

LEADERS OF FAMILY BUSINESSES AND THEIR TEAM ROLES

Linhart, O., Rydvalová, P.

Ondřej Linhart / Technical University of Liberec, Faculty of Economics, Department of Business Administration and Management, Voroněžská 13, 460 01 Liberec, Czech Republic. Email: ondrej.linhart@tul.cz (corresponding author)

Petra Rydvalová / Technical University of Liberec, Faculty of Economics, Department of Business Administration and Management, Voroněžská 13, 460 01 Liberec, Czech Republic. Email: petra.rydvalova@tul.cz

Abstract

Leadership in family businesses has unique characteristics due to the special culture that family business carries, such as the special family bonds that the leader has with the team, the strong influence of the leader on the “family” team and the high level of dependence of the whole family on the business success. These traits should be reflected in the leader’s approach towards teamwork. This research paper aims to identify these traits, more specifically, using the Belbin team role methodology, to identify which team roles are the most typical of family business leaders and which are rather rare or insignificantly represented. The Belbin Full Individual Report questionnaire was utilized, which compares self-evaluations with 360-degree feedback from four team members. Nine leaders of family businesses from the Czech Republic were analysed, and the results were subjected to a deeper statistical study with interesting findings. One of the main merits of this paper is the identification of the team roles Shaper, Coordinator and Resource Investigator to be typical for family business leaders, with the team roles Team Worker and Specialist being represented the least, which differs from the typical characteristics of a start-up leader; yet, an even deeper analysis with other results was carried out.

Implications for Central European audience: The implications of this study for Central European family businesses are that leaders typically occupy team roles such as Shaper, Coordinator and Resource Investigator. The low inclination towards Team Worker and Specialist roles suggests a reliance on complementary team members to fill these gaps. These findings can inform leadership development and succession planning, highlighting the need for balanced team compositions. Also, these findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of how leadership roles are distributed and function within family businesses, providing a framework for future research into team dynamics, complementary team roles of other members and leadership effectiveness in this context.

Keywords: Family firms; leadership; Belbin team roles

JEL Classification: M12, M14

Introduction

Some family business leaders claim that a family business is like a ship carrying its crew and treasures on the open sea. Truly, as it is not possible to hire a crew once the sail is set, it is hard for a family business to hire somebody external; they need to do their best with the human resources they have (Pszczółka, 2021). Even though this analogy is not exact, family businesses actually can act as any other businesses; external hiring for managerial positions is either not very common or is at least a matter of discussion. The purpose, characteristics and specifics of family businesses are widely discussed. Although definitions of family business vary, family businesses experience different stages of development and have different sizes, ages or focuses, and some characteristics connect them together. One of these characteristics is a strong influence of the family that is in control (Zellweger, 2017). Throughout the academic and consultation sphere focusing on family businesses, there is evidence that well-developed teamwork among family members is a necessity and roles must be well distributed (Lievens & Lerut, 2021; Sandig et al., 2023). Roles in family businesses are subjects of research, but from the point of view of functional roles or parental roles (Griffeth et al., 2006). The word “role” in team theory is understood as a specific pattern of behaviour that an individual exhibits when participating as a team member. These roles encompass how individuals contribute to team activities, interactions and the achievement of team goals (Belbin, 2010a). If the family is perceived as a team in family businesses, can its success not also be influenced by the distribution of team roles in terms of their ability to fit into the management of the family business?

Using the previous analogy of seafaring, this paper will analyse the first crucial member of a crew – the captain. This study uses the approach of Belbin team roles to identify team roles of leaders of family businesses, specifically founders or CEOs, regardless of their sex, age, education or succession in generations. Leaders and founders have a strong influence on family business culture and their team as a whole (Risky, 2021; Sánchez Marín et al., 2016); therefore, for the purpose of this paper, only leaders will be examined. As known from the Belbin team role theory, individuals contribute to team performance according to their personal characteristics (Belbin, 2010a). Combining family business management with Belbin's theory has not been carried out in depth, even though family businesses make up the majority of global GDP (De Massis et al., 2018) and their management is typical management of a team, which Belbin's methodology suits the best. Results using the Belbin method for leaders can show their typical characteristics and reveal whether family business leaders are, in fact, comparable in some respects and if there are some patterns in leadership team roles for family business leaders.

Belbin's methodology has proved to be valid not only for management teams but also for non-managerial teams and start-ups, and in this article, it will be applied specifically to family businesses, which is less than common and might therefore bring a new perspective of understanding family businesses. Even though Belbin team roles are used in corporate or start-up research, no such study has been carried out in the area of family business, with the exception of a publication by Shams (2022), who used this methodology for practical consultation with rather limited theoretical findings (Shams, 2022). Therefore, a research gap was identified, with Belbin team roles being a suitable tool for analysing managerial teams

and their leaders but without knowledge about typical team roles of those leaders or their teams.

The main objective of this article is therefore to identify leaders' team roles in family businesses, determine common traits among these leaders and find out which team roles are the most typical of family business leaders and which are rather rare or insignificantly represented.

1 Family Business Theory

The first crucial step before further research is to define what is understood by family business in this article and what sample of respondents will be used. Definitions of family businesses vary significantly around the globe. Conditions to acknowledge a firm to be a family business are slightly different across countries, but there is one general rule that is commonly accepted: there must be a strong one-family influence (Anderson & Reeb, 2003; Villalonga & Amit, 2006). In this article, the Czech national definition of family business will be used, which states that the voting majority must be held by members of one family or, in the case of a one-man shareholder, at least one other person is an employee and part of the management. A freelancer type of business of one family member with a contribution by work or by assets of another family member is also considered a family business (MPO ČR, 2020). Due to its length, the full definition is shown in the Appendix.

Family businesses have some strong characteristics that influence their everyday lives. Firstly, family is one of the greatest influences on individual life; people within the family know each other for their whole lives and build firm connections (Craig et al., 2008; Matějček & Klégrová, 2011). When put together into a business, these interpersonal relations must (and truly do) influence the company. The literature presents several essential characteristics of family businesses, which can be generalized as follows.

The concept of a family business is well characterized by long-term goals (Fernandez Perez & Colli, 2013). Usually, the family business is perceived as a family treasure, something that defines the lives of not only those involved but the whole family. Family businesses tend to make careful decisions, be conservative and consider not only financial impact but also other aspects such as survival on the market, reputation (business and family reputation) or ethical and social aspects (Petlina & Koráb, 2015; Zellweger, 2017). Their approach to innovativeness varies according to the leading generation, with the first generation (founders) being usually more innovative than the second, but with an emphasis that innovativeness is a critical trait for future generations to succeed and assume the position of business leader (Lansberg & Gersick, 2015; Skrbkova et al., 2023). Governance is usually given to the "heir" of the business due to the inclination to nepotism (Maharani et al., 2021; Zellweger, 2017). Conflicts in family businesses are a grave issue, as they are transferred from the business into the family and vice versa (Machová & Procházková, 2017; Petlina & Koráb, 2015). Considering leaders of family businesses, they have a very strong influence on the business (Sánchez Marín et al., 2016) and in 82% of cases, they are men (Calabrò & Valentino, 2019). A Polish study using a self-perception evaluation method on family firms indicated that, while being very strong in having positive relationships with clients and customers, the use of new technologies tends to be their weakness (Kogut, 2019).

These claims should also be reflected in the team roles of leading members. Family businesses are usually of micro to small size (with exceptions) (Petlina & Koráb, 2015). Therefore, the personality of their founders or executive directors should have a major impact. Striving for longevity and stability after initial founding creates a contrast to, for example, start-up teams and their leaders, who operate in a fast-growing, uncertain environment, taking high stakes with potential for rapid development or failure (Bednár & Ljudvigová, 2020). Family business leaders, on the other hand, have other family members practically dependent on their success or failure. Therefore, no such risks (with potential benefits) tend to be taken. Again, this might be seen in dominant team roles.

A systematic review of the academic literature on leadership in family firms was provided by Fries et al. (2021). As they stated, family firms are characterized by a specific leadership setting, and their systematic search resulted in 99 relevant articles that were published in 25 different peer-reviewed journals. Based on their research, they identified a total of seven different leadership styles that prevail in family businesses, as well as five different types of leadership behaviour (Fries et al., 2021). Nevertheless, according to Belbin, the leader always bonds with their team, with the team shaping the leader and vice versa, yet the leadership from a team role perspective in family businesses remains unknown (Belbin, 2010a, 2010b).

2 Belbin Team Role Theory

Meredith Belbin, who dedicated his life's work to identifying factors that lead to successful teams, achieved expertise in the field of team management. After 1970, he performed several research studies and after around ten years of work, he identified certain patterns of individual behaviour in teams, from which nine team roles are derived.

Belbin's approach was chosen for various reasons, even though several other methods were considered. Table 1 shows these methods with argumentation whether to choose them or not.

Table 1 | Why to use Belbin team roles

Method	DISC typology	MBTI analysis	Big-five	Belbin team roles
Pros		Complex		Complex
	Simplistic	Widely scientifically used	Complex	Purely managerial
	Easy to understand	Affordable	Widely scientifically used	Widely scientifically used
	Affordable	Possible to use online	Popular in psychology	Possible to use online
				Developed for the purpose of team assessment
Cons				Gives numerical data
	More psychological than managerial	More psychological than managerial	Psychological, not managerial	
	Not widely scientifically used	Too many combinations, difficult for team analysis	Suitable for individual analysis, difficult for teams	
	Does not describe team dynamics well enough	Gives mostly categorical data	Gives only categorical data	Costly
	Gives only categorical data			

Source: Own elaboration based on Belbin (2012), Belbin & Keeler (2020), Bojanowska & Zalewska (2017), Čakrt (2009, 2015), Eysenck (1971), Jung et al. (1995), Littauer (1997), Rohm & Činčala (2017) and Strelau (2008)

Put briefly, a team role is a specific style of individual behaviour towards a specific team. It does not describe who the person is, but rather how they behave when cooperating with others in a given team. Therefore, it is suitable for managerial research but would probably be inappropriate for psychological research. Since more research considering teams, not only individuals, will follow results of this particular research, with the given arguments in Table 1 and connected to the fact that Belbin team roles have not yet been scientifically assessed in family businesses and therefore represent a research gap, the Belbin team role methodology was chosen.

Notably, there are more team roles that an individual can occupy. Furthermore, individual dominant team roles can change from team to team. Each team role is characterized by its beneficial contribution to teamwork, strengths and possible acceptable downsides or weaknesses. When taking it to the extremes, a specific downside can become unacceptable for mutual cooperation, and such behaviour should be resolved. The difference between acceptable and unacceptable weakness is in its severity and can be identified only by direct personal consultation with the team. Therefore, these undesired traits will be described as one. Belbin's theory puts team roles into three categories, in accordance with their focus and field of work, where the most benefits are extracted from individual work. These categories are social, thinking and action (Belbin, 2010a, 2010b). Furthermore, the first of the team roles

in each category is considered the most suitable for leadership. The definition of team roles according to Belbin (Belbin, 2010a) and their characteristics are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 | Characteristics of team roles

Team role	Strengths (work style)	Acceptable weaknesses
Social team roles		
CO: Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mature, confident • Clarifies goals, promotes decision-making and delegates well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be perceived as manipulative • Offloads personal work
TW: Team Worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative, mild, diplomatic • Listens, builds, averts friction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indecisive in crunch situations
RI: Resource Investigator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extroverted, enthusiastic, communicative • Explores opportunities • Develops contacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-optimistic • Loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed
Thinking team roles		
SP: Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated • Provides specific knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes only narrowly • Dwells on technicalities
PL: Plant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative, imaginative, unorthodox • Solves difficult problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignores incidentals • Too occupied to communicate effectively
ME: Monitor Evaluator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sober and strategic • Sees all options • Judges accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks drive and ability to inspire • Seen as too critical
Action Team roles		
SH: Shaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure • Has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prone to provocation • Offends people's feelings
IMP: Implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient • Turns ideas into practical actions • Searches out errors and omissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somewhat inflexible • Slow to respond to new possibilities • Tendency to worry about small details
CF: Completer Finisher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfectionist • Orderly, conscientious, anxious, consistent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reluctance to "let go" • Reluctant to delegate

Source: Own elaboration based on Belbin (2010a), Belbin & Keeler (2020)

In the overarching theory, there is a notable contrast between weaknesses that are acceptable and those that are intolerable. Innovative team roles may exhibit less attention to detail, while dutiful team roles might lack creativity. Leadership roles might lean towards being overly controlling or hard on people's feelings, whereas team roles that require leadership may shy away from conflicts and decision-making. These are acceptable weaknesses inherent in individual characteristics, influencing the team dynamics but not necessarily harming them. However, when these traits are taken to the extremes, they transform into unacceptable characteristics. These harmful traits undermine team cohesion and

performance, potentially leading to its destruction. Addressing these extreme traits becomes crucial for maintaining team effectiveness and unity. Nonetheless, this research does not dig that deep and negative traits are not examined any deeper (Belbin, 2010a, 2010b).

Since this article discusses the use of Belbin's method for family businesses, where gender plays an irreplaceable role, it should be mentioned that team roles may differ according to a person's gender. According to Anderson and Sleaf (2004), statistically notable differences in team roles exist for Coordinator (men 22%, women 8%) Shaper (men 11%, women 4%) and Plant (men 6%, women 4%), whereas women score much higher in the team role Team Worker (women 41%, men 14%). Even though the study itself stated clearly its limitations (conducted in only one British company, finance and customer care, uneven distribution of men and women in the company – 208 men and 103 women), those figures might advert to certain natural tendencies for both sexes (Anderson & Sleaf, 2004).

Another study done by a British organization (Belbin) indicates similar, yet not that extreme, differences in the distribution of team roles according to sex (Belbin, 2014), demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3 | Usual distribution of team roles by sex

	<i>CO</i>	<i>TW</i>	<i>RI</i>	<i>SP</i>	<i>PL</i>	<i>ME</i>	<i>SH</i>	<i>IMP</i>	<i>CF</i>
Men	11.2%	10.0%	10.7%	11.4%	11.5%	12.9%	10.5%	10.6%	11.2%
Women	10.5%	12.2%	10.4%	11.8%	10.0%	10.1%	9.2%	12.3%	13.5%

Source: Own elaboration based on Belbin (2014)

The abbreviations used in Table 3 to denote team roles are listed and explained in Table 2. As Table 3 shows, the differences in the distribution of team roles by gender are rather in the order of units of percentage points, with some team roles having greater differences by sex and some being relatively comparable.

3 Material and Methods

Belbin's study revealed that the most successful teams are those that manage to put together individuals with diverse team roles. It is important to note that each team member is capable of fulfilling multiple roles simultaneously. Therefore, a three-member team can work ideally according to the theory. While widely used, the application of Belbin's team role theory in the context of family businesses has been limited. The present study aims to identify the roles of founders or CEOs within family business teams, seeking to uncover common characteristics among entrepreneurs in this field. The best potential for using Belbin's method lies in the analysis of the interrelationships of all team members. However, the data on family business leaders are no less remarkable.

Recognising the leader's team role is intricately linked to the team's dynamics, with reciprocal influences between the leader and the team. The influence of any leader on the team must be considered, as it significantly shapes not only the team's overall performance but also its spirit. A prerequisite for achieving this objective is to validate the following research questions (RQ):

- **RQ1:** *What team roles or combinations of team roles are the most typical of family business leaders?* Recurring patterns can be expected, which can be demonstrated for specific characteristics in family business theory.
- **RQ2:** *What team roles are not typical of leaders of family businesses in comparison with team roles that are found to be typical, if any?* In general, according to Belbin's theory, a high tendency towards at least one team role and a low tendency towards at least one other team role can be assumed.

Founders or CEOs are usually severely occupied people who simply do not have enough room for complex research and in-depth personal analysis. The main research method used is Belbin's 360-degree analysis (Belbin, 2010a). This approach delivers the most objective data with time efficiency. Firstly, it analyses an individual's perception of their approach towards work and so-called observers (close relatives or co-workers) are required to fill in a similar simplified questionnaire without knowing the results of the previous step. Team roles are then matched to the analysed person with a commentary on whether the observers are aligned with the analysed individual and with each other or not.

The companies selected for this research are Czech micro to small businesses that meet the definition of a Czech family business.

Family businesses can register in the Czech Republic for an assessment of family status and, on the basis of meeting the definition of MTI CT (MPO ČR, 2020), with the Association of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Crafts of the Czech Republic (hereinafter also AMSP CR). Only those companies that took part in the 2024 Czech National Awards for Quality in Family Businesses ("Národní cena ČR za kvalitu v rodinném podnikání") were invited to the research, with a random selection. It can be assumed that these companies are dedicated to leadership and will be willing to participate in the given research. If a business refused to be involved in this research, the next company was invited. Should the number of participants be lower than nine, companies that would try to get the aforesaid awards this year would be invited. Finally, only companies that voluntarily/willingly accepted the invitation to this team role research would be considered. As a result, more than 60 companies and their leaders were approached to participate in the team role research, but those that declined could not be analysed further. These criteria ensure companies that actively care about their business, and therefore, the questionnaires would be completed responsibly. In total, nine companies and their leaders were examined. Given the criteria for choosing the company for evaluation, the original population of family businesses shrinks greatly, with nine companies representing a large enough percentage in the end. In order to ensure relevant results, it was necessary to undergo certified training from the Belbin organization in the United Kingdom, represented by executives in the Czech Republic, and subsequently purchase licenses for the evaluation of individual members of family teams.

The chosen sample is considered homogenous for various reasons. Firstly, all the businesses are family-owned, strongly defined by their small size and significant family influence (the criterion for selection was micro to small size). Therefore, corporate culture is not expected. All the businesses are multigenerational and have been operating on the market for longer than a decade; therefore, they are considered successful in terms of longevity. Moreover, all the leaders are strongly inclined not to sell the business at the end of their career but to transfer it into the hands of their offspring or other family members, if possible, in the future. Lastly, only those firms that also undertook an evaluation of the Czech

National Awards for Quality in Family Businesses were allowed for this research. Taking part in the competition for these awards clearly shows the ambitions and, again, longevity in mind of those leaders, making the sample as homogenous as possible in the given circumstances. However, there are two areas where some heterogeneity can be found; firstly, the demographic data were not considered, even though sex and age might be influential. Secondly, there are seven leaders who are part of the first generation and two leaders from the second generation. This is considered to be one of the limitations of the research and will be part of future research in this field.

During the literature review phase of the research, a comparable study performed by Bednár and Ljudvigová (2020) was found. The paper describes the team roles of leaders of start-ups. The criteria for choosing their sample are comparable, with nine leaders examined in the end. In order to have consistent data for comparison, which will be presented in Chapter 5, a sample of nine leaders was chosen for this paper as well (Bednár & Ljudvigová, 2020). Given the depth of the research (presented in this paper as well as the following studies), being not quantitative but qualitative, a size sample of nine was considered sufficient.

Lastly, numerical scores in the Belbin team role methodology are, in fact, percentiles of the population. The original sample exceeds 9,500 people (Keeler, 2020). Therefore, when any pattern in any research sample shows some inclination that would evoke differences from the original sample values (as shown in Table 3), it can be discussed and can lead to some valuable conclusions. Again, this leads to an inference that a small sample of nine leaders might be, in fact, enough for discussion and conclusions in this paper, even though a larger sample would still pose more solid ground for generalization.

For statistical evaluation, descriptive statistics such as average and standard deviation will be calculated and a t-test for dependent samples will be carried out. Due to Belbin's methodology, the values of one person are dependent on each other. While evaluating an individual during the Belbin questionnaire, for each question, the person has 10 points to be distributed to 10 answers regarding the level of individual accordance with that answer. Therefore, spending one point means that one less point is available for distribution among the other answers, which leads to the dependency of the values. As a result, the ANOVA test, which would otherwise be very appropriate, cannot be used. The use of a t-test is limited by the criteria of normal data distribution. Because numerical data from the research are percentiles from the much larger population of the Belbin database (around 9,500 – meaning if a person scores 95 for the team role Shaper, they are a stronger Shaper than 95% of the population) with some people having more defined profiles (with more extreme tendencies towards one or another team role) and with some people having a flatter profile (thus being more indifferent and as a result scoring more average points = percentiles), the numerical values can be considered normally distributed – it is significantly less common to hit the extreme in one team role than to hit the middle. Moreover, because answers in the Belbin questionnaire are dependent on when one extreme is hit, no more extremes can be hit by the same person, and their other answers would be either in the middle or on the opposite side of the scale. The use of a t-test is therefore legitimate.

4 Results

Based on the use of Belbin's methodology (The Nine Belbin Team Roles, 2024), the analysis of the leader of each selected family business was carried out first. Each analysed individual first completed a so-called self-perception questionnaire and then was evaluated by close co-workers in so-called observation.

Table 4 represents data from the online Belbin questionnaire. Due to sensitive personal data, only the leaders' first names is shown. Then, the mean and the average value for each of the team roles are calculated and rounded to full numbers. While 0 is the smallest possible value – meaning absolutely no tendency of an individual towards this type of team cooperation behaviour, 100 is theoretically the greatest value, meaning a very strong individual tendency.

Table 4 | Team role distribution in selected sample of family business leaders

Name	Social			Thinking			Action		
	CO	TW	RI	SP	PL	ME	SH	IMP	CF
Zdenek Z.	50	29	18	42	34	87	63	58	72
Ondrej	47	35	95	47	82	69	63	18	12
Hynek	47	9	81	29	27	28	85	35	78
Vladimir	84	13	98	9	83	22	67	11	0
Milan	93	19	18	37	14	9	92	67	55
Zdenek B.	45	27	74	43	59	45	67	50	12
Ivo	69	21	59	30	69	75	35	52	22
Sarka	75	55	93	25	48	29	52	26	38
Petr	25	5	59	21	0	88	89	66	94

Source: Own elaboration

Table 4 offers a summary view of the scores obtained by the individual evaluated family business leaders in all nine team roles.

As shown in Table 5, on average, leaders of family businesses most strongly occupy the team role of Shaper, whereas the team role of Team Worker is occupied the least.

Table 5 | Evaluation of significant team roles in sample by descriptive statistics

Name	CO	TW	RI	SP	PL	ME	SH	IMP	CF
Mean	50	21	74	30	48	45	67	50	38
Average	59	24	66	31	46	50	68	43	43

Source: Own elaboration

A statistical assessment was carried out based on these values (Tables 4 and 5). Each column representing one team role was tested using a t-test for dependent samples in order to find statistical tendencies towards one team role in comparison with the others.

Each team role was compared with the others, resulting in clear information about whether there is a statistically valid tendency towards one team role over the other. Table 6 represents the p-values of the t-test at the 5% confidence level. The highlighted p-values indicate

statistically proven differences in leader inclination towards a team role. Whether this tendency is positive or negative is indicated by values of the variable t , which will be shown separately in the discussion.

Table 6 | P-values of t-test, showing comparative dissimilarity between team role distribution of family business leaders

	<i>CO</i>	<i>TW</i>	<i>RI</i>	<i>SP</i>	<i>PL</i>	<i>ME</i>	<i>SH</i>	<i>IMP</i>	<i>CF</i>
CO		0.0019	0.6241	0.0162	0.2478	0.5806	0.4277	0.1669	0.3170
TW	0.0019		0.0037	0.1784	0.0425	0.0497	0.0020	0.0909	0.2100
RI	0.6241	0.0037		0.0227	0.0585	0.3427	0.8839	0.1931	0.2440
SP	0.0162	0.1784	0.0227		0.2005	0.0899	0.0012	0.1489	0.3810
PL	0.2478	0.0425	0.0585	0.2005		0.7881	0.1772	0.8216	0.8636
ME	0.5806	0.0497	0.3427	0.0899	0.7881		0.2118	0.4739	0.5700
SH	0.4277	0.0020	0.8839	0.0012	0.1772	0.2118		0.0102	0.0243
IMP	0.1669	0.0909	0.1931	0.1489	0.8216	0.4739	0.0102		1.0000
CF	0.3170	0.2100	0.2440	0.3810	0.8636	0.5700	0.0243	1.0000	

Source: Own elaboration

For the **Shaper**, there is the highest tendency; at the 5% confidence level, it is possible to claim that leaders of family businesses are much more likely to occupy the position of a Shaper than a Team Worker, Specialist, Implementer or Completer Finisher, indicated by the positive values of t .

The second and third highest tendency is for the team roles of the **Coordinator** and **Resource Investigator**, with a positive inclination towards these team roles compared to a Team Worker and Specialist, again indicated by the positive values of t . Together with the **Shaper**, these team roles show a percentile above 50%.

The team roles of the **Plant and Monitor Evaluator** are more likely to occur for family business leaders than for the team role of Team Worker, again indicated by a positive t .

On the contrary, the team roles of the **Completer Finisher, Implementer, Specialist and Team Worker** are less likely to be occupied by family business leaders in that given order, meaning that the Team Worker is the lowest.

Secondly, the correlation between values was analysed in order to determine whether some team roles of family business leaders are dependent on each other. A notable negative correlation was found for the pairs of **Plant and Completer Finisher** (correlation coefficient -0.92) and **Resource Investigator and Implementer** (correlation coefficient -0.85). This means that when one team role in the pair is occupied, there is a high probability that the other team role in the pair will show negligible values. Since the team roles of the **Plant and Resource Investigator** are more typical of family business leaders, this negative pairing shows a rather low tendency towards the team roles of the **Completer Finisher and Implementer**. In the correlation analysis, no positive correlation was found, which means that each team role is unique and one team role cannot be predicted from another.

Lastly, variation and standard deviation were calculated, resulting in some interesting data, as shown in Table 7. Numbers are rounded to the first decimal position.

Table 7 | Calculation of variation and standard deviation

	CO	TW	RI	SP	PL	ME	SH	IMP	CF
Variation	428.5	206.2	843.2	131.1	779.1	801.5	300.3	384.5	1,005.1
Standard deviation	22.0	15.2	30.8	12.1	29.6	30.0	18.4	20.8	33.6

Source: Own elaboration

Before the others, the three most strongly demonstrated team roles, **Shaper**, **Coordinator** and **Resource Investigator**, will be examined. The standard deviation for the Shaper is 18.4, which means that the general tendency of family business leaders for this team role is more evenly distributed, whereas for the Resource investigator, the standard deviation exceeds 30, which clearly shows that there will be more extremes, meaning more individuals with a very strong preference towards this team role and some other individuals with a rather weak preference towards the same team role at the same time. Still, those who agree with the Resource Investigator team role obviously answered with a strong inclination, so even with a high standard deviation, the average is still set relatively high. The Coordinator team role resulted in a standard deviation of 22.0, which demonstrates greater differences between individuals than for the Shaper but not as uneven as the Resource Investigator. From these values, in accordance with the previous analysis, an assumption about the Shaper as the highest team role tendency can be derived, with the Coordinator being in second place and the Resource Investigator in third.

The standard deviation for the team roles of the **Specialist** and **Team Worker** is generally low. This indicates that there are no significant differences in the mutual agreement of family business leaders regarding the exclusion of these team roles. Simply, no respondent deviates from the trend of having the Specialist and Team Worker as one of the least preferred team roles.

5 Discussion

Based on the findings presented in Chapter 4, the answers to research questions RQ1 and RQ2 are discussed below.

The first question “*RQ1: What team roles or combinations of team roles are the most typical of family business leaders?*” receives a positive answer. The leaders have high scores with relatively low standard deviation in the team roles of the Shaper and Coordinator, which are the two major team roles known for their leadership skills, while being low on the Team Worker and Specialist, again with a relatively low standard deviation. This pattern is consistent throughout the studied sample. Linking the typical traits of major team roles typical of family leaders to knowledge about family businesses is, at this stage of research, still shrouded and only a matter of discussion. Family businesses tend to keep exceptionally good relationships with their customers (Kogut, 2019), which, from the perspective of Belbin’s model, is the typical contribution of a Resource Investigator, who is extroverted, enthusiastic, communicative and develops contacts (Belbin, 2010a). According to this study, these team roles are typical of family business leaders. Therefore, it can indicate some link, even though not yet statistically proven. Another possible link might lie in the relatively low representation

of team roles such as the Plant and Specialist, who are known for their expertise (Plant for innovation and Specialist for deep-focused knowledge). The lower tendency towards these roles can have some influence on family business self-perception of being poor at new technologies. This discussion compares the Polish study of Kogut (2019) with the present study, performed in the Czech cultural environment. Despite being different nations, Polish and Czech cultures are similar, for both nations speak mutually intelligible languages and have a comparable history of family businesses with a suppression of private business during the socialist era. Another link between general family business characteristics and Belbin team roles can be seen in a lower tendency for the Plant, who is very innovative. Family businesses are rather conservative, so this trend can be correlated, but as well as the other conclusions of that kind, this one is yet to be proved and cannot now be confirmed.

For the second question, “RQ2: *What team roles are not typical of family business leaders in comparison with team roles that are found to be typical, if any?*” there is strong evidence for a positive answer. From the t-test and statistical calculations of standard deviation, it can be answered that the Shaper and Coordinator are very typical, as well as the Resource Investigator, despite some individuals negating a strong tendency towards this type of behaviour. On the other hand, there is a significantly low representation of the Team Workers and Specialists. With the discovery of typical team roles of family business leaders, the goal of this research can be marked as achieved.

From the practical point of view, it is evident that leaders of family businesses are very strong, courageous individuals and managers (Shaper and Coordinator), are communicative (Resource Investigator), average in dutifulness and focused on details (Implementer, Specialist) and poorer in empathy (Team Worker) and deep specialized knowledge (Specialist). Other characteristics will depend more on the leader's individual personality because the average answer did not show any decisive information in combination with a higher standard deviation.

This study can be compared with the results of the Slovak study about leaders in start-ups. In the context of the Czech Republic, with its mutual national history, language and cultural environment, the study of businesses in Slovakia can be considered valid, as was done in the case of the Polish study by Kogut (2019). In the Slovak study, Bednár and Ljudvigová (2020) identified that for start-up leaders, the Plant, Resource Investigator and Shaper are the most preferable team roles, with the Plant exceeding family business leaders the most. The Team Worker also shows very low representation, but the Implementer even lower. The latter team role is known for its reliability as well as rigidity, which is not suitable for the innovative environment of a start-up business, but for family businesses, the role of the Implementer is just slightly below average.

Table 8 | Average and standard deviation of team roles of leaders in Slovak start-ups

	CO	TW	RI	SP	PL	ME	SH	IMP	CF
Average	42.22	30.22	69.00	44.44	72.78	46.11	59.89	26.22	39.33
Standard deviation	32.57	18.09	27.13	38.50	30.63	35.25	27.73	24.60	23.06

Source: Own elaboration, calculated from Bednár & Ljudvigová (2020)

The uniqueness of family businesses (as well as start-ups) is indisputable when even the leaders show different traits corresponding to the nature of the business.

The impact of the paper on business practitioners lies in the value of the information. When using Belbin team roles as a coaching method, when somebody is classified as one team role, they are usually encouraged (with their team taken into account) not to worry about playing their team role properly, even though every team role has its weaknesses. The benefits prevail. Identified as Shapers (SH), Coordinators (CO) and Resource Investigators (RI), the business leaders can be encouraged to show the traits shown by these team roles, while not being particularly sorry for playing this role. Yes, Shapers are tough leaders, but obviously, family businesses tend to need these people. Yes, Coordinators sometimes over-delegate, but family businesses need people who are strong in internal communication and need Coordinators. Lastly, yes, Resource Investigators are overexcited and tend to lose their energy when presented with obstacles, but again, those people are needed because they are the ones who actually make the reputation of family businesses in the eyes of customers or the community through their external focus. The assumption for the leaders can be stated as: *“When you feel the need to play that team role, play it because this is the way family businesses do and it is completely normal.”*

Another implication for businesses is the importance of counterbalancing typical leader team roles with suitable complementary team roles. As known from business theory, Shapers (SH) usually need Team Workers (TW) as support, because those are the only ones that are actually able to “shape the Shapers” by their patience and kindness, as well as Resource Investigators (RI) need Completer Finishers (CF) or Implementers (IMP), who compensate their lack of focus on details or processes. Since leaders of family businesses tend to occupy the aforementioned team roles, they would probably need these other team roles in their team, or indeed, in their family.

Thirdly, wavering people who consider engaging in a family business and show characteristics of SH, CO or RI can be encouraged to take the step into entrepreneurship because successful family businesses show these team roles in their leaders. Furthermore, stronger encouragement can be given if complementary team roles are present within their family.

All the notes in the discussion that speak about other members of the team are the subject of further research. This is discussed in the next chapter.

6 Future Research and Limitations

In relation to the stated research gap, the following observation was made. The use of Belbin team roles in a family business environment yielded interesting data. This not only deepens academic understanding in the field but upon further analysis, may also provide valuable information for family businesses themselves. Therefore, future research will continue this path. In the future, the focus will be on two sides. Firstly, the respondent sample should be expanded in order to have greater statistical certainty for the assumptions, especially linking general traits of family businesses to the traits of their leaders.

Secondly, and even more importantly, all teams of companies that have already been studied will be inspected. That is to say, the leader of a team on their own would be a captain without a crew, so the whole team needs to be taken into account to obtain the complete picture.

Namely, what is known from Belbin is that in order to have quality team cooperation, it is necessary for each weakness of one person to be compensated for by the strengths of another person, in Belbin's terminology, to have complementary team role(s). One study already being conducted focuses on different sex counterparts for family business leaders with a clear question – do family members of the opposite sex complement the team roles of the business leaders? If they do, it will be proved that the most common family business model of a man in charge and a woman being his “first mate”, or, theoretically, in roughly 20% of cases, of a woman in charge and a man being her “first mate”, represent a functional and generally beneficial model, even though being very traditional, which in the eyes of the 21st century may be perceived as “old-school”.

As with any research, this study has its own limitations. Firstly, the findings should be tested in different cultural environments in order to be generalized. This research was geographically limited to only one Central European country, the Czech Republic. Secondly, the sample of respondents was rather limited. The main reason is a relatively high demand for firms to invest their time in the research, which resulted in a refusal by a high percentage of companies. As a result, there is only one woman in the sample. This still fits the distribution of CEOs of family businesses among men and women; yet, to have a higher certainty or to be able to compare different sexes, many times more respondents would be needed.

Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the team roles of founders and CEOs in family businesses using Belbin's team role methodology. We found out which team roles are the most typical of family business leaders and which are more rarely or insignificantly represented. The research demonstrates a notable trend among family business leaders towards certain team roles, revealing patterns that can influence the management and success of these businesses.

The findings indicate that the most common team roles for family business leaders are the Shaper, Coordinator and Resource Investigator, characterized by their leadership qualities, ability to develop contacts and drive to overcome obstacles. This suggests that successful family business leaders often exhibit dynamic, communicative and decisive behaviour, which aligns with the need for strong leadership in maintaining the business's stability and growth.

On the other hand, roles such as the Team Worker and Specialist are significantly less common among the leaders. This could be attributed to the specific demands on family businesses, where leaders need to focus more on strategic management and external relations rather than solely on technical expertise or maintaining team harmony. This statement immediately offers a field for future research, specifically research into team roles of the whole team with an objective to identify whether team roles that are scarcely demonstrated by the leader are, in fact, naturally demonstrated by other team members.

The statistical analysis, including t-tests and standard deviation calculations, supports these observations. This pattern aligns with the conservative, long-term focus typically observed in family businesses, which prioritize stability and careful decision-making over rapid innovation, contrary to the start-up environment, where leaders often display the Plant team role, which is an important one for developing ideas and carrying innovation.

While the study successfully identified typical team roles among family business leaders, it also highlights areas for further research. Understanding how these roles influence the overall performance and culture of family businesses can provide deeper insights into effective management strategies.

In conclusion, the research confirms that family business leaders exhibit distinct team role patterns, predominantly favouring leadership and communication-oriented roles. These insights contribute to the broader understanding of family business management, not only offering practical knowledge but also setting a foundation for future studies.

Acknowledgement

Funding: This research was carried out with the approval of AMSP CR and was financially supported by the "Internal Grant Programme" of the Technical University in Liberec under grant no. 36_PR_2023.

Conflict of interest: The authors hereby declare that this article was neither submitted nor published elsewhere. The authors do not have any conflict of interest.

References

- Anderson, N., & Sleaf, S. (2004). An evaluation of gender differences on the Belbin Team Role Self-Perception Inventory. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 77(3), 429–437. <https://doi.org/10.1348/0963179041752637>.
- Anderson, R. C., & Reeb, D. M. (2003). Founding-Family Ownership and Firm Performance: Evidence from the S&P 500. *The Journal of Finance*, 58(3), 1301–1328.
- Bednár, R., & Ljudvigová, I. (2020). Belbin team roles in a start-up team. SHS Web of Conferences, 83: 01002. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20208301002>.
- Belbin (2024). Method, Reliability & Validity, Statistics & Research: A Comprehensive Review of Belbin Team Roles. Retrieved from <https://www.belbin.com/media/1158/belbin-uk-2014-a-comprehensive-review.pdf>
- Belbin, R. M. (2010a). Management teams: Why they succeed or fail (3rd ed.). Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Belbin, R. M. (2010b). Team roles at work (2nd ed.). Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Belbin, R. M. (2012). Manažerské týmy: Proč některé uspějí a jiné selžou. Wolters Kluwer.
- Belbin, R. M., & Keeler, J. (Directors). (8 September 2020). An Introduction to Belbin Team Roles: Theory and Application [Video recording]. YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOUfUX6XL3c>
- Bojanowska, A., & Zalewska, A. M. (2017). Happy Temperament? Four Types of Stimulation Control Linked to Four Types of Subjective Well-Being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 18(5), 1403–1423. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-016-9777-2>.
- Čákrť, M. (2009). Typologie osobnosti pro manažery: Manažerské styly, rozhodování, komunikace, konflikty, týmová práce, time management a změny. Management Press.
- Čákrť, M. (2015). Typologie osobnosti: Přátelé, milenci, manželé, dospělí a děti. Management Press.
- Calabrò, A., & Valentino, A. (2019). STEP 2019 Global Family Business Survey REPORT: The impact of changing demographics on family business succession planning and governance. Retrieved

- from <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/sa/pdf/2020/step-2019-global-family-business-survey-report.pdf>
- Craig, J. B., Dibrell, C., & Davis, P. S. (2008). Leveraging Family-Based Brand Identity to Enhance Firm Competitiveness and Performance in Family Businesses. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 46(3), 351–371. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-627X.2008.00248.x>.
- De Massis, A., Frattini, F., Majocchi, A., & Piscitello, L. (2018). Family firms in the global economy: Toward a deeper understanding of internationalization determinants, processes, and outcomes. *Global Strategy Journal*, 8(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1002/gsj.1199>.
- Eysenck, H. J. (1971). The structure of human personality (3rd ed., reprint). Methuen.
- Family businesses definition according to the Czech government. (2019, May 13). Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic. Retrieved from <https://www.mpo.gov.cz/en/guidepost/for-the-media/press-releases/family-businesses-lived-to-see-the-definition-of-family-business-approved-by-the-government--246241/>
- Fernandez Perez, P., & Colli, A. (Eds.). (2013). The Endurance of Family Businesses: A Global Overview (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139794848>.
- Fries, A., Kammerlander, N., & Leitterstorf, M. (2021). Leadership Styles and Leadership Behaviors in Family Firms: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 12(1): 100374. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfbs.2020.100374>.
- Griffeth, R., Allen, D., & Barrett, R. (2006). Integration of family-owned business succession with turnover and life cycle models: Development of a successor retention process model. *Human Resource Management Review*, 16(4), 490–507. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2006.08.006>.
- Jung, C. G., Winston, R., & Winston, C. (1995). Memories, dreams, reflections (A. Jaffé, Ed.). Fontana Press.
- Keeler, J. (Director). (2020). Explanation of the Belbin Individual Reports (Belbin 2020 Webinar Series) [Video recording]. YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=allS9VxUiQo>
- Kogut, J. (2019). Strategical management of family business. The 13th International Days of Statistics and Economics, Prague, Czech Republic, September 5-7, 2019.
- Lansberg, I., & Gersick, K. (2015). Educating Family Business Owners: The Fundamental Intervention. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 14(3), 400–413. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2014.0254>.
- Lievens, J., & Lerut, S. (2021, September 9). A Strong Owners Team: An asset for the family business. Family & Business Interface. Retrieved from <https://digital.ffi.org/editions/a-strong-owners-team-an-asset-for-the-family-business/>
- Littauer, F. (1997). Osobnosti plus: Jak porozumět druhým porozuměním sobě samým. Medium.
- Machová, K., & Procházková, P. T. (2017). The reality of family business in the Czech republic. *Business trends*, 3, 41-50.
- Maharani, A., Yokung, L. B., Ignasius, E., & Suwargo, N. (2021). Interrelationships Between Non-Family Business Members, Nepotism And Pride In Family Business Succession. Emerging Markets: *Business and Management Studies Journal*, 8(1), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.33555/embm.v8i1.168>.
- Matějček, M., & Klégrová, J. (2011). Praxe dětského psychologického poradenství (2nd ed.). Portál.

- MPO ČR (2020, February 2). Definice rodinného podniku. Retrieved from <https://www.mpo.cz/cz/podnikani/rodinne-podnikani/definice/definice-rodinneho-podniku--253096/>
- Národní cena ČR za kvalitu v rodinném podnikání. (2024). Oficiální portál Rady Kvality ČR. Retrieved from <https://www.narodniportal.cz/narodni-a-krajske-ceny/narodni-cena-kvality-cr/narodni-cena-cr-za-kvalitu-v-rodinnem-podnikani/>
- Petlín, A., & Koráb, V. (2015). Family Business in the Czech Republic: Actual Situation. *Trendy Ekonomiky a Managementu*, 23(9), 32-42.
- Pszczółka, M. (2021). Rodinný podnik MY DVA. Posádka lodi na širém moři. Retrieved from <https://mydva.cz/rodinny-podnik-my-dva-posadka-lodi-na-sirem-mori/>
- Risky, A. (2021). Leadership style & management system in family business for Z generation workers. In Proceedings of the International Conference on Psychological Studies (ICPSYCHE 2020) (pp. 342–346). Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210423.050>.
- Rohm, R. A., & Činčala, P. (2017). Pozitivní povahové profily (P. Činčala, Trans.). Akademie úspěchu.
- Sánchez Marín, G., Carrasco Hernández, A. J., Danvila del Valle, I., & Sastre Castillo, M. Á. (2016). Organizational culture and family business: A configurational approach. *European Journal of Family Business*, 6(2), 99–107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejfb.2017.05.002>.
- Sandig, A. G., von Schlippe, A., Ruvireta, G., Raventós, J., Torelló, J. U., Rüsen, T., & Lledó, L. (2023). Family Business Knowledge. Retrieved from <https://fbkonline.com/index.php?models-of-family-businesses>
- Shams, M. (2022). Supporting the family business: A coaching practitioner's handbook (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Skrbková, D., Rydvalová, P., & Linhart, O. (2023). Family business innovativeness: A tool for successful succession? In Proceedings of the 16th International Conference Liberec Economic Forum 2023 (pp. 152–161). Liberec, Czechia. <https://doi.org/10.15240/tul/009/lef-2023-17>.
- Strelau, J. (2008). Temperament as a regulator of behavior: After fifty years of research. Eliot Werner Publications.
- The Nine Belbin Team Roles. (2024). Belbin. Retrieved from <https://www.belbin.com/about/belbin-team-roles>
- Villalonga, B., & Amit, R. (2006). How do family ownership, control and management affect firm value? *Journal of Financial Economics*, 80(2), 385–417. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfineco.2004.12.005>.
- Zellweger, T. M. (2017). Managing the family business: Theory and practice. Edward Elgar Publishing.

The research article passed the double-blind review process. | Received: 5 July 2024; **Revised:** 5 August 2024; **Accepted:** 24 August 2024; **Available online:** 16 November 2024; **Published in the regular issue:** 30 May 2025.

Appendix

Appendix 1 | Full Czech family business definition

Family businesses in this article are defined by the following definition:

A family business is a family business corporation or a family trade.

1) A family business corporation is a business corporation in which members of one family directly or indirectly exercise the majority of voting rights and at least one member of this family is a member of the statutory body of this business corporation; the characteristics of a family business corporation are also fulfilled if its sole partner is a member of one family who is also a member of the statutory body, and at least one other member of the same family is a member of its statutory body, its employee, its proxy or a member of its supervisory board. The term family business corporation also refers to a business corporation in which the majority of voting rights are exercised in favour of one family of the foundation or the trustee of the trust fund, if, at the same time, at least one member of this family is a member of the statutory body of the foundation or the trustee of the trust fund.

2) A family trade is a business in which at least two members of one family participate with their work or property, and at least one of the members of this family holds a trade or other similar license or is authorized to do business for another reason.

3) For the purposes of the definition of a family business, spouses or registered partners working together are considered, or at least one of the spouses or partners and their relatives up to the fourth degree, persons with spouses or partners who are siblings-in-law up to the third degree, and persons related in direct line, or siblings.*

** Act No. 115/2006 Coll., on registered partnership and on the amendment of some related laws, as amended). (Family business definition according to the Czech Government, 2019)*