



## Exploring Cultural Conservatism in Moroccan Family Businesses: Implications for Strategic Behaviours and Organizational Dynamics

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**Abstract** This paper explores the cultural conservatism of family businesses in Morocco and its implications for strategic and organizational behaviours. Drawing on the Gioia methodology, qualitative data were collected from twelve Moroccan family businesses representing diverse industries, sizes, generations, and locations. The findings reveal that cultural conservatism in Moroccan family businesses is characterized by a collective culture that promotes solidarity, internal coordination, and blurred boundaries between family and work. A culture of conformity is prevalent, leading to increased stability of relationships and a shared vision and values within family businesses. In addition, the culture of conservation emphasizes the protection of identity, preservation of tradition, and continuity of family control. These cultural characteristics shape the strategic decisions and behaviors of family businesses, contributing to their unique competitive advantage. This paper highlights the importance of balancing tradition with adaptation in achieving sustainable performance in family businesses. The findings offer valuable insights for practitioners and scholars interested in understanding the impact of cultural conservatism on family businesses in the Moroccan context. Further research is recommended to validate the findings quantitatively and explore the role of other stakeholders in family businesses.

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### PALABRAS CLAVE

Empresa familiar;  
Conservatismo cultural;  
Marruecos;  
Metodología Gioia;  
Comportamiento estratégico.

### Explorando el Conservatismo Cultural en las Empresas Familiares Marroquíes: Implicaciones para los Comportamientos Estratégicos y la Dinámica Organizacional

**Resumen** Este artículo explora el conservatismo cultural de las empresas familiares en Marruecos y sus implicaciones para los comportamientos estratégicos y organizacionales. Basándose en la metodología Gioia, se recopilieron datos cualitativos de doce empresas familiares marroquíes que representan diversas industrias, tamaños, generaciones y ubicaciones. Los hallazgos revelan que el conservatismo cultural en las empresas familiares marroquíes se caracteriza por una cultura colectiva que promueve la solidaridad, la coordinación interna y límites borrosos entre la familia y el trabajo. Prevalece una cultura de conformidad, que conduce a una mayor estabilidad de las relaciones y a una visión y valores compartidos dentro de las empresas familiares. Además, la cultura de la conservación enfatiza la protección de la identidad, la preservación de la tradición y la continuidad del control familiar. Estas características culturales moldean las decisiones estratégicas y los comportamientos de las empresas familiares, contribuyendo a su ventaja competitiva única. Este artículo destaca la importancia de equilibrar la tradición con la adaptación para lograr un desempeño sostenible en las empresas familiares. Los hallazgos ofrecen información valiosa para los profesionales y académicos interesados en comprender el impacto del conservatismo cultural en las empresas familiares en el contexto marroquí. Recomendamos realizar más investigaciones para validar cuantitativamente los hallazgos y explorar el papel de otras partes interesadas en las empresas familiares.

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## 1. Introduction

Family businesses constitute a significant portion of the global economic fabric, contributing substantially to job creation and economic growth (e.g., [Crouzet, 1995](#); [Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007](#); [Rovelli et al., 2021](#)). Their integration of individual, familial, and entrepreneurial dimensions has made them the subject of extensive academic exploration across various disciplines ([Ibrahim et al., 2019](#); [Lassassi & Hammouda, 2009](#)). Despite the vast research available, the role of cultural conservatism within family businesses has not been thoroughly examined, especially in conservative contexts such as Morocco, where family businesses are predominant ([Mdaghri & Korichi, 2022](#); [Nassiri & Sabbari, 2020](#); [Samara, 2021](#)).

Current research often adopts Western-centric viewpoints, resulting in a limited understanding of the unique cultural, value-based, and operational intricacies characteristic of non-Western family enterprises ([Bell & Pham, 2021](#); [Dinh & Calabrò, 2019](#); [Kupangwa et al., 2023](#)). Western-centric viewpoints are rooted in frameworks and practices developed within Western countries (primarily North America and Europe), shaped by their specific values and economic systems, which may not adequately reflect the distinct cultural, social, and economic realities of Moroccan firms ([Oumlil & Balloun, 2009](#)). Furthermore, cultural conservatism, often portrayed as an unchanging entity in the literature, has not been critically analyzed for its capacity to adapt to dynamic market conditions ([Li et al., 2020](#)). Simultaneously, the predominant focus on decision-making outcomes in family businesses also leaves a void concerning the cognitive and affective processes underpinning these decisions ([Penney et al., 2019](#)). Consequently, this outcome-oriented perspective overlooks the complex interaction of family members' thought patterns, belief systems, and emotional attachments, which not only shape the strategic choices made within these firms but also craft the very fabric of their long-term vision and operational ethos ([Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017](#); [Nassiri & Ouiakoub, 2023](#); [Zellweger et al., 2012](#)). Bridging these gaps could reveal how a family firm's cultural conservatism may influence its strategic behaviours and organizational dynamics.

This study aims to address these gaps. Positioned within the Moroccan context, where traditional values play a prominent role in influencing organizational practices in family firms ([Gupta & Levenburg, 2010](#); [Louitri & Zaher, 2021](#); [Nidaazzi & Hourmat Allah, 2023a](#)), this study investigates how cultural conservatism influences the strategic and organizational behaviours of family businesses. Using the Gioia methodology and

conducting semi-structured interviews with thirteen individuals (all part of the top management team) comprising four founders, four executives, and five individuals who are both founders and chief executive officers (CEOs) of twelve Moroccan family businesses, this research provides a comprehensive insight into the intrinsic motivations, belief systems, and generational influences at play.

The preliminary findings suggest that cultural conservatism in Moroccan family businesses is not a static constraint but a dynamic enabler, flexibly adapting to both external influences like market dynamics and internal factors such as family values. This adaptive conservatism underpins decision-making and stability, offering continuity and a unique competitive edge rooted in strong personal networks and national identity. Therefore, cultural conservatism in these businesses acts less as a barrier and more as a strategic asset, facilitating adaptation and growth within a conservative economic context.

The paper is structured as follows: Literature review establishes the theoretical groundwork, Methods outlines our Gioia-based approach and interview process, Findings present key insights, Discussion explores implications and broader context, and Conclusion provides a summary of contribution, limitations, and directions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

Cultural conservatism stands as an emblematic ideology within societal fabric, underscoring the pivotal role that a society's cultural heritage plays in shaping both behaviour and identity ([Oyserman & Schwarz, 2017](#); [Vazquez & Campopiano, 2023](#)). Anchoring this is the belief that the safeguarding of heritage is essential for ensuring societal stability and continuity ([Toma, 2015](#)).

### 2.1. Preservation versus change

Central to the construct of cultural conservatism is the essence of preserving traditions, values, and intrinsic cultural institutions ([Sarrafpour, 2016](#); [Thijs, 2019](#); [Yu, 2022](#)). However, some authors postulate that cultural conservatism is not a rigid framework but a perpetually redefined social construct, hinting at its adaptive nature ([Kirk, 2001](#); [Miller, 1994](#); [Oakeshott, 1991](#)). [Conover and Feldman \(1981\)](#), on the other hand, equate cultural conservatism with resistance to change, painting it in a somewhat dogmatic brush, as posited by [Nisbet \(2017\)](#).

Within family businesses, there is a palpable leaning towards preservation. [Dearden et al. \(1990\)](#) distinguish between ex-post prudence and

ex-ante aversion<sup>1</sup>, pinpointing a cautionary approach towards change. It is evident that family firms, in essence, respect the preservation of cultural norms and values, often rebuffing sudden paradigm shifts (Nidaazzi & Hourmat Allah, 2019). This preservation-centric approach subsequently moulds decision-making frameworks and governs organizational behaviour (Hourmat Allah, 2016; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Penney et al., 2019).

## 2.2 Tradition versus innovation

Cultural conservatism is closely tied to tradition, serving as a channel for passing down cultural values from one generation to the next (Guttek, 1997). The family, as the cornerstone of society, is pivotal in this process of cultural inheritance, thereby reinforcing the importance of tradition (Davis, 2014). Nevertheless, in the context of family businesses, this deep-rooted commitment to tradition can sometimes act as a barrier to innovation (Abella-Garcés & Ferrer, 2022; Diaz-Moriana et al., 2020; Fuetsch, 2022).

Further supporting this is the conservative mindset, an inclination towards prudence, and the familiar (Huntington, 1957; Jost et al., 2003; Mazzelli et al., 2018). This is visible in family businesses led by older generations, where reluctance towards disruptive innovations is palpable (Widz & Michel, 2018). They embrace a collective morality that justifies and legitimizes their adherence to long-established traditions and values (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Alrubaishi et al., 2021; Cunningham, 2013). They are tethered to familiar terrains, echoing the cultural conservatism ethos of valuing tradition over avant-garde approaches (Modaff et al., 2011).

## 2.3. Stability versus progress

Kekes (1997) underscores cultural conservatism as a moral compass that steers decisions towards preserving patterns and values perceived to benefit the societal collective. Scholars such as Giddens (1998), Bobbio (1996), and Muller (2001) also associate cultural conservatism with maintaining hierarchical authority, desiring order and stability, and preferring gradual change over abrupt transformations. Within family businesses, this translates to an emphasis on cultural continuity, which heightens both organizational stability and family social capital (Habbershon & Astrachan, 1997; Johnson & Lenartowicz, 1998). This balance, or occasionally the discord, between preservation and adaptation marks the underlying tussle between stability and progress (Nidaazzi & Hourmat Allah, 2023b). Significantly, Augoustinos and Walker (1995) delineate the di-

chotomy between conservatism and progressivism, portraying conservatism as an antithesis to progressivist ideals.

## 2.4. Toward a new definition

In analyzing the existing body of literature, one gap is the insufficient interrogation of cultural conservatism's adaptability and resilience despite rapidly evolving market dynamics (Kirca et al., 2009). Prior studies have frequently portrayed cultural conservatism, not fully exploring its potential for dynamic evolution (Crowson, 2009; Ghirlanda et al., 2006). This study proposes an examination of cultural conservatism not as an immutable set of traditions but as a potentially adaptive orientation capable of navigating the dichotomy between the preservation of core values and the accommodation of new paradigms, especially in the digital age.

Furthermore, the current literature offers limited insight into the nuanced mechanisms through which cultural conservatism influences decision-making processes within family enterprises. Existing research predominantly concentrates on the outcomes of such decisions, neglecting the cognitive and emotional underpinnings driving these choices (Nidaazzi & Hourmat Allah, 2023a; Penney et al., 2019; Zellweger et al., 2012). Our approach seeks to diverge by delving into the intrinsic motivations, belief systems, and intergenerational dynamics that inform these decisions, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of the internal workings of family businesses. This shift in focus presents an opportunity to redefine cultural conservatism in family firms as a more complex interplay of factors beyond the traditional versus modern dichotomy.

In addition, there is a palpable deficiency in the literature concerning the contextual variability of cultural conservatism across different geographical and cultural spectra. Most prevailing research is skewed towards Western models, thereby overlooking the rich biocultural diversity of family business traditions, values, and operational modalities present in non-Western contexts (Dinh & Calabrò, 2019; Ghirlanda et al., 2006; Krueger et al., 2021).

Previous researchers have attempted to empirically model cultural conservatism and the impact of societal context and individual characteristics (Morin, 2022; Thijs, 2019). What sets this study apart from earlier research is its approach to understanding cultural conservatism within family firms as a multidimensional construct. This approach seeks to encompass both the individual and collective facets of cultural conservatism,

1. Ex-post prudence is retrospective caution towards past decisions based on outcomes. Ex-ante aversion is a reluctance to test new ideas before their implementation.

in order to capture organizational behaviour. Notably, cultural conservatism does not represent an enduring and universally applicable social motive. Instead, it manifests as a stable protective business orientation. In terms of its stability over time, variations in cultural conservatism can be attributed to shifts in factors such as company size, socio-emotional wealth, industry competitiveness, or other external influences. Thus, cultural conservatism in family firms reflects a protective business orientation influenced by internal and external antecedents. Culturally conservative family firms prioritize social order and tradition, guided by a shared belief in preserving patterns and values. This extends to decision making, which is influenced by collective morality.

### 3. Methods

A Gioia methodology was chosen to answer the following research question: How does cultural conservatism reflect in the strategic and organizational behaviours of family businesses? The approach is a qualitative approach to developing a grounded theory that can meet the standards of rigour associated with trustworthy research (Magnani & Gioia, 2023). It involves a systematic process of analysing qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, to identify patterns and themes that can be used to develop a theory (Gioia, 2021). We find that the Gioia methodology allows us to discover new knowledge yet gives us the flexibility to set our terms with respect to theoretical saturation. It employs an iterative data analysis, allowing researchers to continuously refine their understanding and identify emerging themes, while also granting them the autonomy to decide when sufficient data has been collected to reach a comprehensive understanding. It also takes a holistic approach to analyse qualitative data. This study explores a new area, that is, cultural conservatism, and any new topic area needs explorative methods or discovery in nature.

#### 3.1. Data collection

Our qualitative study explores conservative behaviour within the context of twelve family businesses that meet the criteria of theoretical representativeness, diversity and balance (Yin,

1994), potential for discovery and consideration of the research objective (Hlady-Rispal, 2015). Regarding theoretical representativeness, it was important to specify the criteria for defining a family business to achieve homogeneity among cases. We adhere to Handler's definition of a family firm, which entails full ownership by the family, family members occupying top management positions, and a commitment to passing the business from one generation to the next (Handler, 1989). The principle of diversity, on the other hand, is an integral part of the process of empirical saturation (Pires, 1997) and is necessary to extract maximum information and avoid redundant responses that could bias the results. Therefore, we opted for a multiple case study and targeted businesses operating in different industries, sizes, dates of establishments, generations, and geographic locations to obtain a comprehensive view of the construct within the companies. Thus, we attempted to maintain a strict balance among the cases, meaning that each company profile is unique, and together they provide a balanced variety of different situations. For discovery purposes, we selected cases informed by preliminary insights from informal interviews with potential participants about cultural aspects. This technique is appropriate because King et al. (1995) argued that researchers must carefully select cases to ensure that they are particularly representative of the population. Over a two-month period, we conducted an exploratory qualitative study, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in question, exploring its components, motivations, attitudes, underlying values, decision-making processes, and organizational structures. Following established practices as outlined by Mason (2002), these interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, designed to engage key family members involved in the family business, including founders, CEOs, and executives. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, allowing for substantial discussions on the designated themes. Interview duration varied but typically averaged around 40 minutes. Ethical procedures and guidelines were followed throughout the process, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring data anonymization, and cultivating a comfortable and non-judgmental environment for participants.



Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Firm	Firm sector	Firm size	Year of foundation	Family member in management	Generations	Succession
A	Automotive	Medium-sized business	1998	3 (founder and sons)	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Leadership transition phase
B	Tourism	Holding	1953	8 (brothers and cousins)	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation	1 <sup>st</sup> completed in 1999 and 2 <sup>nd</sup> in plan preparation phase
C	Construction Textile Real Estate Tourism	Conglomerate	1980	2 (founder and son)	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Successor preparation phase
D	Bakery Confectionery	Hypo-group	1991	2 (founder and son)	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Not yet started
E	Packaging	Large corporation	1960	3 (brothers)	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	1 <sup>st</sup> completed in 2018
F	Dairy agri-food	Medium-sized business	2014	2 (founding brothers)	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	Not yet started
G	Hardware	Small business	2005	4 (founder and sons)	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Not yet started
H	Plastics Rope making Twine Agricultural greenhouse Real estate Adjuvant chemistry	Conglomerate	1980	3 (founder, son and daughter)	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation	1 <sup>st</sup> completed in 1991 and 2 <sup>nd</sup> in successors preparation phase
I	Construction Civil engineering	Small business	1999	3 (founder, wife and son)	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Plan preparation phase
J	Real estate	Medium-sized business	1999	5 (founder and sons)	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Ownership transfer phase
K	Electrical and Construction	Start-up	2015	2 (founder and son)	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Not yet started
L	Construction and Construction materials	Holding	1958	7 (brothers and cousins)	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation	1 <sup>st</sup> completed in 1986

### 3.2. Data analysis

The Gioia methodology, as described by Magnani & Gioia (2023), creates a data structure that represents organizational experiences by understanding participant interpretations, and then formulating theories based on those experiences, as further elaborated by Gehman et al. (2017). The data structure encompasses three standard processes.

First-order codes are labels or tags that are applied to segments of the data that share a common theme or pattern in the Gioia methodology (Mees-Buss et al., 2022). During this process, we strictly adhered to the participants' terms—we prioritized using the exact words, phrases, or expressions provided by the participants during our data collection—and aimed to simplify the categories by assigning labels or descriptive phrases to the identified concepts (see Figure 1). These open codes are developed during the initial stage of data analysis and are used to identify

key themes in the data. They are more specific and concrete than second-order codes, which are broader categories that group related first-order codes together (Chandra & Shang, 2019).

Second-order codes are abstract categories that are developed from the first-order codes. The aim is to reduce the categories developed in the first order from concepts to themes. Once the first-order codes have been developed, the next step is to group and redefine them into broader categories that share a common theme or pattern (Mees-Buss et al., 2022). These broader categories are the second-order codes. Second-order codes are more abstract and general than first-order codes, and they help to identify the underlying themes and patterns in the data that can be used to develop a grounded theory (Chandra & Shang, 2019).

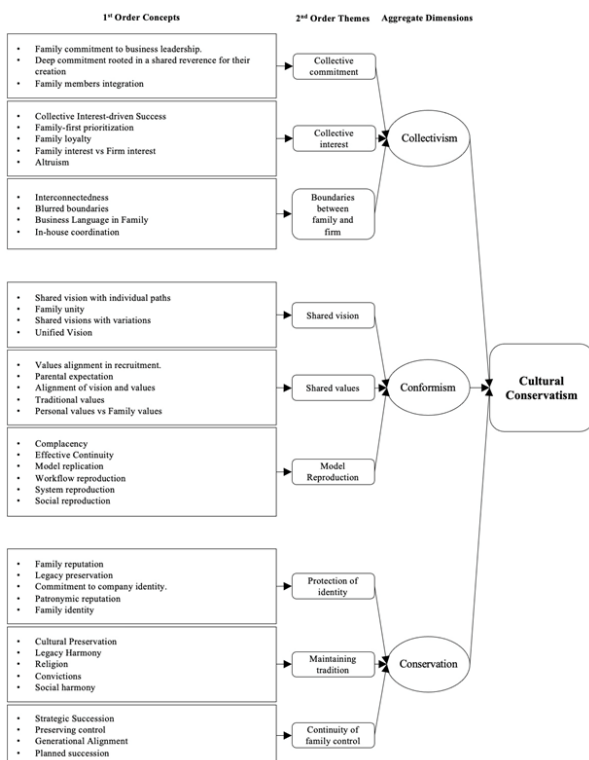
We presented the experiences of twelve family firms while adhering to the scientific principle of systematically analysing the data. This approach

corresponds to the grounded theory method known as theoretical sampling, as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The second-order themes that emerged were subsequently condensed into broader dimensions, forming a comprehensive theoretical framework at a higher level.

Once the second-order codes have been developed, the next step is to group and redefine them into even broader categories that share a common pattern. These broader categories are the aggregate dimensions. Aggregate dimensions are more abstract and general than second-order codes (Balachandran Nair, 2021). The development of aggregate dimensions is a crucial step in Gioia methodology's approach to data analysis, as it helps to move from the specific to the general and identify the broader patterns and themes in the data.

Figure 1 illustrates the visual representation of the data structure created based on the emerging terms, themes, and aggregate dimensions. It also displays the aggregate dimensions, researcher-centric concepts, and participant-centric terms. Examples of interview extracts are presented in the following section.

Figure 1. Data structure



## 4. Findings

Our results reveal that for participants, cultural conservatism is a philosophy that encourages the preservation of a culture's heritage. It emphasizes non-flexibility and primarily focuses on internal organization. The organizations that emphasize group culture tends to maintain the group.

*"We protect our family, we protect our culture, and it is our goal to reach the right point, leaving the children a well-established business, and we hope they will also maintain the same system" [B].*

*"We follow an order; everything will be fine internally. Order is essential for success [...] It's sure and certain, if we protect our culture and tradition and follow an order, everything will be marvellous internally. Order is essential for success [...] I am willing to develop our business, and my brother shares the same vision. No family business can succeed without family members who share the same vision and support each other" [F].*

*"If he does not adhere to the group's vision and values, he won't even get in, regardless of his degrees, his abilities, his technical skills [...]" [H].*

Belonging, trust, and participation are fundamental values, and the key motivating factors are attachment, cohesion, and belonging. Leaders tend to be participative, caring, and supportive, facilitating interaction through teamwork.

*"Overall, the fundamental values are shared by all members of the family [...] also all employees. Even in recruitment, we are strict about the company's values, and we try to select individuals who have and could adopt the same values" [B].*

*"In general, we all share the vision, of course. There are minor differences in the details, questions of 'how to get there.' Each person does it in their own way, but the destination is the same" [C].*

*"[...] my father wants me to have the same values and the same vision as him" [D].*

*"Trust is so important for us [...] We do not need meetings or elaborate contracts within the family. A simple call or handshake will get the job done" [G].*

*"All members of the family share the same vision and have done so since the creation of this company" [I].*

*"Mutual trust is the backbone of our firm. It's not just about business, it's about upholding the family name and legacy [...] As soon as we become less committed to the company, we*

can announce the decline of the family business!" [J].

"[...] we share the same vision and values towards the company, which is normally what should be done [...]" [L].

Criteria for the effectiveness of this type of organization include the development of human potential and family members' commitment.

"With the presence of our father as the leader, we are all committed to the business [...]" [E].

"We are fully committed because I hold sacred what we have created here, and my brother does too" [F].

"During the last recession in the COVID pandemic, we had to make tough decisions. But our commitment to our family and employees meant we took measures to ensure that no one was left behind" [H].

The results demonstrate that cultural conservatism in Moroccan family businesses is, first, characterized by a collective culture that promotes solidarity, internal coordination, and blurred boundaries between family and work.

"[...] the success and continuity of the company are based on general interests rather than individual ones" [A].

"Conversations at the dinner table often revolve around business decisions, and holidays become brainstorming sessions [...]" [D].

"[...] The language of business prevails even in the family context" [E].

"[...] When you're in a family group, if you don't prioritize the interests of the family above all else, your personal interest won't work. So, I have my father who was also in a family group with my grandfather and his brothers, some of these people may have put their personal interests before the family interest, which led to the demise of this business. But if they had stayed together, I think they could have gone further [...]" [I].

In addition, a culture of conformity is prevalent, leading to increased stability of relationships and a shared vision and values within family businesses. Moreover, the culture of conservation emphasizes the protection of identity, preservation of tradition, and continuity of family control. These cultural characteristics shape the strategic decisions and behaviours of family businesses, contributing to their unique competitive advantage.

"[...] because when you talk about our company, you talk about our family name. You

talk about the founder and his sons. When you touch the family, you touch the company, and vice versa. Our identity is untouchable; we must preserve it; we must maintain our reputation [...] especially succession planning. The key factor for the success of the latter is planning. We are in the third phase now [...] My father is starting to disengage [...] Ensuring the future of the successor by leaving them an inheritance, a company, so they don't need to look for a job, and ensuring them a significant income [...] To preserve, one must maintain control" [A].

"Yes, I even go towards the point where it must be organized during one's lifetime. Because today, even from a fiscal perspective, certain things that need to be optimized in this regard. And then, whether it is decisive or not, definitely yes, because what defines the family group is the fact that it passes from the patriarch to the direct descendants [...] My cousin, the direct descendant of the boss, is working precisely on this issue of succession and trying to optimize it" [B].

"I identify with every aspect of the company; my father wanted me to follow in his footsteps to ensure that I do my best to protect our identity [...] I remember the day when I wanted to start my own business, but my father didn't want me to. He told me that his businesses are mine too, and I must ensure the continuity of the family heritage [...] Keeping family control is very important [...] My father tells me that, albeit indirectly" [D].

"[...] We are a very close-knit family with an identity that we have built [...] My father loves perfection and what makes our reputation in the market" [H].

"It is imperative to be decisive for continuity. In order to address the degradation of heritage, it is necessary to establish a connection between the company and the next generation, and try to align their vision as closely as possible with that of the firm. Otherwise, in the event of the father death, the heirs will proceed with the sale of the assets in order to pursue their own projects" [K].

The findings show that culturally conservative family businesses have several constants (tradition, values...) that act as filters for strategic initiatives and shape them towards sustainability. However, while tradition has the advantage of avoiding risky strategic manoeuvres, it also leads to rigidity and a risk aversion that can drive it towards immobility and maintaining the *status quo*. The weight of tradition is one of the most important characteristics of culturally conserva-

tive organizations.

*"[...] throughout all of it from the beginning, I haven't had to change our way, because it suits me and suits others as well" [C].*

*"Now we are trying to replicate the same thing because when we opened the new entities, we copied the same model that my father established" [D].*

*"It's hard for us to change, but when it is accepted, we adapt to it because we have the same vision [...]" [F].*

*"I haven't had to change our way, because it suits me and suits the others" [G].*

*"Preserving customs, beliefs, and norms is essential for establishing social harmony within the company since it is a family business, and especially because it is the grandfather's legacy" [L].*

Family businesses in Morocco, as in many other cultures, often rely on personal networks - "L'maâref", trust - "Tiqa", intention - "Niyyah", benediction - "Baraka", reputation - "S'umaâ", historicity - "Q'dim", and contentment - "Qanaâ". Additionally, we found a notable adherence to familial hierarchies within religiously conservative family firms, which often emphasize respect for elders and traditional family roles, whereas a more egalitarian or merit-based hierarchy may prevail in non-conservative settings.

*"Yes, my father wants me to have the same traditional values as him when it comes to business [...]" [D].*

*"Our vision is collectively shared among family members because we hold the same beliefs as the founder" [E].*

*"My father believes in Baraka, he always tells me to have Niya in business and to maintain good relationships, to have L'kelma. He is very religious and believes that tradition should be upheld" [G].*

Our findings also reveal a pronounced community-oriented ethos in family firms that follow the Islamic ethical framework. They show a great sense of duty towards charitable endeavours, contrasting with a potentially stronger focus on profit maximization seen in less conservative contexts.

*"The boss is a great patron, he always gives Sadaqa, sends employees on Umrah, gives sheep to employees during Eid al-Adha, and always welcomes everyone [...] During the COVID-19 pandemic, he offered the family group hotels to the regional authorities for medical use" [B].*

*"We made donations for the municipality and the mayor appreciated it [...] We've worked with a number of children's associations and doctors for the approximate caravans in the Atlas Mountains" [H].*

In terms of financial practices, we found that conservative family firms align with religious prohibitions, such as the avoidance of interest - "Riba", marking a clear divergence from the conventional financial practices embraced in non-conservative settings. In addition, conflict resolution in conservative family firms, as per our findings, often leans towards religious or community structures, diverging from the possibly more formalized legal and business structures employed in less conservative contexts.

*"We have a tradition of not engaging in usury (Riba). The fundamental idea is self-financing because the core business has generated significant added value, enabling it to maintain a substantial cash reserve. We are aware that debt offers various financial advantages, but because we do not require it, we prioritize self-financing. The owner justifies this by stating that available funds should first be exhausted before considering other means" [B].*

*"Personally, I have a communication problem with my father, but the behaviour within the family is different from that in a professional setting" [D].*

*"Purely self-financing. We don't take on debt. My father doesn't like Riba" [G].*

*"[...] Self-financing is the best way to keep a company out of debt" [J].*

Our results also show that conservative family firms use generosity in their discourse (e.g., L'kheir, Laâchour, Sadaka, Eid gifts) to enhance their reputation.

*"[...] The boss is a great benefactor; he always gives Sadaka, chooses employees to offer them a trip to do El Omera, and provides sheep to the employees for the Eid Al Adha. Unlike rigid structures, the boss welcomes everyone" [B].*

*"[...] We give Laâchour every year; it's essential, everyone does it here because it exists in our religion" [G].*

*"You handle it between you and God, while as far as we are concerned, we've done a lot of l'kheir. [...] We have collaborated with children's associations and doctors. We made donations to the municipality. It also allows us to hire people and support families, which is very important. We've gained both financially*



and socially” [H].

“Our family name is the same as the company name, so [...] Preserving customs, beliefs, and norms are essential for establishing our reputation and social harmony within the company, as it is a family business and, above all, it is the legacy of the grandfather” [L].

According to our findings, cultural value systems also have the potential to foster collectivism. Collectivism places importance on conforming to social norms, whereas individualism encourages autonomy and independence. Furthermore, we found two subtypes of conservatism: horizontal and vertical. In cultures with horizontal collectivism, group members are considered equals, whereas vertical collectivism is more socially conservative as it emphasizes social hierarchies. The findings highlighted this dichotomy, with some cases exhibiting horizontal conservatism, characterized by an egalitarian approach where family members view each other as equals with shared responsibilities, and others manifesting vertical conservatism, where there is a clear emphasis on social hierarchies, authority, and defined roles within the family.

“Our way of organizing is more traditional than experimental, which means they have nothing to do with it [...] It’s like a father in the family, the members of the family don’t ask him what he’s doing [...]” [B].

“My father, when he wants to decide on something crucial, he doesn’t include anyone in the decision because he has over 30 years’ experience. [...] He sees things that we can’t see in business. He has his own system with employees and partners [...]” [D].

“Yes, all decisions are taken in consultation with all employees, including family members. We share information with each other and study the different scenarios (opportunities, risks [...]) before making any decisions, and we do this in working meetings” [J].

“Yes, major decisions are always made in collaboration with my son. As far as the details are concerned, there’s no point wasting time on everyone doing their own thing. If there’s a problem, we can discuss it afterwards [...]” [K].

Moreover, collectivism, like other forms of social conservatism, fosters a heightened preference for internal groups. For example, collectivism fosters heightened reciprocation among individuals within a group while exhibiting increased differentiation and bias towards members within the group compared with those outside the group.

“[...] There are standards, apart from cost, delivery and payment times, quality and availability, there are friendly or inter-family relationships. For example, we have a family in the same area and we prefer if we want to buy [...] We take the family one. It might even be a bit more expensive, but we’ll take the family one” [A].

“[...] Yes, standards of competence of quality of deadlines, but for my father, he chooses someone just because he’s known him for 25 or 30 years [...]” [C].

“Our network is part of the family [...] even our main supplier is my mother’s family from Agadir, because they give us more lead times and facilities [...]” [G].

According to the participants, cultural conservatism was interpreted as a rigid commitment to particular sets of values, which they connected to religious conservatism in some cases. Religious conservatism involves dedicated loyalty to a particular Islamic perspective, encompassing adherence to religious texts, doctrines, and rituals. For example, in the second case (B), since its inauguration, the founder and president of the family group has decided that their hotels will not serve alcoholic products to customers because they are not *halal* according to the religion. Conservative religious leaders see the development path of their companies as both natural and divine, with their corporate culture drawing heavily from Islamic religious precepts. Lastly, the protection of identity and conformity were the only variables common to all interviewees. They naturally result from the leaders’ profiles and their involvement in family businesses—they firmly believe in traditional values and often have a sense of nationalism.

“It is in times of crisis where our values have proven effective with collaborators, clients, suppliers [...] we have helped our partners and vice versa” [A].

“Islamic tradition is a source of pride, [...]” [C].

“Our values are deeply rooted in our family Moroccan traditions [...] Everyone, from my grandfather to my youngest cousin, believes in it” [L].

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Collectivism

This conservative culture promotes collectivism, conformity, preservation, and shared beliefs. As highlighted by Gersick et al. (1997) in their literature review, members of the owning family

have a particular interest in the business because it is part of their collective heritage, and often represents one of the family's main assets (Bauer, 1993). Family members work together to ensure the success of the business, as their heritage depends on it. Research on altruism (Schulze et al., 2003) emphasizes the prevalence of a common family interest, with family members concerned about making decisions in the best interest of the family.

Collectivism encompasses the entire network of the business and is characterized by the interdependence of many actors, whether they are from different generations, internal or external to the family, due to the existence of a collective heritage.

Our results demonstrate that collectivism explains the solidarity of conservative family businesses during times of crisis. The influence of conservative family businesses is therefore distinguished by a set of aspects shared among family members. Let us further explore this link on the basis of the results presented in the previous section. According to these results, the collectivism of the conservative family is reflected in three statements. First (a) A collective commitment in which family members tend to be more involved in internal social networks and more engaged in the reproduction of behavioural patterns (habits), and less exposed to stimulating changes or exciting challenges (Glenn, 1974). Second (b) The importance of collective interest. It implies, among other things, the dedication to the group interest at the expense of individual interest, even if collective decisions go against what individuals prefer (Schwartz, 1994). Third (c) The boundaries between family and work. At the family level, conservatism is reflected in the collective culture that results in blurred boundaries between family and professional life. Nordqvist and Melin (2001) discussed the importance of this interaction process. Furthermore, family members in the business have the opportunity to interact outside their workplace, within the framework of family life. Interactions continue in other spaces and times: the boundaries between work and family are unclear. According to Chick and Dow (2005, p. 366), boundaries around and within the social or economic system are changeable. This posture results in effective internal coordination, which is supported by a strong network of reciprocal exchanges between family members and with external and internal stakeholders. At the theoretical level, Lansberg (1983) examined how conservative family businesses provide a high level of tacit coordination and control, and Ye et al. (2020) found that the success rate of internal coordination is indeed higher. Therefore, collective culture leads to better internal coordination

because it is based on mutual trust.

**Proposition 1.** *Conservative family businesses are characterized by a collective culture that promotes solidarity, internal coordination, and blurred boundaries between family and work.*

## 5.2. Conformity

The existence of shared members within both the family and the collective of the business suggests that the learning that takes place within the family permeates into the business as it is conceived and applied by the family leaders. By strongly contributing to the development of behaviour and thought patterns of its members, the family has a direct impact on shaping the vision of the business. To remain active members, it can be reasonably assumed that there is a mimetic or normative influence. This refers to a certain culture of conformity.

According to the findings of our study, it was observed that a culture of conformity is linked to increased stability of relationships, which is essential for establishing strong social bonds within the family business. The specificity of the family can influence this stability in two ways: the stability of intrafamily relationships independent of the business and the maintenance of ownership and power within the family (dynasty). The first aspect pertains to the family as an institution. According to Kellerhals (1987), the family's role is to endure across generations by maintaining social bonds, which are reinforced by the existence of family norms that recurrently and stably shape the behaviour of family members (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1991). The stability of family social capital is perpetuated across generations through shared values, norms, and established trust within familial networks. This inheritance leads to continuity in the relational dynamics of family businesses over time. This is reflected in the following three statements. First (a) shared vision. The vision is probably specific and collectively shared among family members because they hold the same beliefs. For example, conservatives are not easily receptive to change, but when it is introduced effectively through the shared vision of family members, it is then accepted. Second (b) Shared values. Conservative family businesses are distinguished by their commitment to and respect for traditional values. Several studies have confirmed the importance of traditional values in these types of enterprises (Labari, 2011; Madoui, 2005; Mahmoud-Jouini & Mignon, 2010). According to Dyer (1988), culture and values play a central role in determining a company's competitive position. Indeed, family conservatism entails preserving "traditional" family values to combat

their decline. Conservative businesses generally share common values and strive to preserve those that are most sacred and intangible to replicate their future performance. Third, (c) Model reproduction: As Giddens (1998, p. 40) wrote, “A major criterion continually reappears to distinguish conservatism: the conservative view society as inevitably hierarchical.” In fact, our cases reveal a significant commonality: a tendency to rationalize existing institutions, especially those that uphold hierarchical authority. Family firms seem to favour individuals who can seamlessly align with such authority structures. Within this context, “mutual adjustment” plays a pivotal role, serving as a subtle yet powerful facilitator of business model reproduction. It is a process of informal coordination, deeply rooted in the family’s interpersonal relationships and historical practices, where individuals consciously embody the firm’s ethos.

**Proposition 2.** *The existence of shared members within the family and business collective suggests a culture of conformity, leading to increased stability of relationships and a shared vision and values in family businesses.*

### 5.3. Conservation

A culture inclined towards maintaining the *status quo* is associated with a culture of conservation. Our findings demonstrate that the desire for conservation is reflected in three themes: (a) protection of identity, (b), preservation of tradition (c) and the continuity of family control.

The family firm’s recognizable identity characterizes its conservative nature. Cultural conservatism is reflected here through the protection of identity, even though this identity may be perceived differently. In our cases, a strong identification with the company often leads to a preference for family members in leadership roles and ownership, thereby implicitly discouraging the inclusion of non-family members. In addition, a patronymic image is manifested through a certain reputation management aimed at preserving the family’s image in business affairs. Moreover, the image of the founder correlates with that of the company (Allali, 2008; Ibáñez et al., 2022). Researchers have found a direct impact of the family name on the reputation of the family firm (Astrachan et al., 2014; Kashmiri & Mahajan, 2010; Santiago et al., 2019). Yesil and Kaya (2013) argue that the culture of an organization is a blend of ideals, rites, rituals, and stories, each of which forms the distinctive character of an organization and builds its managerial reputation.

According to Hirschleifer and Thakor (1992), when businesses are driven by the desire to maintain a certain reputation, this can lead to an overly

cautious approach. This often results in choosing projects with lower risk profiles. For them, conservatism is therefore the result of the management’s desire to preserve its reputation. Family involvement in the management of the company has a positive impact on its reputation and strengthens the trust of the family members. Another common characteristic of the studied family firms is their public commitment to social responsibility. Many of them engage in the communities where they operate and are often reluctant to lay off employees, whom they consider to be part of the company (Aragon-Amonarriz & Iturrioz, 2020; Fitzgerald & Muske, 2016). This sense of social responsibility can also extend to their clients, suppliers, and society as a whole. The second conservation aspect of family firms is tradition. The conservative family firm remains deeply rooted in a certain tradition, which is reflected in accumulated experience, know-how, culture, and values specific to this type of enterprise that acts as a constant ensuring its longevity. Indeed, the traditions that conservatives promote and maintain must meet independent criteria. First, they must carry the weight of a successful history. Second, they must engage in the loyalty of other family members, in the profound sense of shaping their idea of who they are and should be. Lastly, they must designate something enduring, something that survives and gives meaning to the resulting actions. Family firms in our study, therefore, operate by avoiding family disputes, following customs and religious beliefs, and respecting group norms. The final aspect of the culture of conservation is the continuity of family control over the business. In conservative firms, the need for conservation is reflected in the desire to preserve and pass on the company and cultural heritage to future generations. Harris et al. (1994) observed that conservative family firms exhibit certain rigidities regarding paradigm shifts because, first and foremost, they prioritize internal succession.

**Proposition 3.** *The culture of maintaining the status quo in family businesses reflects a culture of conservation, characterized by the protection of identity, maintenance of tradition, and continuity of family control, as well as the preservation and transmission of business and cultural heritage to future generations.*

Moving towards our conclusion, we have explored how collectivism, conformity, and conservation shape the cultural conservatism in Moroccan family businesses. Next, we will synthesize these insights, examining their broader impact and future perspectives.

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore cultural conservatism in Moroccan family businesses and provide a nuanced understanding of strategic behaviours and organizational dynamics intrinsic to this unique context.

Our results show that cultural conservatism, contrary to popular portrayals, is not a rigid construct. Instead, it emerges as a dynamic and adaptive force, deeply rooted in a collective culture that emphasizes solidarity, internal coordination, and a seamless blend of family and professional realms. Our findings also underscore the importance of tradition preservation alongside the need for adaptation. This balance provides family firms with a distinct competitive position based on stability, shared visions, and values.

From a practical perspective, our research holds significance because of the need to increase the understanding of cultural conservatism among family business leaders and its potential implications for business growth. Furthermore, the insights we have generated can assist these managers in evaluating and adapting their cultural conservatism, enabling them to make more informed choices, particularly about innovation and risk management.

From an international perspective, recognizing these behavioural differences is essential. As businesses increasingly engage in international collaborations, understanding these cultural nuances can enhance the effectiveness of international partnerships by preventing potential misunderstandings and fostering mutual respect. By highlighting these insights, this paper hopes to serve as a bridge, facilitating a more inclusive global discourse on family businesses that celebrates diversity and recognizes the strength inherent in varied cultural contexts.

There are several limitations to our study. First, the paper does not explore the potential influence of the number of family members on the firm's value systems. Second, the study is limited to analysing Moroccan companies, so their results might not be generalizable to companies from other countries. Third, this study treats family firms as a homogeneous category instead of considering the differences that exist between various types of family firms.

This article serves as the foundation for various research extensions. To offer a more comprehensive understanding of cultural conservatism's influence on family businesses worldwide, it is essential to quantitatively validate these findings, conduct cross-cultural studies, and investigate the impact of other stakeholders.

## Author contribution statement

The authors contributed equally to the work.

## Conflict of interest statement

None.

## Ethical statement

The authors confirm that data collection for the research was conducted anonymously and there was not possibility of identifying the participants.

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