

**FFI VIRTUAL STUDY GROUP IBEROAMERICA
10th Anniversary**

**WEAVING THE NETWORKS OF KNOWLEDGE: HOW THE LARGEST NETWORK OF
FAMILY BUSINESS CHAIRS IN THE WORLD WAS BUILT IN SPAIN**

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On the tenth anniversary of the Family Firm Institute Iberoamérica Virtual Study Group, we want to highlight an outstanding milestone in the field of family business studies in Iberoamérica throughout this decade—the Network of Family Business Chairs in Spain. This network constitutes a fundamental pillar for the dissemination of knowledge and values of family businesses. For instance, a number of entrepreneurs who attended events organized by the Family Business Chairs, have become aware of their status as business families, surpassing their own prior perceptions as simple entrepreneurs.

The Network, founded in 1998, was created at the initiative of the Instituto de la Empresa Familiar, an association that brings together one hundred leading family businesses in Spain.¹ This national business association is complemented by the eighteen regional family business associations, which work in a coordinated manner with the Institute, although they are independent entities. In 1998, the Family Business Institute created the first Family Business Chair at the University of Barcelona, and since then, a Network of Chairs that covers the entire Spanish territory has been developed, with forty-one chairs in forty-two universities, both state and private universities. In 2008, the Network of Family Business Chairs was awarded the third Universidad Empresa Award² for the best academic collaboration project between universities and companies.

The Family Business Institute in Spain (IEF) coordinates an important network of family business centers, financed by Santander Bank. This network, the largest in the world in this discipline, consists of thirty-nine centers in which 200 university professors interact with an average of 2,000 students per year throughout Spain.

The Family Business Chairs are created through a collaboration of the Family Business Institute, a corresponding regional association, a university, and a sponsor. In this way, the Chair does not belong to a single institution, but is supported by all four partners, which provide complementary resources from the business and university spheres, in addition to financing. The activities of the chairs focus on teaching, research, and knowledge transfer.

¹ Instituto de la Empresa Familiar. (n.d.). *Quienes somos*. <https://www.iefamiliar.com/quienes-somos/>

² The Universidad Empresa Awards are presented by the Red de Fundaciones Universidad Empresa (RedFUE), a national network of the Fundaciones Universidad Empresa in every public university in Spain. <https://redfue.es/>

Regarding teaching, the chairs develop specific courses on family business, which in some cases may be included in the bachelor's or master's programs of their universities. It is common for these courses to be taught jointly by family entrepreneurs, consultants, and specialists in the topic. As support for teaching in these courses, the Family Business Institute has edited three handbooks,³ and an updated fourth edition is to be published shortly.

In collaboration with the Family Business Institute, the Network of Chairs has developed several joint research projects, including the first in-depth study on Family Businesses in Spain, carried out using data from more than 117,000 companies, and an extensive survey of CEOs of 529 family businesses, with the aim of addressing the lack of reliable research data on family businesses. Based on the results of this study,⁴ we can provide figures on the particular issues and experiences of family business in Spain with sufficient statistical reliability. The data confirm that family businesses are the majority in Spain (88.8% of all companies), and provide most of private employment (66.7%) and wealth creation (57.1% of the GVA of the private sector). This pioneering study has been translated into English, due to the interest in other countries to establish a methodology that approaches the study of family business with sufficient rigor and statistical reliability. In addition, this study has resulted in two subsequent studies: "Factors of Competitiveness and Financial Analysis of the Family Business"⁵ and an upcoming one that will be published by the end of 2022, about the contribution of family businesses to the Spanish economy.

In addition to these joint studies, each Chair has its own lines of research, which have resulted in a significant number of doctoral theses, as well as the publication of numerous articles in academic journals and communications at international conferences. According to the study⁶ published by the Spanish Academy of Family Enterprise Researchers (SAFER), Spain is the fourth country in the world in volume of publications on family businesses in indexed scientific journals, with ninety works published by Spanish authors in 2020, only by behind the United States (128), Italy (108), and the United Kingdom (93).

³ The most recent is Corona, J. (Ed.) (2017). *Empresa familiar: Análisis estratégico*. Instituto de la Empresa Familiar, Ontier, TFAB. Editorial Deusto.

⁴ Corona, J. (2015). *La empresa familiar en España (2015)*. Instituto de la Empresa Familiar, Red de Cátedras de Empresa Familiar de España, Santander. <https://www.iefamiliar.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/La-Empresa-Familiar-en-Espan%CC%83a-2015.pdf>

⁵ Instituto de la Empresa Familiar. (2018). *Factores de competitividad y analisis financiero en la empresa familiar*. https://www.iefamiliar.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Factores_de_competitividad-5Mb.pdf

⁶ Casillas, J.C., Iturralde, T. & Lorenzo, D. (December 2021). La investigación en empresa familiar en España. Spanish Academy of Family Enterprise Researchers (SAFER). <https://www.safer-academy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Investigacion-Safer-2021.pdf>

The Family Business Chairs also have an important role in disseminating and transferring knowledge about family businesses. They organize seminars, conferences, events, and even plays about family businesses, in which members of business families, managers, and experts in different roles in the family businesses are invited as speakers. These activities are a way of bringing the particularities of the family business closer to people interested in the topics, without losing the rigor of the content.

On the Family Business Institute side, the Network of Chairs is coordinated by a team led by academic adviser Juan Corona. The cohesion of the Network is maintained with two face-to-face meetings a year, one of which is held during the annual celebration of the National Family Business Congress, which is the largest business meeting in Spain. In addition to these meetings of the Network as a whole, the Chairs hold frequent exchanges and regional meetings, as in the case of Andalusia.

According to John Ward, the Spanish Network is a model to follow, with Spain being the country that has invested the most in training and research in family businesses.⁷ This initiative of Spanish business families grouped in the Family Business Institute will celebrate its first 25 years in 2023. Over the years, the expansion of the Network has reached all corners of the national territory, creating a unique structure in the world, which continues to spread knowledge about family businesses. Moreover, many of the Chairs have continued to sustain their initial teams and directors, applying the idea of generational renewal to maintain the activities of the Chairs and adapt them to different and changing times.

Those entrepreneurs who once attended a play, seminar, or conference thanks to the Family Business Chairs have become aware of their status as family entrepreneurs, and they now understand, for example, the benefits of creating a family charter with the help of specialized family business consultants. In addition, they share their experience with other entrepreneurs going through similar situations, so that they can confront their problems with the certainty that they are not alone and can trust family business specialists to help them face the future of their family and their company with confidence and hope.

⁷ Instituto De La Empresa Familiar (2009). *X Aniversario de la Red de Cátedras de Empresa Familiar (1998-2008)*. p. 11. <https://www.iefamiliar.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/6838ad558a176b1f9b1c51932d976b568d7638e4.pdf>