

Birth Order, Personality, and Innovation in Family Business

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Left to Right: Santo (b. 1944), Donatella (b. 1955), and Gianni Versace (b. 1946)¹.

¹ <http://www.greatitalians.com/Images/Versace.jpg>, accessed November 2, 2009.

Purpose of Research

To provide a theoretical contribution to the field of entrepreneurship by exploring family firm innovativeness through a biosocial lens. The main argument is that the birth order (BO) of family business founders helps shape their personality which, in turn, affects their degree of innovation proneness as reflected in their goals.

Overarching Research Question

How does a family business founder's BO affect his or her propensity to champion new ideas for the firm?

Why does this Research Warrant Practitioners' Attention?

1. Little is known about the processes by which personality traits affect entrepreneurial goals (Rauch & Frese, 2007)
2. Review of literature in family business demonstrates a lack of research on family firms and innovation (Litz & Kleysen, 2001)

Literature

• BO and Big Five personality in *Born to Rebel* (Sulloway, 1996; see also Healey & Ellis, 2007):

1. Firstborn status correlates positively with conscientiousness, extraversion, and neuroticism
2. Firstborn status correlates negatively with agreeableness and openness to experience

Literature (Cont.)

- Research in marketing on BO and adoption of product innovations supports Sulloway's findings (Saad, Gill, & Nataraajan, 2005)
- Laterborns are more likely to embrace radical scientific ideas than firstborns (Sulloway, 1996)
- Competition between siblings stems, in part, from dominance hierarchies and differential parental investment (Saad, 2007; Sulloway, 2001)
- In *Homo sapiens*, BO "is a proxy for disparities in age, physical size, and status, all of which contribute to personality" (Sulloway, 2001, p. 39)
- Family Climate Scale (Björnberg & Nicholson, 2007) has been developed recently for use in family business contexts (pp. 233-234):
 1. Family process (communication, adaptability)
 2. Family intergenerational style (authority, attention)
 3. Family cohesion (emotional, cognitive)

Theoretical Frameworks

1. Parent-offspring conflict (Trivers, 1974)
 - Conflict arises from differences in parental investment to a given offspring
2. Niche partitioning (Darwin, 1859)
 - 'Principle of divergence' is suggestive of a role specialization among siblings within a family

Proposed Conceptual Model

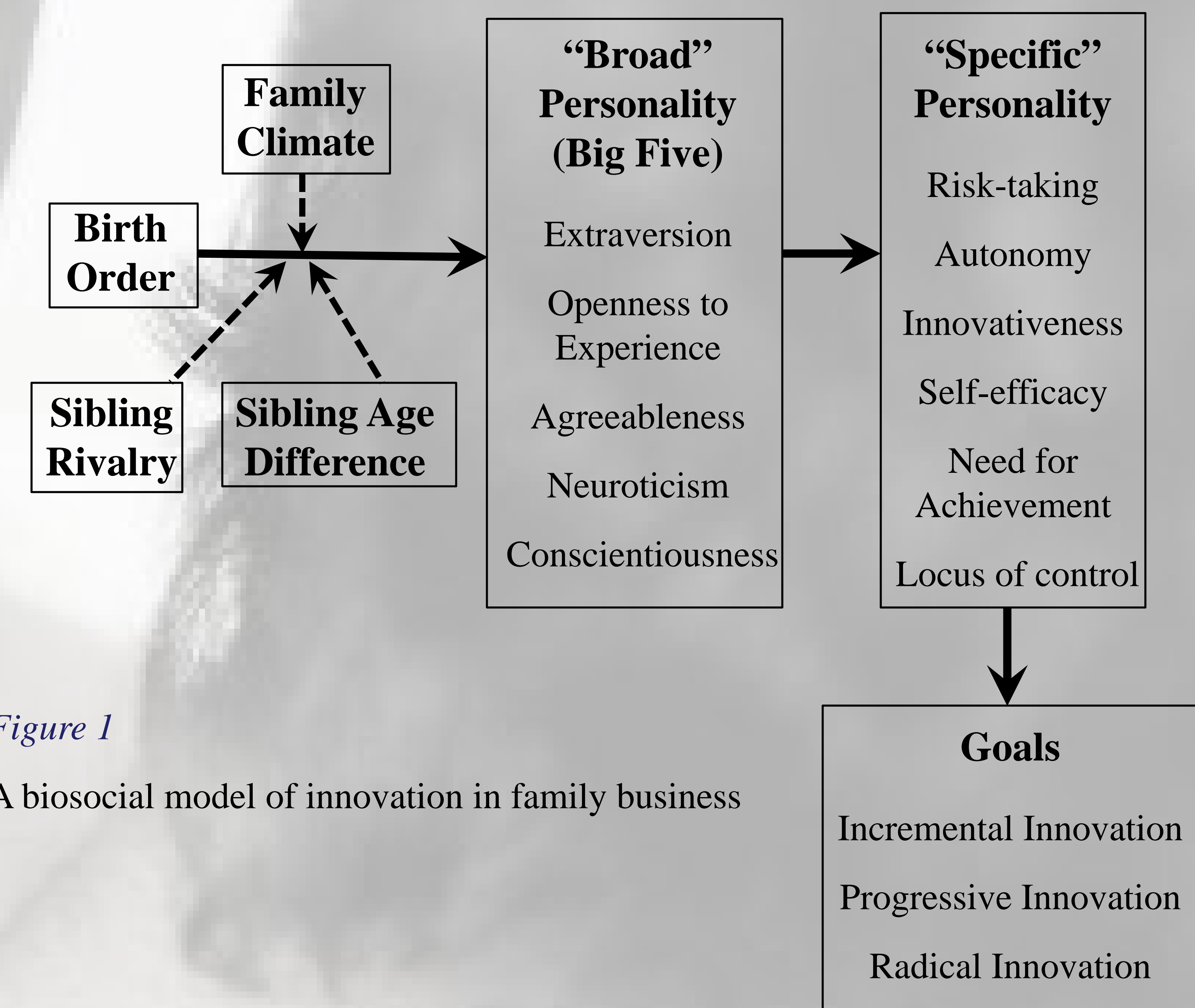


Figure 1

A biosocial model of innovation in family business

Potential Contributions to Research and Practice of Family Business

1. Complements work of Rauch and Frese (2007; 2009) on revival of psychological traits in entrepreneurship
2. Unites disparate disciplines, and positions family business within broader social sciences (Dyer & Sánchez, 1998)
3. Helps to appreciate the strengths that each family business member possesses since all innovations are deemed to be important (Bergfeld & Weber, in press)