ABSTRACT: The paper explores the relationship between family businesses (FB), communities of practice (CoP), and entrepreneurship education in the context of the knowledge production and sharing within and between these communities. The relationship between these three spheres of knowledge is presented from a transdisciplinary point of view. The contextual legitimacy identifies the communicational channels between the fields of family businesses and the communities of practice and entrepreneurial education in a transdisciplinary generative synergistic context. The notion of CoP suggests that organizational community boundaries do not correspond with typical functional boundaries, including practice - and person - based networks, while family businesses underline the necessity of sustainable business education which can be achieved through collaborative interaction in a creative entrepreneurial framework. The paper proposes to find the common ground of the three fields of knowledge and the way these points develop new knowledge windows towards a new entrepreneurial understanding of life, and generating new alternatives.

Key words: entrepreneurship education, family business, communities of practice

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge and its management represent the heart of the informergic economy, with the unprecedented possibilities of production and sharing of knowledge, of learning and change in knowledge place organizations and individuals alike under the imperative of capitalizing on this new reality [1]. In order to meet the knowledge imperative economic actors resorted on various organizational solutions, some of these solutions brought teams as a central element (e.g. cross-functional teams), others have focused on the customer as a central element, and others were interested on business model [2]. The search for better solutions that capitalize on knowledge continues, the paradigm shift regarding the approach of knowledge needs consider the conservation of fundamental elements of knowledge, of invariants as relevance, correctness and value, reconfiguring the approach of the knowledge process in terms of a synergistic generative methodological approach. In this context transdisciplinarity approach is considered the best way to be chosen in order to understand the different channels the entrepreneurial learning could work in family business as a community of practice, even they are partially distinguished incompatible systems, with potential tensions and conflict [3, 4, 5]. The transdisciplinarity as a new way for knowledge has to manage, to redistribute and to share the new spaces opened up by new opportunities through specific processes [6]. The CoPs become an important source of learning and innovation in connection with family business in an entrepreneurial learning context as new knowledge spaces [7, 8, 9, 10]. Such a synergistic generative approach is better to explain processes of learning and innovating then the monodisciplinary approach. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding the way entrepreneurial learning is working in the family businesses as community of practice, offering insights and stimulating to reflections on the challenges and processes involved in transdisciplinary knowledge production. Several studies have emphasized that knowledge production is socially, historically, culturally and materially situated [11, 12, 13, 14, 15]. To understand knowing in practice is necessary to go beyond the local level and look at how it is distributed into larger socio-technical networks, connecting different levels of reality in the new context of the informergic knowledge based society [5]. The knowledge search window, with top-down as theoretical approach and bottom-up levels, as practical experiences allows to put together things, people, and events that are distant and only partially congruent, because they allow the coexistence of old and new, because they are able to deal with change and disorder while explaining persistence and order, in the new synergistic generative perspective [4, 16, 17, 18].

2. MONODISCIPLINARY APPROACH

2.1. Communities of practice

CoPs are important as they weave the organization around competencies without reverting to functional structures, facilitating an informally environment formally structured, supported by knowledge, people, organizational processes and infrastructure [7]. These CoPs hold a vast base of knowledge ranging from bottom-up level, working as practical experiences, to top-down level, as theoretical concepts. CoPs are considered as the engines for acceleration in an organization, as knowledge fabrics for apprentices of CoP in order to acquire communitarian identity with shared passion, relationships, roles and ways to achieve a common knowledge, practices, based on detailed empirical evidence of a globally operating organization [8, 9]. CoPs feature distinctive characteristics from other organizational forms such as project teams, formal work group or informal networks, which are also
present in organizations for managing knowledge [19]. CoPs, unlike the other three organizational forms, spring from the members’ interests and passions (glue) with the purpose of developing the auto-selected members’ (membership) capabilities and to create and share knowledge (purpose) and therefore their span of life is directly connected to the interest to maintain the group (duration). Communities of practice are fertile environments where knowledge is produced but also they themselves function on the basis of knowledge. These environments foster genuine learning through a corroborating of collectively participatory interaction around issues that are of interest for its members [8]. A community of practice (CoP) draws its identity from the domain component, which sets the direction in which it will evolve and ensures a purpose driven activity. Through its participatory dimension the CoP allows members to get involved and interact socially with members which are situated on different levels of the knowledge spectrum of the particular domain, creating in the midst of that interaction new resources, which belong to the community. The community’s resource heritage is also enriched by the stock of experiences and practices that each individual member brings from his participation in other communities. On the premises that CoP is not functioning on imposed hierarchy the communication process is characterized by accessibility [8, 12, 20].

2.2. Family businesses

Although family businesses are commonly recognized as long-standing phenomenon and important contributors to the economic development and wealth creation around the world [21], yet the literature indicates that 30% of these types of entities survive over the second generation of family, and just 15% survive over the third generation [22]. The family business body of literature has long struggled to reach a consensus regarding the definition of family business [23] and rightly so since every family business has its own history, culture and idiosyncrasy that differ in various ways. The essential elements which define this rather diverse typology of business are: identity (the collective idea that the business is a family business and that the family issues matter in the management and ownership of the business), intention to maintain family control of the dominant coalition; a unique, inseparable, and synergistic resources and capabilities arising from family involvement and interactions; a vision held by the family for trans-generational value creation; pursuance of such a vision [24, 25, 26, 27].

The family business is a complex and dynamic system composed of other subsystems that interact with each other and within themselves in a particular way given by the pattern of cycles that can be identified in the life span of family business [21]. They give birth to idiosyncratic resources namely “familiness” (unique, inseparable, and synergistic resources and capabilities arising from family involvement and interactions [25] and which is source of competitive advantage [26]. The “familiness” resources are not merely characterized by uniqueness which derives from the interactions and involvement of family but are also shared resources, in a sense a shared repertoire of the family business creating a mutual or shared understanding over the matters of the business and being collectively produced and used. The natural social enterprise of the family as a major component of the socioeconomic system of the family business brings forward the component of trust as its inherent characteristic of relationships which impacts the strength of the relationships within the family business ensuring the correct premises of its functioning and resulting in a high identification of the family members with the venture and a high responsibility (commitment) towards its survival [28]. Yet in order to perform successfully, family businesses also require a tacit collective knowledge embedded in the routines of the business, which to integrate, coordinate and mobilize its idiosyncratic resources and capabilities [29]. In this sense, the family business’ capacity to create and transfer its specific knowledge is crucial not only to its performance but also to its survival over generations [30].Because the founding generation, generally possess a substantial stock of tacit knowledge regarding the business firm, the nature of the relationship between the first generation and succeeding generation is of paramount importance in the transfer process [31]. Another weak point of the family business is that they often falls into path-dependent developments and historical legacies [32] which hinder their renewal and their pursuit of entrepreneurial strategies, therefore the very survival of the family business depends on the capacity of the members to foster a trans-generational entrepreneurial orientation [33].

2.3. Entrepreneurial learning

Learning as a process of signification enables people to develop the ability to behave differently, to combine knowledge, practice and to allocate meaning “why”, as legitimacy (motivation) [34]. Through learning, people construct meaning through contextual experience and create new realities [35]. Genuine learning is embedded in the social participation in everyday life [36]. Entrepreneurs are engaged in a continual process of learning in a interconnected constellation of communities where they learn not only “what and how to do” but also “how to be” (identity formation and molding). This continual dimension of the learning process ensures progress and renewal [37].

3. SYNERGISTIC GENERATIVE APPROACH

Transdisciplinarity as understanding (top-down approach), learning and practicing (bottom-up approach) is based on an active process, occurring either intentionally or spontaneously, that enables to control information, thus to question, integrate, reconfigure, adapt or reject it [1, 38, 39]. The four pillars of the transdisciplinary knowledge learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live with other people [40] are presented in a new framework, learning as achieving information and knowledge, as an objective rational extrinsic logical issue, and understanding as an ethic-semantic issue, the subjective relational dimension of knowledge. The active extrinsic transdisciplinary approach, “learning to learn to know by doing”, and reactive intrinsic transdisciplinary approach, “learning to understand to be by living with others”, represents a multiple transdisciplinary paradigm, working as guidelines to achieve both necessary integrative semiophysical skills in a synergistic communicational context, through the structural-functional semiophysical system, with its technical efficiency (knowing what and how we know), and ethic-semantic value of semiosial products in an ethical authoritative context with its axiological coefficient (knowing how and why we live) [41, 42, 43]. The rational knowledge process „learning to learn to know by doing” involves „creativity through adequateness and innovation (to know-what, how, why)”, combined with „action through competence and performance (by doing-who, what, how and why)”, as extrinsic active component, characterized by the efficiency of knowledge process. The relational knowledge process “learning to understand to be by living with
other people”, presupposes „authenticity through integrity and excellence (to be-who, how)”, together with „participation through communion and apprenticeship (by living with-to whom)”, as intrinsic reactive component, characterized by its axioloical ethic-semantic parameter [44, 42, 1]. Learning to know becomes a ring of the extrinsic active knowledge chain, with “what, how and why” epistemic questioning paradigm [45, 46, 47, 44], related with the message (quantitative and qualitative aspects, know what), with the manner of the communicational process, code and channel (know how), and finally with the context (know why) [1]. The ring “by doing”, of the extrinsic active knowledge chain represents the “acquiring a profession necessarily passing through a phase of specialization in a challenging world, with changes induced by the computer revolution with excessive specialization risks, reconciling the exigency of competition with equal chance and opportunity for all” [39].

3.1. The spheres of authority in the knowledge process

In the midst of globalization, knowledge processes can no longer be treated separately, mono-disciplinary but rather there is a need to overcome the disciplinary barriers and find connections between different domains as channels of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary communication [38, 17, 43]. Insights regarding the sources of entrepreneurial learning process can be drawn from the application of “Model of authority spheres” – a triadic approach which considers the existence of three spheres of authority: leadership, education, and relationships. This model is relevant for the study of entrepreneurial learning because it incorporates the most frequent sources of learning presented in the literature (cognitive learning, experiential learning, and social learning) [41].

In the leadership sphere, entrepreneurial learning takes place “by-doing” in specific situations faced by the entrepreneur in the enterprise - from business opportunity identification, entrepreneurial step, to actual management of the venture for growth and development. The evolution of the entrepreneur throughout all these phases springs the development of entrepreneurial skills, the accumulation of a heritage of contextual entrepreneurial knowledge and the refining of entrepreneurial instinct. The leadership sphere presents two dimensions in which the entrepreneur learns: the dimension of the apprentice/employee and that of head of a business. In the position of apprentice/employee the entrepreneur learns from previous experiences of participating in activities/ventures in which someone else is the expert. From the position of head of a business the entrepreneur learns to work with others and through others. In the relationships sphere entrepreneurial learning occurs through participation in a variety of relationships and through exposure to the knowledge and experiences of those who the entrepreneur is interacting with in different communities. This sphere includes participation in both cultural and sector specific networks, which can be formal as well as informal. The positions of the entrepreneur has in variety of relationships and communities favour an all-levels learning. The educational sphere fosters cognitive entrepreneurial learning through exposure to formal professional training, which allows an accumulation of general methods, techniques and instruments in a specific field as well as the development of expertise and know-how [5].

Learning by doing could be, in the transdisciplinary approach an apprenticeship in creativity, discovering what is new, bringing in actuality as innovation the creative potentialities, generating the conditions for the emergence of the authentic person, working at the top level of the creative potentials [48, 49, 50]. The step “learning to be” is a permanent communitarian apprenticeship in which teachers inform the disciples, as much as disciples inform the teachers, in a continuous teaching-learning process, so that the shaping of a person passes inevitably through a transpersonal dimension with fundamental tensions between the rational and the relational approach, discovering the harmony or disharmony between individuals and social life, testing the foundations of the personal believes in order to discover that which is found underneath, questioning in a scientific spirit being a precious guide for all the people [38, 39, 17, 41, 51]. This can be done only by living together with other people in communion, supposing that the transgressive attitudes can, and must be learned, allowing to a better understanding of own culture, to better defend the personal and collective identity with all its components [52].

The synergistic generative of the knowledge integration is based on the equilibrium between the outside (with its extrinsic active knowledge aspect) of the person and his inside (with its intrinsic reactive knowledge aspects) [53, 4, 43, 54]. In the context of practical perspective regarding the unification of knowledge in domains that go beyond traditional disciplinary limits, the transdisciplinary model of synergetic synthesis can be used to establish the systemic approach of transdisciplinarity [43]. This process of integrating knowledge evolves on the ascendant spiral of knowledge through the hierarchical integration of various sequential, special, and temporal heterarchic functional structures with the relationships specific to each sequence of data [5].

3.2. Entrepreneurial learning in family business as a community of practice

Every knowledge space of this transdisciplinary integrative study, entrepreneurship, family business, and communities of practice has specific communicational channels in order to configure the new synergistic generative channels, as it is pointed in the figure. As an inherently creative process entrepreneurship brings forth its renewing capacity generated by the progress creation solutions it provides, which could help family businesses to escape the path-dependent trap. The family business through its natural relationships that generate a high level of trust and commitment provides the fertile soil for the functioning of community of practice framework. The community of practice through its domain dimension allocates meaning to the activities that are taking place in the family business ensuring a shared understanding and fostering collective participatory learning within the family business.

![Figure 1. Synergistic generative model for Entrepreneurial education in Family business as Communities of practice](image)
the family businesses organized as communities of practice the process of knowledge achievement takes place through the multiple transdisciplinary paradigm of teaching-learning and understanding approach [42]. In the context of family business the members engaging in day-to-day running of the business participate in a complex social and economic context of learning and ultimately work at producing “their own future” [12]. In the family business functioning as community of practice, knowledge is achieved by understanding, learning and practicing skills [20] and learning is embedded in the participation in everyday social practices of family and business as overlapping communities of practice [55]. The family business as a community of practice functions in a new trans-disciplinary educational model, fostering a learning process where the “student” is educated in an experiential setting [20]. In the family business community of practice the different generations learn from each other through participation in a ‘constellations of interconnected practices’ [56] and interact according to a APA (active-passive-active) model of participation [5]. The family business incorporates the accumulated knowledge and experience that the founders bring in from their own families, education, previous work experience and that of the new-generation joining the business which also bring their accumulated knowledge and learning from other communities that they are members, in this developing together a new community of practice that is the family business. In the family businesses organized as communities of practice the process of knowledge achievement takes place through the multiple transdisciplinary paradigm of teaching-learning and understanding approach [42]. In the family business community of practice the different generations learn from each other through participation in a ‘constellations of interconnected practices’ [42, 57], and interact according to a APA (active-passive-active) model of participation [5].

4. CONCLUSIONS

The transdisciplinary approach to achieve, transmit and implement knowledge, through its multiple paradigm, with extrinsic active (learning to know by doing) and intrinsic reactive (understand to be by living with others) components can be applied to understand the way entrepreneurial learning, family business and community of practices are working together in the new synergistic generative integrative process. The transdisciplinary approach is bringing together separated systems as entrepreneurial learning, family business, and community of practice, which implies that learning occurs in a context of potential tensions and conflict. However, a transdisciplinary way knowledge makes possible to manage, to redistribute, and share the new spaces opened up by new opportunities through processes of “perspective making and perspective taking” [6]. The CoPs [7, 58] become an important source of learning and innovation in connection with family business in an entrepreneurial learning context. Such a synergistic generative approach is a better explanatory process of learning and innovating then the monodisciplinary approach [59].

In order to contribute to a better understanding the way entrepreneurial learning is working in the family businesses as community of practice, offering insights and stimulating to reflections on the challenges and processes involved in transdisciplinary knowledge production. It is important to emphasize the social, historical, cultural and material context to evaluate the real knowledge production. To understand knowing in practice, it has to go beyond the local level and look at how it is distributed into larger socio-technical networks. Simply fostering links across professions and different spheres of knowledge may not result in knowledge integration where the organizational and/or institutional context reinforces separation between the practices of those professionals, as well. This implies to take into account the epistemic context, tools for knowing in the projects, the influence of professional identity, legal and formal regulations surrounding experience and division of labor in research. Knowing is participation in a complex web of relationships among people, activities and functional structures [60, 16]. To know is not a static capability, but a practical accomplishment as actors engage in the world [61], the practical implications being therefore that we only get knowledge about a new way of working by practicing it in an integrating transdisciplinary network in very new knowing and practicing way [62], in order to lead to path dependent teaching/learning processes to solve the challenges to manage the radical changes in the knowledge process, to avoid or to cancel the barriers of incompatibility between the existing stock of knowledge, embedded into epistemic cultures [59, 64], and the knowledge required by new and radically different practices, not just locally defined, but working as networks extending beyond the immediate context [65, 66].

5. REFERENCES


