

The Relevance of a Whole-Person Learning Approach to Family Business Education: Concepts, Evidence, and Implications

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Next generation family members often struggle with challenges of various roles, identities and opportunities, they are faced with. Family education has a big role to play, when it comes to preparing the younger members for future responsibilities. This article explores 'whole-person learning' as an experiential learning pedagogy for the development of the next generation. The authors also describe how the approach helps participants develop cognitive, emotional and social intelligences.

Whole-Person Learning Approach to Family Business Education

The 'whole-person learning' (WPL) pedagogy lays emphasis on experiential learning aimed at holistic development of the participant. In addition to cognition, its learning objectives also include emotional and social skills. In the family business context, WPL helps the next generation members acquire leadership qualities and prepares them for succession. The authors suggest that WPL leads to 'individuation,' i.e., the next generation family member begins to differentiate self from the whole (i.e. the family). Individuation makes the person aware of his/her own feelings, values and beliefs. Thus, the person is more likely to act on his/her own rather than being influenced by others. It also helps them steer through their several roles like, family

members, family executives and business owners.

The authors suggest that WPL approach of imparting cognitive, emotional and social skills can be taught through classroom learning, if the programme is properly structured and effectively delivered. They study the structure and effectiveness of 'Personal, Professional and Leadership Development' course offered by Stetson University that provided a WPL learning experience. The course had two parts: (1) Lectures and (2) Lab Sessions (i.e. experiential exercises). The participants were encouraged to apply the classroom learnings through: (1) Self-assessment, (2) Analysis of values (3) Recognizing personal challenges, (4) Performing career analysis, and (5) Developing understanding of family business. The learning experience was unique to each individual and aimed at development of his/ her cognitive, social and emotional competencies.

Effectiveness of WPL Approach

The authors interviewed the programme participants (i. e., next-generation family business members) to identify the learning experiences in the course and transformation outcomes. The interview results were also confirmed by a follow-up survey. Based on the data analysis, the participants' **experiential learning opportunities** in the course were classified into five categories:

- (1) **practical application of course materials:** applying classroom concepts,
- (2) **self-reflection:** better understanding of self and family,
- (3) **normalizing:** learning from others' experiences,
- (4) **emotional responses:** to and from business system and to and from family system, and
- (5) **enhanced communication:** overcoming barriers and open discussion on family business issues.

- (5) **extending temporal perspectives:** insights on past, present and future.

The findings revealed that family business education with WPL approach could help next generation members in developing their cognitive, emotional and social awareness and competencies. It could help them gain an improved awareness of self, the family and its business. This would make them more confident, capable of individuation and prepare them for succession. (Figure 1)

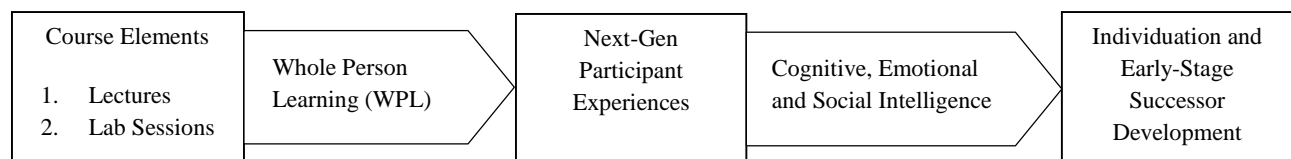


Figure 1. Whole Person Learning Approach

The participants were also asked whether the experiences influenced their development as potential family business successors. Based on the interview and survey responses, the authors identified five categories of **early-stage successor development** that participants went through:

- (1) **understanding family business attachment:** identifying with, commitment to and emotional ownership of - family business,
- (2) **managing role expectations:** role clarity and managing complexity,
- (3) **developing incumbent–successor trust:** confidence, credibility and willingness,
- (4) **making career decisions:** clarity on career inside/ outside the family business, and

Practical Implications

The study establishes that WPL approach of family education can be effectively used for early-stage successor development. Family businesses can deploy this approach for holistic development of the younger family members. The WPL approach helps next generation members in obtaining an internal locus of control, thus making them more effective decision makers. The study also has implications for family business practitioners and business schools that offer family business programmes. They would be more effective in educating next generation members if they use the WPL approach of experiential learning embedded in their programmes.

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