and managerialization, and the total amount of papers

Starting from 2015, papers in common between professionalization and managerialization increased considerably, and in 2018 papers in common between the two queries are higher than papers only related to one of them (Table 2). This improvement could be due to an intensification of a shared vision of professionalization as a multidimensional construct (see Dekker et al., 2015). Therefore, in recent years, papers considering professionalization and managerialization as related processes are increasing in number. Additional evidence are given by the trend of the total amount of papers, which from 2008 until

2017 follows the trend of professionalization, and in 2018 changes direction returning to increase after three years of decline, differently from the trend of professionalization which continues to decrease (Figure 1).

Moving to the evolution of the literature's content throughout the time (Table 3), we followed the protocol proposed by De Bakker et al. (2005). They suggested dividing the documents into three macro-categories: theoretical, prescriptive, and descriptive. Inside the theoretical macro-category, they identified conceptual papers, focused on developing theoretical contributions not relying on empirical data; exploratory papers focused on developing theoretical contributions based on the examination of empirical data; and predictive documents focused on developing theoretical contributions making use of empirical data to test hypotheses. Inside the prescriptive macro-category, instrumental papers have a significant focus on providing prescriptions to practitioners and professional useful to the achievement of a specific goal, while normative papers have a major focus on giving prescription to practitioners and professional from an ethical, moral, or religious point of view. Finally, descriptive papers aim to report data or opinion without any specific contribution to theory or practice.

**Table 3: Epistemological Orientation of Papers\*\***

		Prof* (n=155)	Man* (n=24)	Prof and Man* (n=38)	Overall* (n=217)
Theoretical	Conceptual	16.76%	25.00%	18.42%	17.97%
	Exploratory	23.22%	12.50%	23.68%	22.12%
	Predictive	57.42%	58.33%	52.63%	56.68%
Prescriptive	Instrumental	0.65%	0.00%	5.27%	1.38%
	Normative	0.65%	0.00%	0.00%	0.46%
Descriptive	Descriptive	1.30%	4.17%	0.00%	1.38%

\* "Prof", "Man", "Prof and Man", and "Overall" refer to, respectively, professionalization, managerialization, professionalization and managerialization, and the total amount of papers

\*\* All the percentages refer to the total of the related column

Predictive papers represent most of the articles in each area (Table 3). Thus, most of the studies focus on developing theoretical contributions making use of empirical data to test hypotheses. Exploratory papers are the second most recurrent epistemological orientation for both professionalization, and professionalization and managerialization. Nevertheless, in the case of managerialization, exploratory papers are fewer than conceptual papers. Differently, professionalization, and professionalization and managerialization, respectively have 16.76% and 18.42% of conceptual papers, focused on developing

theoretical contribution not relying on empirical data. Finally, prescriptive papers and descriptive papers are very few in percentage. Therefore, it needs a call to improve the number of papers devoted to providing prescriptions to practitioners and to describe the professionalization and managerialization processes in family firms.

Considering the methodology distribution (Table 4), despite recent calls for qualitative methods in family firms (Nordqvist et al., 2009; Sharma, 2004), most of the papers are using quantitative methodologies.

Qualitative methodology is the second most recurrent in both professionalization, and professionalization and managerialization. Differently, in the same way as mixed methodologies, it is less common in managerialization.

**Table 4: Methodology distribution\*\***

	Prof* (n=155)	Man* (n=24)	Prof and Man* (n=38)	Overall* (n=217)
Quantitative	56.77%	54.17%	55.26%	56.22%
Qualitative	20.65%	8.33%	23.68%	19.82%
Mixed Qualitative and Quantitative	3.23%	8.33%	0.00%	3.23%
Conceptual	16.77%	16.67%	10.53%	15.67%
Review	2.58%	12.50%	10.53%	5.07%

\* “Prof”, “Man”, “Prof and Man”, and “Overall” refer to, respectively, professionalization, managerialization, professionalization and managerialization, and the total amount of papers

\*\* All the percentages refer to the total of the related column

Table 5 reports the number of papers belonging to professionalization and managerialization research strings, and the related string words. String words are the set of words, included in the research strings of professionalization and managerialization, present in articles’ titles or abstracts.

Starting from professionalization, family managers and nonfamily managers are the most common words. Coherently with what was underlined by Hall and Nordqvist (2008) and Dekker et al. (2015), a large part of the literature on professionalization relate to family and nonfamily managers. Meanwhile, competences received fewer attention. Finally, 17.42% of the documents explicitly mention the terms “professionalization” or “professional competences” in their titles or abstracts.



Moving to managerialization, most of titles and abstracts include strategic management systems, HRM systems, accounting systems, and operation management systems. Oppositely, marketing systems seem to be overlooked.

Finally, considering papers in common between professionalization and managerialization, a first remarkable result is that there is an equilibrium between family and nonfamily managers, and competences. Nonetheless, no papers are related to marketing competences and systems. As for the other systems, papers are well distributed, going from accounting systems to strategic management systems. Lastly, the number of papers explicitly mentioning “professionalization” or “professional competences” in their titles or abstracts is 15.79%.

**Table 5: Professionalization and Managerialization String Words\*\***

String Words	Prof* (n=155)	Man* (n=24)	Prof and Man* (n=38)	Overall* (n=217)
<b>Professionalization research string***</b>				
Strategic Management Competences	5.16%	0.00%	7.89%	5.07%
HRM competences	4.52%	0.00%	13.16%	5.53%
Accounting Competences	1.94%	0.00%	21.05%	5.07%
Marketing Competences	3.23%	0.00%	0.00%	2.30%
Operation Management / Technical Competences	7.10%	0.00%	7.89%	6.45%
Professionalization / Professional Competences	17.42%	0.00%	15.79%	15.21%
Family Managers (Competences)	59.35%	0.00%	31.58%	47.93%
Nonfamily Managers (Competences)	21.94%	0.00%	10.53%	17.51%
<b>Managerialization research string***</b>				
Strategic Management Systems	0.00%	16.67%	18.42%	5.07%

HRM Systems	0.00%	25.00%	23.68%	6.91%
Accounting Systems	0.00%	25.00%	31.58%	8.29%
Marketing Systems	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%	0.92%
Operation Management / Technical Systems	0.00%	33.33%	28.95%	8.76%

\* “Prof”, “Man”, “Prof and Man”, and “Overall” refer to, respectively, professionalization, managerialization, professionalization and managerialization, and the total amount of papers

\*\* All the percentages refer to the total of the related column

\*\*\* Several papers present an overlapping of string words

To further observe the main concerns of professionalization and managerialization in family firms, we evidenced the key themes of each article. Subsequentially, we collected and reported all the findings in the following Table 6. Five areas emerged: the dimensions of professionalization and managerialization functional to competences and systems; the presence of dominant actors involved in the processes of professionalization and managerialization; the existence of main strategies pursued by family firms in relation with professionalization and managerialization; the incidence of constructs emerging from the family business literature; the occurrence of dominant theories.

**Table 6: Key Themes\*\***

****	Prof* (n=155)	Man* (n=24)	Prof and Man* (n=38)	Overall* (n=217)
<b>Dimensions of Professionalization and Managerialization***</b>				
Strategic Management	5.81%	16.67%	21.05%	9.68%
HRM	9.68%	33.33%	26.32%	15.21%
Accounting	8.39%	25.00%	39.47%	15.67%
Marketing	3.23%	4.17%	0.00%	2.76%
Operation Management	5.16%	20.83%	21.05%	9.68%
Not Functional Allocations	69.03%	0.00%	0.00%	49.31%
<b>Actors***</b>				
Advisors	2.58%	4.17%	0.00%	2.30%
Board of Directors	7.74%	0.00%	7.89%	6.91%
CEO	6.45%	4.17%	2.63%	5.53%
CFO	3.23%	0.00%	0.00%	2.30%
Employees	3.23%	16.67%	13.16%	6.45%
Family Managers	43.23%	4.17%	44.74%	39.17%

Managers	7.10%	0.00%	5.26%	5.99%
Nonfamily Managers	9.68%	4.17%	5.26%	8.29%
Owners	38.06%	29.17%	26.32%	35.02%
No Dominant Actors	10.32%	37.50%	13.16%	13.82%

**Strategies\*\*\***

Competitive Advantage	4.52%	4.17%	2.63%	4.15%
Growth	13.55%	4.17%	13.16%	12.44%
Innovation	25.81%	12.50%	18.42%	23.04%
Internationalization	14.19%	4.17%	2.63%	11.06%
No Pursued Strategies	45.81%	79.17%	65.79%	53.00%

**Constructs\*\*\***

Family Goals	4.52%	4.17%	5.26%	4.61%
Nonfamily Members Involvement	1.29%	0.00%	2.63%	1.38%
Human Capital	17.42%	4.17%	31.58%	18.43%
Relational Capital	34.84%	8.33%	34.21%	31.80%
Structural Capital	26.45%	33.33%	34.21%	28.57%
Other Constructs or No Constructs	30.97%	50.00%	21.05%	31.34%

**Theories\*\*\***

Agency Theory	14.84%	8.33%	13.16%	13.82%
Behavioural Agency Theory	3.87%	4.17%	0.00%	3.23%
Behavioural Theory	1.94%	0.00%	0.00%	1.28%
Institutional Theory	3.87%	4.17%	7.89%	4.61%
Knowledge-Based View Theory	0.65%	0.00%	5.26%	1.38%
Resource-Based View Theory	5.16%	4.17%	10.53%	5.99%
Social Capital Theory	7.10%	4.17%	2.63%	5.99%
Socioemotional Wealth Theory	5.81%	12.50%	5.26%	6.45%
Stakeholder Theory	2.58%	0.00%	0.00%	1.84%
Stewardship Theory	7.10%	4.17%	10.53%	7.37%
Upper Echelons Theory	2.58%	4.17%	0.00%	2.30%
Other Theories	5.16%	4.17%	0.00%	4.15%
No Dominant Theory	50.97%	66.67%	57.89%	53.92%

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\* “Prof”, “Man”, “Prof and Man”, and “Overall” refer to, respectively, professionalization, managerialization, professionalization and managerialization, and the total amount of papers

\*\* All the percentages refer to the total of the related column

\*\*\* Several papers present an overlapping of key themes

\*\*\*\* Given the high volume of data, we have only highlighted fields that reoccur at least three times.

Starting from professionalization, 69.03% of papers are not considering a functional allocation of the dimensions of professionalization and managerialization. This is not surprising, since as we already discussed most of the papers investigating professionalization in family firms consider family and nonfamily managers as the main variable related to professionalization in family firms (Dekker et al., 2015; Hall and Nordqvist, 2008), as also confirmed by the actors. Indeed, family and nonfamily managers are the main actors, along with owners, involved in the professionalization process (Table 6). Moreover, family firms are more likely to engage in the professionalization process when pursuing innovation, internationalization, growth, and competitive advantages. At the same time, constructs reveal that relational capital is the principal construct, followed by structural capital and human capital. Finally, the dominant theories of the field are agency theory, social capital theory and stewardship theory.

Meanwhile, papers included in the managerialization group always consider functional dimensions of professionalization and managerialization. Differently from professionalization, the main actors are owners and employees, while family managers and nonfamily managers received relatively fewer attention. Notably, 37.50% of papers belonging to managerialization does not consider the involvement of actors as a key theme. Furthermore, only innovation seems to be addressed, while 79.17% of managerialization papers do not deal with strategies. Structural capital is the most present construct in managerialization, followed by relational capital and human capital. Lastly, excluding socioemotional wealth theory and agency theory, it is not possible to draw a clear line on the main theories used to explain this process.

Finally, papers in common between professionalization and managerialization are in the middle between the other two groups. Functional dimensions of professionalization and managerialization are always present, and family managers, owners, and employees are the principal actors involved. Nonetheless, except for innovation and growth, strategies are overlooked. Indeed, 65.79% of papers are not considering strategy as key theme. At the same time, constructs are well divided in relational capital, structural capital and human capital, while the most common theories are agency theory, stewardship theory, and resource-based view theory.

## Conclusions

The main challenge of this review was given by the fact that both professionalization and managerialization lack a common and shared vision in family firms' literature. What our results underline is that, while on the one side professionalization and managerialization are considered as two separated processes, on the other side it exists a part of literature in common between professionalization and managerialization in family firms. Remarkably, literature in common between professionalization and managerialization in family firms is recently growing. Considering the growing attention on the two processes as integrated, it was necessary to set a point, enlighten the two processes, and define a new direction for both professionalization and managerialization in family firms to avoid the several streams of research which, in past, have led to inconsistent results (Dekker et al., 2015; Stewart and Hitt, 2012; Hall and Nordqvist, 2008).

Nevertheless, this review has three main limitations. First, we conducted our research on Scopus. Thus, using a different database, such as Thomson Reuter ISI Web of Knowledge or EBSCO, there may be results that confirm or disprove what has been said in this review. Second, given the high initial number of documents (Table 1), we limited our research to peer reviewed articles. Third, even though in the research strings we have tried to consider all the formal managerial systems and the related professional competences, there may be something more that we have not considered.

Therefore, future research could replicate our study on different databases, include further types of documents, such as book chapters or conference papers, or try to broaden our research strings, so to obtain further evidence on professionalization and managerialization in family firms.

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