

COURSE OUTLINE: Family Firms

Programme: BBA
Module Code: BSP3513
Module Title: Family Business
Semester: 2019/2020 Sem 1 (Aug-Nov 2019)
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Course Overview

Family firms are the dominant form of business organization everywhere around the world. As such, family firms play an important role in all economies, but especially so in Asian economies, where large family firms often constitute a significant part of the private sector. Large Asian family firms - the focus of this course - are often organized into corporate groups, and this type of economic organization has lost its attractiveness in many other parts of the developed world, but continues to be important in most emerging economies. In many ways, the Asian family firm defies the wisdom of strategic management. Its demise continues to be predicted, but does not appear imminent.

This course provides students the opportunity to develop deep skills and understanding of the strategy and governance of family firms, and focuses in particular on strategic issues faced by family firms in Asia. Topics include characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of family ownership and management, succession of ownership and leadership, governance of family businesses, and how to grow and sustain the legacy of family business. The knowledge obtained from this course is particularly essential to doing business intelligently with family firms not only in Asia and other emerging economies but also in developed countries.

This course is open to students from all faculties in NUS, and for exchange students interested in Asian family firms. I specifically encourage students from business families to join, irrespective of what degree they are pursuing in NUS. For students from business families this course will be particularly relevant as it will provide the knowledge to run and sustain family business for generations. For other students, the course will provide an understanding of the dynamics of family firms and will be useful because no matter which career you pursue, as you will most likely work with family firms either as your employers, clients, suppliers, or partners.

Course Objectives

The objective of this course is not to offer best practices and models, but rather to increase understanding relevant issues for family businesses in Asia as they develop from an entrepreneurial venture to a cross-generational family firm. Given that the mere persistence of Asian family group business models is already subject to heated debate in popular and academic articles, the focus will be on understanding the arguments, deepening understanding of the issues, and expanding students' thinking with regard to possible strategies for family firms in the long term. Provocative articles representing a variety of views will be discussed. More concretely, in this course, there will be three objectives:

- *Inculcate knowledge.* To encourage the understanding of the main issues involved; the controversies; the strategies and governance of Asian family firms.
- *Stimulate interest in the topic.* The course will look at family firms from a range of perspectives, including owners, new generation leaders, outside professionals, employees, investors, economists, and professional advisors such as bankers. It will attempt to increase the interest of students in the topic through attractive content including guest speakers, stories, videos, and student projects that bring the issues family firms face alive.
- *Asia-focus.* Through cases, in-class examples and guest speakers, this course attempts to focus specifically on Asian family businesses. The knowledge, however, can be applied to family firms elsewhere as well.

Assessment

The final grade for this course will be computed based on the following:

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| Class Participation | 30% |
| Mid-term test (take-home, upload by 21 Sept, 5pm) | 20% |
| Group Essay & Presentation (upload by 26 Oct, 5pm) | 30% |
| Final individual test (take-home, upload by 16 Nov, 5pm) | 20% |

- Class participation will be based on the quality and quantity of participation, but the quality is more important. However, absence from class sessions or not speaking up will result in a lower participation score.
- Students are required to analyze a family firm in teams. Details on the group project requirements and presentation will be made available on LumiNUS.
- There will be two short individual tests which will require students to apply their knowledge on Asian family business to a practical situation (e.g. case or essay).

Course format

The course is worth 4MC and will be offered in 13 sessions. Note that the sequence of the topics may change depending on the availability of relevant guest speakers. A detailed planning per session with readings, case questions, and guest speakers will be available online before the beginning of the course. Some of the topics covered are:

- Prevalence and uniqueness of family firms
- Family feuds and other roadblocks for family business
- Succession of leadership and ownership across generations
- Family firm growth, diversification and internationalization
- Innovation in family firms
- Professionalization and outside management
- Governance structures for family firms
- The role of family firms in Asia's economic development

Schedule

Will be available on LumiNUS closer to the start of the course

General guide and reading

The format of the course is based on a mixture of cases, theory and guest speakers. Classes will be used for discussion, guest speakers, and for case discussion.

- *Case discussion*: I generally apply a 3-stage approach to learning with cases: 1. students prepare the case at home; 2. in class students discuss their analysis in a small group; 3. there is a plenary class discussion. Debating with others in small and larger groups will sharpen someone's analytical skills considerably and will help students to communicate their ideas clearly.
- *Readings*: Students should come prepared by reading the articles and case in advance. Some readings are TedTalks or videos. Active participation important for our quality of learning, the quality of student contributions will be reflected in the class participation grade.
- *Guest speakers*: Much effort has been put into securing high-level guest speakers for this course. Several guest speakers are CEOs of large family firms, and students are expected to be ambassadors of NUS by showcasing their qualities and professional skills. High-level guest speakers' schedules may change and this may imply last-minutes changes in this course. Your understanding is highly appreciated.
- *Questions and feedback*: If you have any questions on the topics discussed in the course, regarding your individual performance, or if you have feedback to improve the classes, please feel free to contact me any time through e-mail or phone.

This course strives to be "paper-less". Teaching materials (readings, cases, slides) are available online, and students are required to upload assignments and exams.

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Academic integrity and honesty is essential for the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. The University and School expect every student to uphold academic integrity & honesty at all times. Academic dishonesty is any misrepresentation with the intent to deceive, or failure to acknowledge the source, or falsification of information, or inaccuracy of statements, or cheating at examinations/tests, or inappropriate use of resources. Plagiarism is 'the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own' (The New Oxford Dictionary of English). The University and School will not condone plagiarism. Students should adopt this rule - You have the obligation to make clear to the assessor which is your own work, and which is the work of others. Otherwise, your assessor is entitled to assume that everything being presented for assessment is being presented as entirely your own work. This is a minimum standard. See: <http://www.nus.edu.sg/registrar/adminpolicy/acceptance.html#NUSCodeofStudentConduct>; and Online Module on Plagiarism: <http://emodule.nus.edu.sg/ac/>