



Stress and Stress-Management Mechanisms in a Family Business

Marija-Paula Sorić

Department of Tourism, Aspira University of Applied Sciences, Split, Croatia
Email: marija.paula.soric@aspira.hr

How to cite this paper: Sorić, M.-P. (2026) Stress and Stress-Management Mechanisms in a Family Business. *Open Access Library Journal*, 13: e14773.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1114773>

Received: December 18, 2025

Accepted: February 1, 2026

Published: February 4, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Open Access Library Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Family businesses constitute complex organizational systems in which stress manifests uniquely due to the overlap of family and business subsystems. Stress affects not only the well-being of family members but also operational efficiency and the long-term sustainability of the enterprise. This study aimed to investigate the sources of stress and the strategies employed to manage it within a small family-owned business operating in the field of antenna and internet systems. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with two participants, the founder (father) and a newly integrated family member (son), providing qualitative insights into their experiences during the integration process. The analysis identified role conflicts, high workload, and the overlap of family and professional responsibilities as primary sources of stress. To address these pressures, the founder implemented deliberate mechanisms, including the gradual introduction of the new family member to business operations, clear separation of professional and family roles, continuous open communication, and strategic delegation of tasks. These strategies effectively reduced tension, fostered trust, and maintained both a supportive working environment and healthy family relationships. The findings demonstrate that, although stress is inherent in family businesses, it can be constructively managed to support business growth, enhance family cohesion, and ensure the continuity and sustainability of the enterprise. This study highlights that recognizing and addressing stress through structured strategies is essential for the long-term success of family-owned businesses.

Subject Areas

Management, Organizational Studies, Business Psychology

Keywords

Stress, Family Business, New Members in Business

1. Introduction

Workplace stress is an inherent aspect of organizational functioning, yet its manifestation in family businesses differs markedly from that in non-family enterprises due to the constant overlap between familial relationships and managerial responsibilities [1]. This structural interdependence makes it difficult to fully separate personal and business interests, requiring management to balance operational demands with the complexities of family dynamics. The resulting stressors often emerge from disagreements regarding managerial decisions, role allocation, or the integration of family members into the business, all of which can affect both organizational performance and family cohesion. Stress commonly arises when the demands placed on an individual exceed their perceived ability to cope [2], influencing behaviour, decision-making, and interpersonal relations within the enterprise. Understanding these mechanisms is therefore essential for developing strategies that reduce stress and promote both organizational sustainability and healthy family relationships.

Family businesses, by their nature, combine emotional and professional dimensions, making the study of stress particularly relevant for both academic inquiry and practical management. This paper aims to investigate the sources of stress in a small family-owned business and to examine the strategies employed by the founder to manage these pressures. By focusing on the experiences of a father and his newly integrated son, the study provides qualitative insights into the challenges of balancing family involvement with professional responsibilities, highlighting the importance of structured integration, role delineation, and effective communication for both business continuity and family harmony.

2. Stress in Business Operations

Stress arises when there is an imbalance between the demands placed on an individual and their ability to cope with them. This represents only one of the many definitions of stress. Due to its increasingly broad usage, a single definition cannot encompass all aspects of the concept. Stress affects not only personal life but also employees and their organizational relationships [3].

Strenks defines occupational stress as a condition that occurs “when individuals attempt to cope with tasks, responsibilities, or other forms of pressure associated with their work, but encounter difficulties, tension, anxiety, and concern in the process” [4]. Stress and employee productivity are closely interrelated concepts. The primary goal of any organization is to maximize productivity while minimizing stress levels. Considering that employees spend a substantial portion of their day—and consequently, their lives—at the workplace, where they are frequently exposed to stress, it is understandable that stress directly affects their psychological and physical well-being [5].

Attention to stress in the workplace is crucial, particularly in situations where stressful conditions are more frequent or the work environment is highly demanding. It is essential for organizations to identify critical points of stress and address

them through appropriate management strategies. Examples of stress-inducing situations in the workplace include unclear task instructions, excessive workloads, noise, poor communication with colleagues or supervisors, and psychological harassment [6].

2.1. Burn-Out in Business Operations

The burn-out syndrome, also referred to as occupational exhaustion, is a disorder that develops from prolonged exposure to stressful situations. It is most prevalent in helping professions such as healthcare workers, emergency responders, nurses, firefighters, and police officers [7]. Burn-out syndrome can lead to various psychological, emotional, and physical disorders, often manifesting as emotional emptiness, loss of energy, and diminished sense of purpose in one's work. Organizational leaders and managers must be aware of the factors contributing to the development of this syndrome and implement preventive measures. Creating a positive work environment characterized by flexibility and effective organization of tasks is critical to managing work demands successfully. Burn-out, often referred to as a "disease of modern times," tends to increase with longer working hours, highlighting the need for early identification of symptoms and proper interventions to prevent a decline in professional performance [8].

Various case studies have examined burn-out syndrome, providing valuable insights. For instance, longitudinal research on job satisfaction and burn-out in national samples indicates that over the years, role conflicts and ambiguity, particularly in family-run businesses, contribute to employee dissatisfaction [9]. Stressors in the workplace are defined as any physical, psychological, or social stimuli that induce a state of stress [10]. These stressors can be categorized into several groups: physical stressors, such as exposure to extreme noise, temperature variations, electrical hazards, or natural disasters; biological stressors, including sleep deprivation, infections, and severe pain; and psychological stressors, which arise from everyday life demands, interpersonal conflicts at home or work, and lack of time or financial resources [11].

2.2. Stress in Family Business Operation

Family businesses represent a distinct organizational form characterized by the simultaneous interaction of family and business systems. They are commonly defined as enterprises in which ownership, control, and key managerial roles are held by members of a single family connected through close kinship ties. Despite differences in definitional approaches, academic literature largely agrees that family ownership, decision-making control, and active family involvement constitute the core dimensions of family enterprises [9]. While this structure enables long-term orientation, strong commitment, and efficient resource mobilization, it also introduces organizational complexity. Stress in family businesses primarily arises from the overlap of family relationships and business responsibilities, particularly in relation to role ambiguity, succession planning, and strategic decision-making.

The effective management of these tensions requires clear role differentiation, formal governance mechanisms, and structured communication in order to sustain both family cohesion and organizational performance.

2.3. Integration of New Family Members into Family Businesses

Integrating new family members into a family business represents a complex interplay between the emotional dynamics of the family subsystem and the rational goals of the business subsystem. Successful integration should prioritize performance, talent, and commitment over emotional attachment, as unmanaged emotions can disrupt both family and business balance. Early exposure of younger family members to the business fosters organizational socialization, reducing future stress and facilitating competence development. According to research, social barriers are the most significant obstacle in this process, followed by process-related and technical barriers, highlighting the importance of mentorship, willingness to learn, and structured education [3]. The integration process can be divided into several stages: pre-business phase, where potential successors observe and learn about the business; introductory phase, involving initial experience without formal employment; functional introduction, where they perform simpler tasks and gain practical experience; functional phase, with full-time responsibilities and managerial skill development; advanced functional phase, where they assume decision-making authority; early succession phase, identifying the successor and gradually transferring responsibilities; and mature succession phase, marking the official transfer of ownership. Throughout these phases, stress and conflicts may arise, necessitating clear goals, defined hierarchy, professional competence, and flexibility to maintain both business performance and family harmony. As shown in **Figure 1**, stress levels gradually decreased during the integration process.

Stages of Integrating a New Family Member into the Family Business



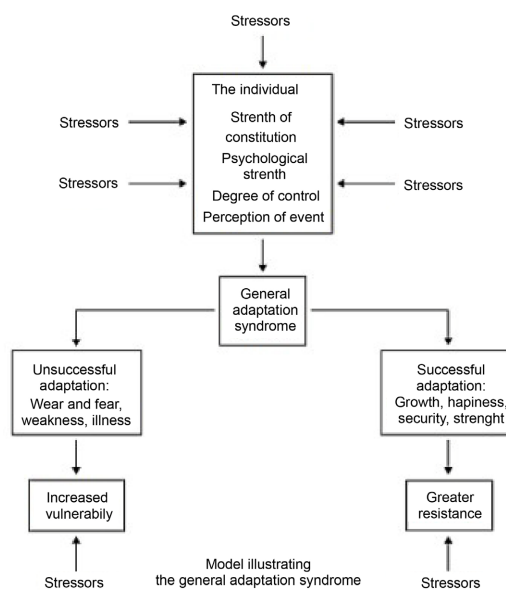
Figure 1. Family Business Integration Stages. Source: Author's elaboration based on: Sorić, M. P. (2024). STRES I MECHANIZMI UPRAVLJANJA STRESOM: STUDIJA SLUČAJA OBITELJSKOG PODUZEĆA (Završni rad). Ekonomski fakultet u Splitu, Split, Croatia.

These stressors are further compounded by emotional involvement, intergenerational expectations, and limited opportunities for career progression outside

the family framework, contributing to feelings of stagnation and role strain. Effective stress management in family businesses, therefore, requires a comprehensive and participatory approach, grounded in continuous education, mutual support, teamwork, and the development of a learning-oriented organisational culture, where shared responsibility and a supportive family environment can serve as protective factors against work-related stress [5].

3. Sources of Stress

Workplace stressors are particularly pronounced in family-owned enterprises due to the unique overlap of family and business systems, which intensifies both traditional and emerging sources of occupational stress [12]. Although stressors such as workload, role conflict, and role ambiguity have long been recognised, their manifestations in family businesses are continually evolving as work demands become more complex and boundaries between professional and personal roles increasingly blurred [13]. Quantitative workload in family enterprises is often reflected in extended working hours, multiple role responsibilities, and heightened pressure to ensure business continuity, frequently without clearly defined control mechanisms or adequate resources [14]. At the same time, qualitative workload has become more prominent, encompassing increased cognitive demands, continuous skill development, adaptation to new technologies, and sustained expectations of professionalism, all of which may be particularly challenging in smaller, family-run organisational structures [15]. **Figure 2** illustrates the workflow distribution between father and son after role delegation.



Izvor: Stranks, J. (2005.): *Stress at Work, Managment and Prevention*, London, str.21

Figure 2. Depiction of stress adaptation. Source: Author's elaboration based on: Sorić, M. P. (2024). *STRES I MEHANIZMI UPRAVLJANJA STRESOM: STUDIJA SLUČAJA OBITELJSKOG PODUZEĆA* (Završni rad). Ekonomski fakultet u Splitu, Split, Croatia.

4. Research Methodology

Stress Management Methodology

For the purposes of this study, an in-depth interview was conducted with two participants, the founder (father) and a new family member (son), of a small family-owned business operating in the field of antenna and internet systems. To ensure the confidentiality and privacy of sensitive business information, the company's name and identifying details have been intentionally omitted, as this data was provided solely for research purposes. The objective of the interview was to collect qualitative insights into the business's operations, growth, and development, as well as to facilitate comparisons with similar enterprises in the sector.

The methodology was designed to explore the evolution of a family business over time, with particular emphasis on the founder's experience of establishing the enterprise with initial family financial support, the integration of new family members, and the anticipated employment of non-family staff in the future. The primary focus was on the founder, who initially operated as the sole employee before deciding to involve another family member. Key aspects examined included decision-making processes, trust-building, client handover, and management of operational responsibilities.

Interview

The business under study commenced operations in 2006, leveraging the founder's prior professional experience and industry knowledge. Initial capital and material support were provided by family members to ensure a smooth start. Clients were gradually acquired through a combination of pre-existing professional relationships and local marketing strategies, highlighting the importance of reputation in the early stages of the enterprise.

The interview protocol was structured around several core themes, including family involvement, entrepreneurial motivation, the decision to incorporate new family members, and the long-term vision for the business. While the interview followed a formal structure with written responses to predefined questions, it also incorporated informal discussions that provided additional contextual understanding of the business environment. Participants were explicitly requested to provide accurate and candid answers to maximize the validity of the data collected. The interview revealed detailed insights into the founder's strategies for managing stress, including gradual integration of the son, clear delineation of roles, open communication, and strategic delegation of operational tasks. These measures were critical in minimizing stress and ensuring both family cohesion and business continuity [16].

This methodology allowed for an in-depth examination of family business dynamics, including mechanisms of stress management, succession planning, and strategic decision-making, without compromising confidentiality.

5. Results

The analysis of the interviews revealed several critical stress factors and corre-

sponding stress management mechanisms within the family business. Role conflicts were identified as a significant source of stress, as both the father and the son experienced overlapping responsibilities during the integration of the new family member, leading to temporary confusion in decision-making and task allocation. Additionally, the founder's initial management of all operational tasks alone generated high workload pressure, particularly during periods of client growth. Emotional involvement and family expectations occasionally influenced professional decisions, further increasing psychological pressure and highlighting the complex interaction between the family and business subsystems.

To address these stressors, the founder implemented a gradual integration strategy, initially assigning minor responsibilities to the son and progressively increasing engagement over time. This approach minimized stress and mitigated potential role conflicts. Furthermore, the clear delineation of professional roles from family relationships was emphasized, ensuring that personal disagreements did not interfere with business operations. Open communication and trust-building were maintained through regular discussions regarding business challenges and strategic decisions, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. Strategic planning and task delegation allowed the founder to distribute operational responsibilities effectively, reducing individual workload and enabling shared ownership of tasks. The combination of these mechanisms demonstrates that while stress is inherent in family businesses, it can be managed constructively to support growth and maintain business stability.

6. Conclusions

Managing stress within an organization is a complex and multifaceted process, with both positive and negative consequences. In family-owned businesses, stress manifests in unique ways due to the interaction of two intertwined subsystems: the family and the business. This interaction increases pressure on both the business owner and family members, creating potential for conflicts and elevated stress levels. The findings of this study indicate that deliberate strategies can mitigate stress and transform it into a constructive, positive influence.

The integration of new family members into the business was identified as a critical stage in stress generation and management. Gradual introduction, clear role delineation, open communication, and strategic delegation of responsibilities proved to be effective in reducing tension and ensuring smooth operational continuity. The father and son successfully managed workload pressures, minimized role conflicts, and maintained a clear distinction between family and professional spheres. These practices not only supported the well-being of family members but also contributed to the continued growth and sustainability of the business.

Ultimately, effective stress management in family businesses requires careful planning, mutual understanding, and ongoing dialogue between family members. By implementing these mechanisms, the enterprise can preserve its identity as a family-owned business while promoting professional development, operational

efficiency, and long-term organizational stability. This study highlights that constructive management of stress is integral to both family cohesion and business success, demonstrating that stress, when properly addressed, can serve as a catalyst for positive growth.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Aspira University of Applied Science, Split, Croatia for giving them funding for the publication of the paper.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the valuable insights gained from the in-depth interview, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. The research is based on a single family-owned business, which limits the generalizability of the findings [17]. While the qualitative data provide rich insights into decision-making, succession planning, and stress management, the experiences and practices of this specific enterprise may not fully represent other family businesses, particularly in different industries or regions [18]. The study relies heavily on self-reported information from the founder and a key family member, which introduces the possibility of subjective bias or selective recall [17]. Although participants were instructed to provide accurate and candid responses, the confidential nature of operational and financial information may have influenced the depth of disclosure. Additionally, the research primarily reflects the perspective of the founder, with limited input from other family members, employees, or external stakeholders, which could have offered a more comprehensive understanding of internal dynamics and potential conflicts [18].

Future research could address these limitations by incorporating multiple family businesses across diverse sectors and locations, which would enhance the representativeness of findings and allow for cross-case comparisons [19]. Longitudinal studies tracking family enterprises over time would provide deeper insight into the evolution of stress management practices, succession decisions, and strategic business development [20]. Including perspectives from non-family employees, clients, and other stakeholders could enrich the understanding of organizational dynamics and highlight the interaction between family and business subsystems. By expanding the scope of inquiry, future studies can contribute to the development of practical strategies and theoretical frameworks for managing family business operations, ensuring sustainable growth, and fostering resilience in complex business environments [16].

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Kružić, D. and Bulog, I. (2012) Obiteljska poduzeća: Životni ciklusi, nasljeđivanje i

- održivost. Split, 255-265.
- [2] Lučanin, D. (2014) Measures for the Prevention and Mitigation of Harmful Effects of Stress [Mjere prevencije i sprečavanja štetnih posljedica stresa]. *Sigurnost*, *56*, 223-234.
 - [3] Havelka, M. (2002) Health Psychology [Zdravstvena psihologija]. Naklada Slap, 88 p.
 - [4] Strenks, J. (2005) Stress at Work: Management and Prevention. Routledge, 16 p.
 - [5] Siefert, K., Jayarante, S. and Chess, W.A. (2006) Job Satisfaction, Burnout, and Turnover in Health Care Social Workers. *Health & Social Work*, *16*, 193-202.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/hsw/16.3.193>
 - [6] Tziner, A., Rabenu, E., Radomski, R. and Belkin, A. (2015) Work Stress and Turnover Intentions among Hospital Physicians: The Mediating Role of Burnout and Work Satisfaction. *Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *31*, 207-213.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rpto.2015.05.001>
 - [7] Kalauz, S. (2008) Burnout Syndrome among Nurses [Sindrom sagorijevanja na poslu kod medicinskih sestara]. In: *Book of Abstracts, 7th Congress of the Cardiology Society with International Participation*, Liječnički vjesnik, 120-121.
 - [8] Brennan, D. (2020) Burnout Symptoms & Signs.
<https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/burnout-symptoms-signs>
 - [9] Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W.B. and Leiter, M.P. (2001) Job Burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*, 397-422. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397>
 - [10] Taylor, S.E. (2015) Health Psychology. 9th Ed., McGraw-Hill Education, xviii, 430 p.
 - [11] Cooper, C.L. and Quick, J.C. (2017) The Handbook of Stress and Health: A Guide to Research and Practice. John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118993811>
 - [12] Kružić, D. (2004) Family Business [Obiteljski biznis]. RRIF, 132 p.
 - [13] Dewe, P.J., O'Driscoll, M.P. and Cooper, C.L. (2010) Coping with Work Stress: A Review and Critique. John Wiley & Sons Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470711712>
 - [14] Britvić, D. (2010) Family and Stress [Obitelj i stress]. *Medicina Fluminensis*, *46*, 267-272.
 - [15] West, M. (2005) Successful Business Operations—Secrets of Effective Team Management: How to Lead a Team to Innovation, Creativity, and Success [Uspješno poslovanje—Tajne uspješnog upravljanja timom: kako voditi tim do inovativnosti, kreativnosti i uspjeha]. Školska knjiga.
 - [16] Sorić, M.P. (2024) Stress and Stress-Management Mechanisms: A Case Study of a Family Business [Stres i mehanizmi upravljanja stresom: Studija slučaja obiteljskog poduzeća]. Ekonomski fakultet u Splitu.
 - [17] Verschuren, P. and Doorewaard, H. (2010) Designing a Research Project. 2nd Edition, Eleven International Publishing.
 - [18] De Massis, A. and Kotlar, J. (2014) The Case Study Method in Family Business Research: Guidelines for Qualitative Scholarship. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, *5*, 15-29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfbs.2014.01.007>
 - [19] Amato, S., Basco, R. and Lattanzi, N. (2020) Contextualizing Employment Outcomes in Family Business Research: Current Findings and Future Research Avenues. *Management Review Quarterly*, *72*, 531-604.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-021-00226-9>
 - [20] Schaufeli, W.B., Leiter, M.P. and Maslach, C. (2009) Burnout: 35 Years of Research and Practice. *Career Development International*, *14*, 204-220.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430910966406>