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CONTRIBUTIONS OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL NORMS TO PROJECTS SUCCESS WITHIN THE REAL ESTATE FAMILY BUSINESS IN CHINA

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Received 18 October 2024; accepted 25 February 2025, published 30 March 2025

Abstract. The research question of how could project managers make the Chinese real estate family business projects more sustainable and successful under specific cultural and social norms, is anchored in five-factor groups: the role of cultural and social norms in entrepreneurship; the value-added of an effective project; family business characteristics across different economies; peculiarities of real estate firms, and the growing economic and entrepreneurship power of China. As a pillar of China's economy, the real estate family enterprises are typical project-based enterprises. Driven by the purpose of understanding the views and experiences of project managers in a specific context of cultural and social norms and providing project management improvement recommendations (based on the Chinese real estate family businesses experience), the literature review led to a conceptual model of the role of cultural and social norms on Chinese real estate family business project success. The qualitative analysis, based on the semi-structured experts' interviews, helped verify the conceptual model. The theoretical framework conditions were tested through different angles, such as generation gap, educational background, professional experiences, and nature of the environment (family versus non-family).

Keywords: project success; family business; real estate industry; cultural and social norms; innovation; effectiveness

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Laužikas, M., Miliūtė, A., Liu, L. 2025. Contributions of cultural and social norms to projects success within the real estate family business in China. *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues*, 12(3), 270-285. <http://doi.org/10.9770/z7373676874>

JEL Classifications: L16, L21, L85, M14, M16

1. Introduction

Chinese real estate family companies have gone through multiple development stages, and many failed to grow sustainably due to insufficient support received by family business project managers under specific cultural and social norms, accompanied by the fusion between intergenerational inheritance and innovation. The routes of research on the link between project management and culture could be traced back to the seventies or eighties. Some scholars view culture from a trans-spatial perspective, while others understand culture from a trans-temporal perspective (Kresnawidiansyah et al., 2023; Agit et al., 2024; Pahuja et al., 2024). Such a multi-faceted interpretation opened many opportunities for research related to the culture in family business. The division of ownership, corporate functions, and other family characteristics are influenced by specific cultures. Family business projects in China are deeply influenced by the traditional Chinese culture, while social norms play a significant role in Chinese real estate family business projects.

The Chinese family businesses have rapidly evolved over the last decades, providing a strong impetus to China's economic development. According to Wu and Qi (2020), maintaining inheritance is often considered a prerequisite for the sustainable development of family enterprises, while enhancing innovation capabilities is an engine for the longevity of family enterprises. Given that most real estate family businesses are typical

project-led enterprises (Produção et al., 2022), the project's success or failure is impacted by the effectiveness of both project management/ leadership quality and innovation processes (Wang et al., 2024b).

In parallel with the evolution of technology, the workplace of modern organisations is evolving (Arefief et al. 2023; Siejca, 2023); representatives of different generations with their specific characteristics and values face different challenges, while project managers in family businesses need to reach higher economic and social value-added under specific cultural and social norms, reshaping social standards for appropriate and inappropriate behaviours, along with individual and organisational behaviour (Lauzikas & Miliute, 2020). In 2003, Wenquan et al. conducted a cross-cultural study on social norms of the citizens of China, the United States, and Japan, which divided social norms into four basic dimensions: adjusting external relations, preventing conflicts, expressing the central values, and sharing gains and costs.

Over the last years, many scholars (Laužikas & Mačiukaitė-Žvinienė, 2023) linked cultural and social norms to both business sustainability and entrepreneurship opportunities, while the attitude towards business behaviour emerged as a specific cultural environment impacting thoughts of diverse stakeholders, as well as contributing to the entrepreneurship dynamics, public health, social inclusion, citizens'/consumers' needs, etc. (East et al., 2019),

Given the advancement of modern technology, diverse factors (such as the combination of different generations' characteristics - trans-temporal culture, enhancing living conditions, and implementing a well-developed healthcare system) allow people to work beyond their traditional retirement age. Thus, the Chinese real estate family businesses (CREFB) often possess representatives of several generations working together and adapting to evolving cultural and social norms (Wang et al., 2024). Moreover, managers need to acknowledge each generation's expectations, motivation criteria, attitudes, behaviour patterns, and communication styles while acting according to these characteristics and reaching the synergy effects (Gilsing et al., 2022). In today's changing business environment, project management emphasises equal collaboration among employees, while the traditional Chinese culture emphasises hierarchy. Therefore, the project management function should be anchored on information transparency, efficient risk mitigation, and conflict management: the CSNs differences between the East and West should be taken into account and integrated into a strategy by Chinese real estate family businesses (CREFB) while preventing potential project conflicts (Liu, 2018; Liu, 2020).

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the real estate industry, which is based on projects in general, has been continuously contributing to China's economic growth (Zhang, 2022). The economic growth of the real estate industry relied mainly on residents' behaviour in purchasing their real estate, thanks to the increasing purchase power. Relying on the cross-country comparisons, it is found that the higher the level of economic development, the lower the homeownership rate is. However, China's urban housing market shows the coexistence of high house prices and homeownership rates (Lin et al., 2019), which contradicts the findings of cross-country comparisons.

In the long run, traditional cultural values play a dominant role, while the traditional culture is increasingly influencing the home-buying behaviour of individuals. Taking the individual and family factors into account, it is common for Chinese parents to use their own savings to buy a house for their children, which is the manifestation of intergenerational income transfer in the context of 'altruistic' family retirement (Deng et al., 2019, Lai, 2024). From the government's perspective, the government can use the law and regulations of external control norms to structure policies related to homeownership (Wang et al., 2019), such as homeownership incentives, to influence residents' homeownership purchasing behaviour. CSNs influence Chinese residents' home-buying behaviour, individual and family factors, housing factors, real estate development factors, psychological factors, and institutional/ policy factors, which is in line with scholars' findings that culture has a strong influence on home-buying behaviour (Lai, 2024).

CREFB with family characteristics encounter different obstacles at different growth stages, such as the scale of capital, the organisational structure, profitability, etc. (Yang, 2024), calling for the absorption of external social capital, openness and bigger social trust among stakeholders that are not direct representatives of family culture, as well as integration of external talents in organisational operations. Thus, improving the market profitability

means establishing extensive corporate alliances based on the effective integration of external financial and human capital.

2. Characteristics of family business in China

The dimension of family business is purposefully integrated within the research question because it directly links the culture with business sustainability. Although different scholars reveal a vast spectrum of criteria defining a family business, they agree with the family-centred ownership model: a family business is a business where a family holds the ownership and makes key management decisions. According to the GEM (2024/2025) methodology, the family business concept incorporates four dimensions (ownership, management, employment, and collaboration as a stakeholder), while the level of involvement depends on how many dimensions the chosen career of an individual matches. All in all, a family business could be defined as a family-owned entity, where a family possesses a substantial part of ownership, which is run by the second or further generation, and where the board of directors or executive leadership includes at least one or more family members. Notwithstanding that family businesses are numerous in China, they often face a lack of sustainability, lower technological intensity, and constraints jeopardising sustainable development, smooth transformation, and innovation (Ghafoor et al., 2024).

Such a perspective suggests that family firms in China are currently facing the dual challenges of intergenerational succession and innovation transformation. Achieving effective inheritance is a prerequisite for the sustainable development of family firms while enhancing innovation capabilities is a necessary precondition for the longevity of family firms (Wu & Qi, 2020). In parallel, innovation is largely perceived as both a driver for long-term survival (Shams et al., 2019) and a challenge in terms of the sustainability of family firms (Hernández-Perlines, 2024). Due to the family planning policy, the structure and scale of Chinese families changed. The number of children has decreased, while the younger generation's perception of family has evolved. It is challenging to reach a common understanding of family-based business development among different generations; thus, innovation plays a significant role in the intergenerational development of family businesses (Sanchez-Famoso et al., 2019, Li et al., 2022).

First-generation family firms are considered more entrepreneurial than multi-generational ones. In contrast, how to turn the “rich second generation” into the “entrepreneurial second generation” became a hot topic in Chinese family businesses. This phenomenon indicates that maintaining young generations' innovation and entrepreneurial spirit in family business is both a challenge and an approach to promoting sustainable development across generations. Considering that corporate governance is the main axis of modern enterprises, this strategic goal should be accompanied by the efficient allocation of innovation resources and, consequently, a significant effect on technological innovation (Hernández-Perlines et al., 2024).

Referring to the incompatibility of family goals with the economic goals of a firm, the open innovation system may employ external human resources to influence non-financial goals of the family firm's governance. In contrast, a family firm may secure the achievement of non-financial goals while reshaping its strategic priorities (Wang et al., 2024b). Overall, organisational openness and innovation play an important role in the sustainable development of family businesses. Open innovation in family business is a novel topic; thus, the theoretical model of family business characteristics (see Figure 1) should be further examined while taking into consideration new emerging trends, such as open innovation, new collaboration trends, and the combination of the economic and social value-added.

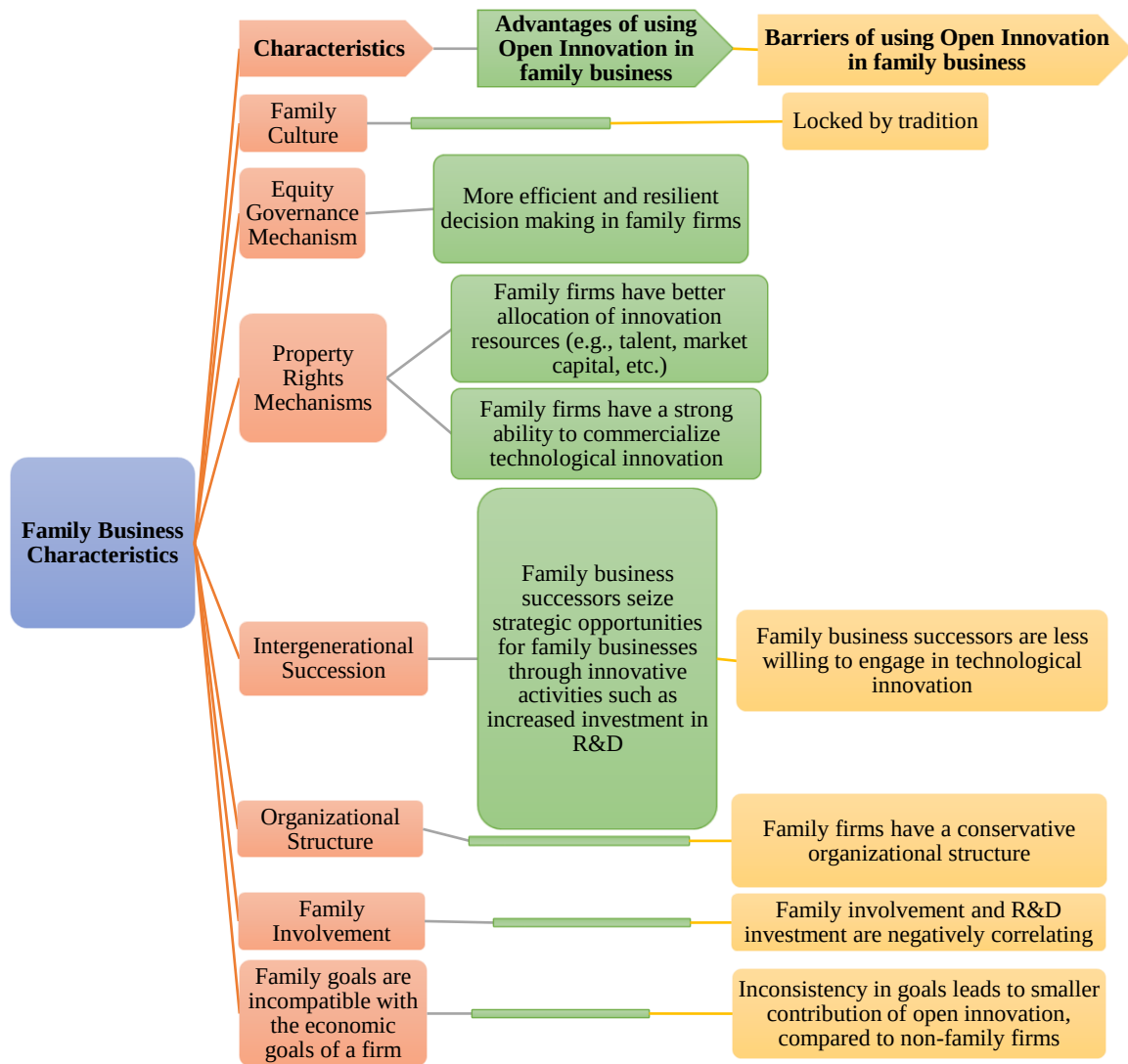


Figure 1. Family business characteristics in China: barriers and advantages of using open innovation

Source: prepared by the paper authors, based on Li et al., 2022; Ghafoor et al., 2024; Calabrò et al., 2019; Letonja and Duh, 2016; Vrontis et al., 2016; Del Vecchio et al., 2019

Given that project success is a key outcome for project practitioners seeking effective commercialisation (along with the economic and social value-added), project managers often monitor and emphasise diverse project activities. The project management approach establishes mechanisms for making decisions around specific tasks across diverse functional departments; thus, diverse effects of cultural and social norms might impact the performance of project managers. To further examine the relationship between project success in Chinese family real estate business and specific cultural and social norms, it is essential to back the theoretical implications of project managers' insights.

3. Methodology: conceptualisation of the role of cultural and social norms

To better understand the effects of cultural and social norms, numerous relevant research methodologies are compared (Table 1), and the conceptual research model is developed while incorporating the main impacts of cultural and social norms on real estate project success in family businesses in China. The developed conceptual model concludes framework conditions as a mosaic of fractions (effects of cultural and social norms), and it is tested via semi-structured qualitative expert interviews.

The adapted methodological framework model is based on project managers' perceptions of the contributions of cultural and social norms to the competitive advantages of Chinese real estate family business (CREFB). Given the global role of the Chinese economy in terms of the advanced science and technology, examining how Chinese project managers perceive and unlock the contributions of CSNs to project success in CREFB is of significant scientific value to family-based real estate companies across the globe.

The idea of a quantitative survey was abandoned in the present research because of high employee mobility in a competitive real estate industry in China and the difficulty of finding hundreds of CREFB project managers. Such limitations could have jeopardised the research representativeness while diminishing the reliability of the data. Moreover, many project success aspects in Chinese real estate family business are often kept among a narrow group of decision-makers, which calls for strict expert selection criteria. After the ingenious literature review, the diverse methodologies used in similar studies were compared, justifying the suitability of the qualitative research method to answer the research question.

Table 1. Comparison of research methodologies

<i>Author, year</i>	<i>Research topic</i>	<i>Research results</i>	<i>Methodology and industry</i>
The present study	The role of cultural and social norms on real estate family business projects (China)	The role of cultural and social norms on project success; X and Y generations' angles	Qualitative research Semi-structured interviews Via Skype and Wechat online
Masoumeh et al., 2018	Impacts of trust, commitment, and openness on research project performance: case study of a research institute	Trust, openness, and commitment are essential for effective teamwork, shared understanding, commitment.	Semi-structured interviews Non-family business
Ghafoor et al., 2024	To investigate the behaviour of CEOs in family firms within innovation and R&D investment in Chinese family firms.	CEOs with moderate managerial ability show willingness to invest in innovative projects; without ability--- willingness declines.	Chinese A-share listed family firms Ordinary least squares regression Non-family and family CEOs
Chinyamurindi, 2017	Information management in projects: South African construction firms	Conceptual model of project success via information management	Semi-structured interviews Non-family construction business in South Africa
Pasquale et al., 2019	Open innovation in family firms: empirical evidence on internal and external knowledge flows	Family firms execute open innovation strategies, manage knowledge, and create value across generations.	Online survey of 208 Apulian entrepreneurs Research on open innovation in family firms
Guo & Lu, 2023	Competitiveness via data-driven principal component analysis: performance, potential, and process.	Other scholars could use the applied methodology to examine competitiveness across different industries.	A case study of Chinese international construction companies Non-family business
Wang et al., 2020	Research on critical success factors for main contracting model of overseas housing construction projects	Establishes the selection model of project management mode and the success factors system of project management model	Secondary data with the case study Real estate project in Malaysia Family business
Arsić, 2018	Key factors of project success in family small and medium-sized companies	Identification of success factors of projects in family companies	Secondary data Serbia and the EU Family Business

Source: prepared by paper authors, based on Guo & Lu, 2023; Arsić, 2018; Chinyamurindi, 2017; Masoumeh et al., 2018; Pasquale et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020; Ghafoor et al., 2024

The comparison of research methodologies revealed that only a few studies have examined the impacts of CSNs on the success of family business projects: the scholars are more inclined to use qualitative interviews with experts, presenting specific viewpoints regarding the research object, along with respondents' valuable experience. Although this type of method does not gather knowledge in numerical terms, collecting the data in the form of thoughts, perceptions, insights, and experience enables in-depth conceptualisation and more pertinent recommendations, where various fractals of the systematic/holistic view are explained in conceptual models, maps, theories, and schemes. Such methods help researchers gain deeper information from a specific

target group of participants who are involved in similar activities and have sufficient expertise and experience with regard to the research question.

The conceptual framework model is anchored on 4 pillars that could be described as research objectives: defining project success and cultural social norms from the theory and project practitioner perspectives; conceptualising and modelling the main effects of cultural and social norms on project success among Chinese real estate family firms; interpreting project managers-experts' perceptions with regards to possible ways to improve CSNs contributions to the project success in Chinese real estate family business; outlining implications and recommendations regarding real estate family business (or any other projects-based industry) improvement in a specific cultural and social context.

Following the ethical (sample exceeds the logical demand/necessity) and scientific (data might be unsaturated) semi-structured expert interview criteria of sample size, it is intended to collect the data until the point of saturation: the sample size reads ten representatives of the leading CREFB with not less than 5 years of project management experience, representing different cities in China, and additional experience outside the family. Most of them completed their studies at home university, except PE 10 expert (with educational background from outside the region), which in the present study is coded as a referee: it helps mitigate the biased approach of our research and check the credibility of answers. Four experts belonged to the X generation, and six belonged to the Y generation (see Table 2 below). The research question, sample size and experts' selection criteria were derived from the literature review and pilot interviews with university professors – experts in the examined area. Confidentiality and privacy were respected via the coding system.

Table 2. Research interviewees

Interviewees	Generation	Education	Experience
Project expert 1 (PE1)	Gen X	College, China	18 years of working experience in a real estate company, more than 10 years as a project manager in a family firm
Project expert 2 (PE2)	Gen X	Bachelor, China	20 years of working experience in a real estate company (10 years in a state-owned enterprise and 10 years in a family business), more than 15 years as a project manager
Project expert 3 (PE3)	Gen Y	Bachelor, China	14 years of working experience in a real estate company and 8 years as a project manager in family business
Project expert 4 (PE4)	Gen Y	Bachelor, China	6 years of working experience in a real estate firm, and 3,5 years as a project manager in a family firm
Project expert 5 (PE5)	Gen X	Bachelor, China	16 years of working experience in a real estate company, and 9 years as a project manager in a family firm
Project expert 6 (PE6)	Gen X	Bachelor, China	16 years of working experience in a real estate company, and 8 years as a project manager in a family firm
Project expert 7 (PE7)	Gen Y	Bachelor, China	5 years of working experience in a real estate company, and 2,5 years as a project manager in a family firm
Project expert 8 (PE8)	Gen Y	Master's, China	6 years of working experience in a real estate company, and 5 years as a project manager in a family firm
Project expert 9 (PE9)	Gen Y	College, China	7,5 years of working experience in a real estate company, and 4,5 years as a project manager in a family firm
Project expert 10 (PE10)	Gen Y	PhD, Abroad	More than 15 years of working experience in a project team

Source: prepared by the authors of the present study

Thus, the present investigation was based on a qualitative database, consisting of the project management experiences of the ten selected CREFB project experts. Considering that project experts working in CREFB may present different interpretations of project success and CSNs and might differently assess the project success factors under specific cultural and social norms, the first four questions were designed to ascertain whether the interviewees met the selection criteria, set in this study. The fifth-tenth questions were designed to clarify project experts' perceptions of project success, CSNs, and project success factors, along with the role of cultural, social normative factors on CREFB project success. The last group of questions attempted to identify how respondents perceived and whether they were capable of improving CREFB project success in the context of certain cultural, social norms to validate the theoretical framework conditions.

The research problem is interpreted from different angles, such as generational differences, educational background, professional experience, family or non-family environment, etc. This makes the study applicable in any industry (based on projects) and might be useful for experts working in CREFB of different level of experience. The emphasis on how the project managers perceive and are capable of enhancing the Chinese real estate family business project performance is the main research axis, which leads to value-adding recommendations and future research perspectives within this holistic and multi-faceted topic.

To identify the effects of CSNs on success of real estate family business projects in China, it was important to diminish potential biases among family members and accord to the industry's context; thus, 9 project managers from outside the family environment with degree from home universities were selected, while one respondent was a representative of another country with her/his studies completed abroad. Such combination helped examine the Chinese real estate Family Businesses from a more in-depth, objective, and at the same time holistic perspective.

While scrutinising the peculiarities of a specific culture, the characteristics of different generations were addressed: four respondents were representatives of the X generation, and six of them belonged to the Y generation: the liaisons between the project success and cultural social norms in CREFB were tackled mainly from the perspective of X and Y generations, revealing diverse angels, behaviour and perception patterns that correspond to specific age categories, along with other important codes, such as educational background, professional experience, involvement/ engagement level in a family environment.

4. Research implications: towards more sustainable Chinese real estate family business projects

In line with diverging scholars' interpretations of project success, experts' insights were also diverse: eight different definitions of project success were provided by the respondents (see Figure 2). To distinguish the project success characteristics perceived by Gen X and Gen Y, the comparative analysis of the descriptions is illustrated via the web diagram.

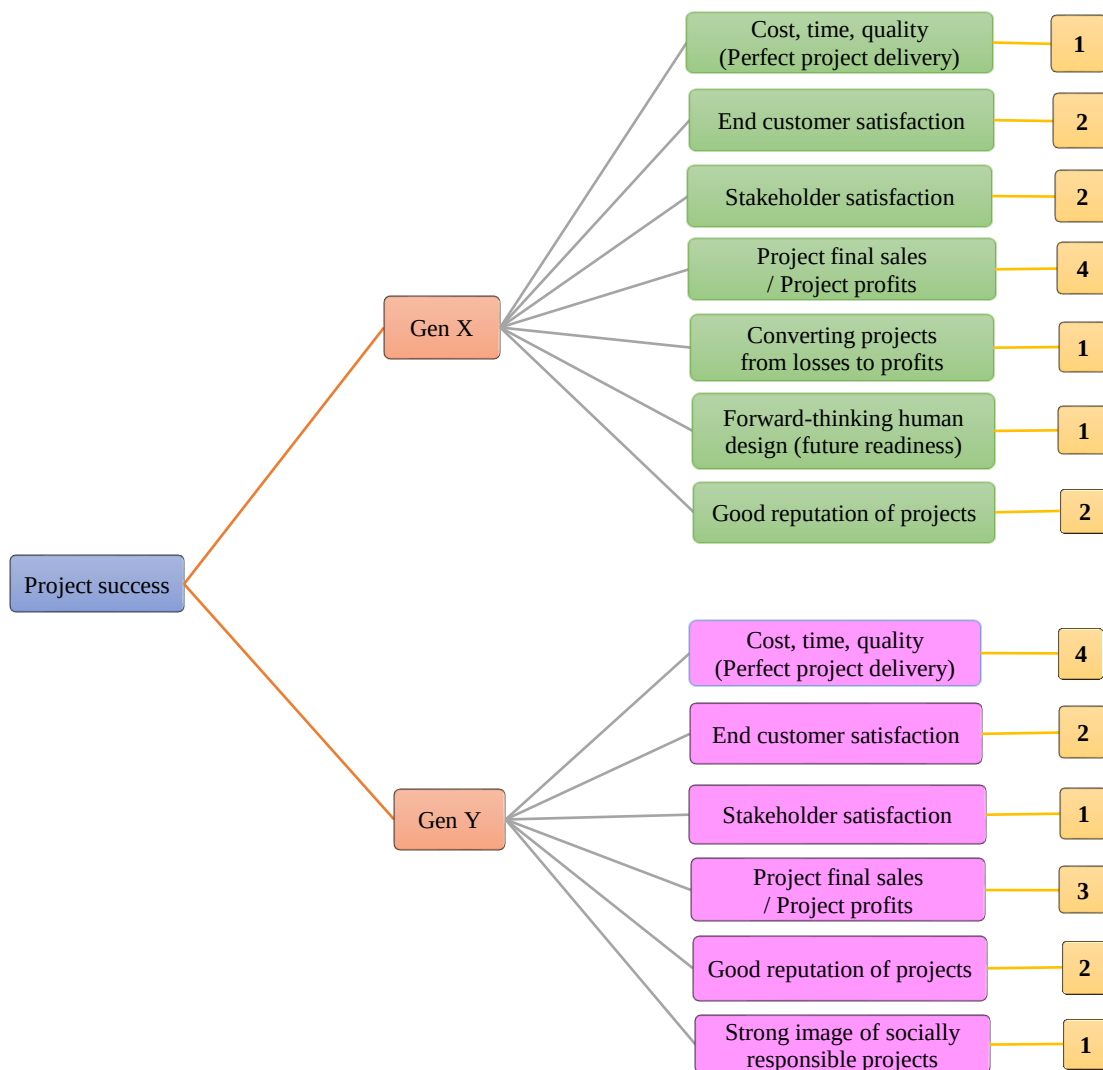


Figure 2. Comparison of project success definitions, X versus Y generations.

Source: developed by the authors of the present study

From the eight project success definitions illustrated above, five of them are mentioned by both Gen X and Gen Y. Having the five project success concepts mentioned by both Gen X and Gen Y analysed more ingeniously, it appears that they all emphasise the achievement of rather tangible improvement in terms of cost, time, and quality; focus on project delivery, end-customer and stakeholder satisfaction, project profit, and reputation. There some significant differences could be identified. For instance, only one representative of Gen X mentioned optimising project delivery as a project success criterion, compared to four of the Gen Y. Moreover, all the Gen X experts mentioned achieving project profit as a project success (compared to half of the Gen Ys). It is also worth noting that of the remaining three project success concepts, two were mentioned only by Gen X, i.e., turnaround and future readiness, while one was mentioned only by Gen Y, i.e., building a strong image of social responsibility.

To continue, Gen X's perception of project success is more inclined to project final sales, while Gen Ys believe that effective project delivery (cost, time, quality) is a more significant indicator of project success. Gen Y's definition of project success seems to be more short-term oriented. In terms of similarity, effective project delivery, end-customer and stakeholder satisfaction, project profit and reputation are the project success concepts that Gen X and Gen Y both emphasise.

The respondents' perception towards culture and social norms were ambiguous and inconsistent. Eight of the ten participants associated CSNs with the company's culture and five associated CSNs with nepotism. Based on experts' interviews, eight were perceived as the most influential on the success of CREFB projects (four of which were mentioned by both Gen X and Gen Y). Regarding the other four dimensions, Gen X and Gen Y representatives did not reach a consensus. All the Gen Xs linked cultural social norms with a corporate culture based on customer satisfaction, while only four Gen Ys mentioned this dimension. Three Gen Xs emphasised the importance of integrity and the role of interpersonal relations on project success, whereas only two Gen Ys did so. In contrast, Gen Y places more emphasis on the impact of technology and innovation culture on project success (compared to Gen X). Of the remaining four cultural social norms, three were mentioned only by the representatives of Gen Y, such as employee motivation, laws and regulations, organisational openness, social contribution, and social responsibility (see Figure 3).

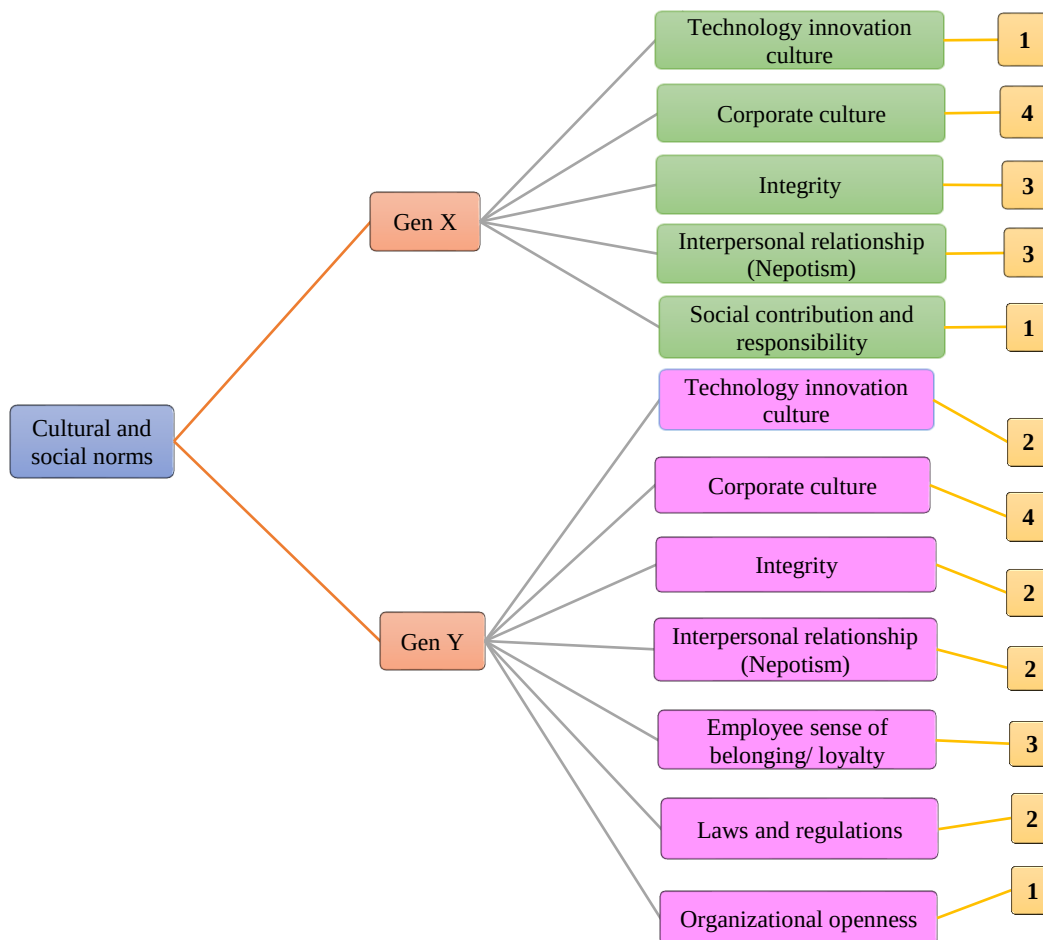


Figure 3. Perception of Cultural and social norms: comparison of X and Y generations.

Source: developed by the authors of the present study

All in all, Gen Xs believe that interpersonal relationships and integrity have a strong impact on project success, while Gen Y believes that cultural and social norms (such as technological innovation, employee loyalty, and laws/ regulations) are more conducive to project success. In terms of similarity, a corporate culture based on customer satisfaction is a cultural and social norm that Gen X and Gen Y jointly emphasise as conducive to achieving project success.

From the theoretical point of view, Z generation is an objective of the present research (for X and Y project managers, Z generation stakeholders are their future customers and clients); However, within the population

investigated, there were no cases of Z generation representatives in CREFB project managers registered. Moreover, the sustainability of real estate companies is affected by a key factor – housing demand. The Z generation, born after 1994, will be the main group of future home purchasers (some of them have already been customers). If X and Y generation project managers intend to succeed, they must focus on Z generation's mindset. As the PE1 mentioned: ‘forward-looking real estate project positioning and project design contribute to the success of a project, and future readiness is an important project success factor, as generations change rapidly’.

Within the next papers of the same series, it is crucial to address questions, such as what representatives of X and Y generations (presently active in real estate project management positions in China) should consider while preparing for the next decades, where Z generation is more powerful in all value creation, strategy development, consumerism, and innovation process commercialisation stages.

Based on five theoretical framework conditions, which substantiate the impacts of CSNs on project success, the present research draws attention to pertinent and value-adding implications of how real estate family firms in China should reshape their business models and strategies to be more sustainable and effective, considering a specific cultural-social context. The research results confirmed that despite the origin of educational background, project managers are more receptive to digital/software-based project management tools, and it is witnessed in terms of their practices or intentions to use project management software introduced in the market. Although only one interrogated project manager had international academic experience, all ten project managers indicated that they use modern project management software in their daily work and would be willing to try out new modern project management software if it was available in the market. This is related to the fact that eight out of ten experts had the first cycle degree completed, and their knowledge with respect to technology innovation culture enabled them to acknowledge the role of high technologies in the efficiency of their operations and corporate performance; therefore, they were more receptive to new technologies.

All the project managers with higher education backgrounds were highly receptive to the application of modern project management tools. This finding is also related to the role of higher education in resource management skills. It was confirmed that experts with higher education backgrounds can allocate and share resources more effectively and smoothly. Eight of ten respondents considered the knowledge and competencies acquired and developed at the university level or outside the family business sufficient to be a professional quality performer in family business projects. On the other hand, a few experts stated that only some university-related knowledge and competencies can be applied in a family business project because family values and philosophy must be considered while joining a family business in China.

Moreover, the diverse perceptions and attitudes towards knowledge and competencies suitable for a family environment make this factor of significant interest: eight respondents were more driven by the concrete, practical techniques and skills, while two experts emphasised both soft (value, culture, philosophy, etc.) and practical project-related competences (knowledge, techniques, skills etc.). In addition, it is significant to note that none of the experts notes resource sharing and allocation as critical for project success, which might be because they are coming from outside the family environment, with less delegation of authority with respect to resource allocation, or they have no sufficient experience abroad (which might diminish the awareness of effective resource sharing via the combination of internal and external resources).

The characteristics of different generations play a significant role in project success because of diverging risk management styles. The present research drew some interesting conclusions regarding the liaison between the average age of project team members and the conservatism of the risk management style. All ten respondents were consistent in their answers with respect to the willingness to be part of a new project that would lead to a more profitable outcome but with a probability of failure or risk. This might be due to their education being oriented to opportunity and challenge, using an effective risk management model. It is interesting to note that the interrogated experts (eight respondents) prefer not to quit a project team in case of enrolment in a large, complex, and unexpected project they might not complete on time. The contradiction of other experts might be related to their lower level of education and limited social responsibility within project teams. Moreover, it could also be related to the fact that an expert is not a family member; thus, does not consider himself/herself

responsible for the failure of a family project. Another expert outside the family admits that project members need to take risks and responsibility for every project they work on; However, they might quit a project team if they are not paid adequately or treated unfairly.

Notwithstanding that, one expert emphasises the role of strategic partnership in overcoming all minor disadvantages. All in all, experts with higher education seem to be more capable of taking risks and responsibilities than those with a somewhat lower educational level. When they encounter the same problems, those with higher education prefer to find solutions to mitigate risks, while those with lower education tend to avoid responsibilities.

The role of collaboration of team members with project managers was emphasised in the context of a specific hierarchy: the flatter the company's hierarchy, the more efficient the collaboration of team members is. This is related to a way of sharing experience, knowledge, and work progress, along with the working style, combined with the collaboration intensity among the team members and the strategic direction of their supervisors. All ten project managers were eager to share project progress experiences with their team members, partly thanks to a flat hierarchy in their organisations and the information transparency, which in parallel facilitated effective collaboration (it was accentuated, despite experts' education level and their connection to the project experience). For instance, a family member with limited project management experience agreed that there was a need to share information about work progress. At the same time, flat teams were considered a precondition for effective collaboration among team members.

In contrast, the experienced project managers admitted that their team members would make suggestions when they hesitated to make decisions. This might be related to project managers' high level of education: they all emphasised teamwork, knowledge sharing and suggestions. One expert mentioned that “a team cannot be successful, relying only on individual efforts; everyone should be given the right to voice their thoughts equally, and the adoption of reasonable advice is more likely to lead to a successful project”.

Project management experience is an essential but insufficient precondition for project management success in the real estate environment in China. The project managers from outside the family environment tend to be more efficient in communication among the team members, which might be related to the nepotistic nature of Chinese society and the specific human relations within the family environment, as emphasised by the experts. One respondent accentuated the dependence between the communication efficiency in family firms and a clear division of job functions and duties among the family members and project managers. If it is disorganised, the family members might consider themselves superior to their colleagues while not obeying the rules.

Management function separation in a family business is critical for project success because the unclear division of job functions among family members in a family firm can affect communication efficiency between family project managers and team members, directly affecting project success. One expert added – that keeping the decision-making power in one person's hands might endanger the strategic effectiveness: some family project managers might have knowledge and skills that do not match the requirements of their position, while communication with other team members (non-family experts) might be inefficient. However, this is rarely the case with the non-family project managers. This might be related to the lack of openness of family businesses while managing family resources (including human and information); a family project manager might also lack trust with other team members.

Having defined project success and cultural and social norms within the literature review, the Chinese real estate family business project managers added interesting new implications for project success under specific cultural and social norms (see Table 3 below). Although the experts' perception was not entirely in line with strategic project success factors/efficiency criteria emphasised by scholars, the research confirmed the role of cultural, social norms on family business project success via two framework conditions: the flatter the company's hierarchy, the more efficient the collaboration of team members with project managers; while the project managers coming from outside family might be more efficient in their communication with their team members.

Table 3. Summary of findings

	Gen X	Gen Y
Project success definition	● Converting projects from losses to profits. ● Forward-thinking human design (future readiness)	● Strong image of socially responsible projects
	● Cost, time, quality (Perfect project delivery) ● End-customer satisfaction ● Stakeholder satisfaction ● Project final sales/Project profits ● Good reputation of projects	
Cultural social norms which improve project success	● Social contribution and responsibility	● Employee sense of belonging/loyalty ● Law and regulations ● Organisational openness
	● Technology innovation culture ● Corporate culture ● Integrity ● Interpersonal relationship and nepotism	
Verify theoretical framework from different angles		
The role of cultural, social norms in family business project success	The flatter the company’s hierarchy, the more efficient the collaboration of team members with project managers. Project managers from outside families will communicate more efficiently with team members.	

Source: prepared by the authors of the present study

The recommendations from four perspective angles (as shown in Figure 4 below) are prepared to help project managers effectively/ efficiently operate under specific cultural and social norms as well as unlock the potential of family project success. The recommendations are prepared based on the innovation approach of the business model.

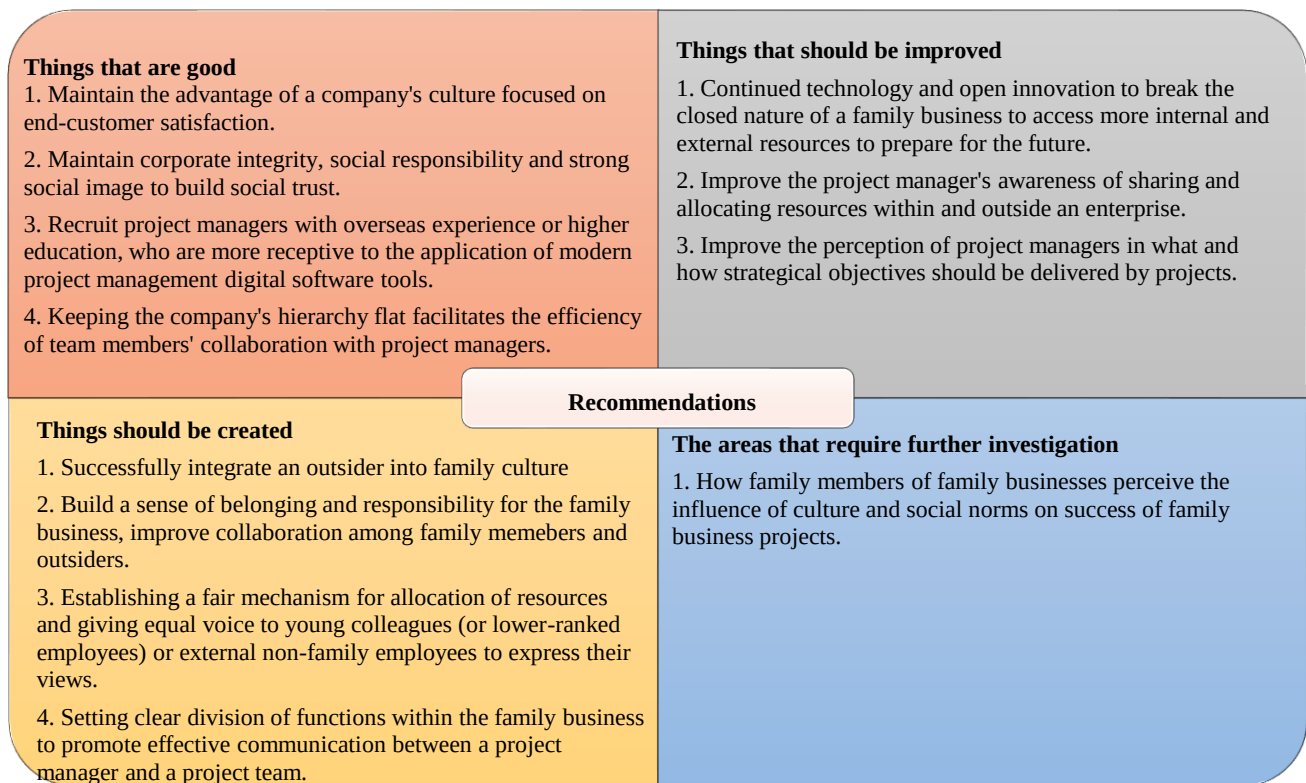


Figure 4. Recommendations for project managers

Source: developed by the authors of the present study

The present research methodology was centred on qualitative research approach, because of the strict respondents' selection criteria in terms of their job position and experience, as well as due to high employee turnover in Chinese real estate family firms. The combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods might be considered to approach more respondents from 'Z' generation. This study serves as a guide for project managers in real estate family business (or any other industry, based on the project management approach) to unlock the potential for project success in the context of cultural and social norms, and in parallel unlock the potential of the topic for future research covering other industries and economies.

Conclusions

The present study led to the established conceptual framework of the effects of cultural and social norms on Chinese real estate family business project success, which via semi-structured expert interview supported eight definitions of project success as well as eight cultural social norms that the respondents perceived to be most influential in commercialising of CREFB projects; five theoretical framework conditions were tested of which two were in line with actual interview results.

Nowadays, human capital of a family firm is composed of Gen X, Gen Y, and even Gen Z; thus, it could be challenging to align the project management efficiency criteria at the organisational level with diverse characteristics of a specific generation and its representatives' individual characteristics (such as, international studying experience, education level, coming outside or being part of the family environment, etc.) under specific cultural and social norms. The study results are critical for a family business with a geocentric approach to its culture: to be open and capable to create an environment for project managers outside family; allow easily enter an organisation as well as understand and fit the family values and philosophy. The family business experts extensively emphasise the culture, the ethical norms, and rules that are above family interests, making family business transparent outside and inside. The more open the family is, the easier to unleash the potential of the employees coming from outside the family environment, while working on organisational and team project success.

To reach the project success in family business, it is important to successfully integrate the non-family employees into the family culture. Coping with the gap between the family culture and the values of the employees coming from outside, family businesses should take the following suggestions into account. Firstly, a clear communication guide must be created while integrating the modern technology; secondly, clear ethical norms should be set for everyone (each family and non-family member); thirdly, social trust should be reached through leadership. Moreover, hiring employees with the experience abroad or high educational level (both national and foreign) might help family businesses become more open to accept and implement new technologies necessary for real estate family business success in China.

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