

# Exploring the Role of Agile Operant Resources in Facilitation of Strategic Orientation: Case of Family-Owned Businesses in Pakistan

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No one can deny the pertinent role of resources in each era. Over time, its usefulness enhances which facilitates firm sustainability in today's volatile business world. To the best of the author's knowledge, no study has been done specifically in the context of Family-Owned Businesses (FOBs) in Pakistan regarding the Owner's possessed agile operant resources. The purpose of this study is to explore the hidden agile operant resources of the family business owners which facilitate FOBs in strategic orientation. This study resides on a relativistic school of thought based on the interpretive paradigm. It is used as an exemplary nature of research. Purposive sampling is used for data collection conducted interviews through open-ended questionnaires and observation of family owners. This study is based on the abductive research approach along with Gioia methodology has been used to develop broader themes for discussion. This research paper provides sound conceptual insights on the strategic orientation of family firms through the pertinent role of learning & observational resources, agile entrepreneurial phronesis & agile sensing skills. The authors proposed a conceptual model for shedding light on the pertinent role of agile operant resource supports to facilitate the strategic orientation of Family-Owned Businesses.

**Key words:** *Strategic Orientation, Abduction, Family Firms, Pakistan, Gioia Methodology*



## 1 Introduction

*How does a Family Owned Business (FOBs) in Pakistan can gain sustainable firm performance in Today's volatile & challenging global world?*

To answer this question, numerous research scholars have applied different organizational lenses. To address this multi-dimensional question, this study provides some significant insights into sustainable Family owned business performance in Pakistan through strategic orientation.

Family-owned businesses are the fundamental and intrinsic attributes of any economy. A large number of businesses owned by families all over the globe. Around 80-90 percent of businesses owned by families in each sector, some are listed & others are non-listed in the stock exchange (Zaidi & Aslam, 2016). FOB models can play a significant role in the development of economies (Deloitte, 2013). In Pakistan, FOB plays a dominant role in the business community and take part in the development of emerging economies (Ghani & Ashraf, 2005). As the landscape of business is rapidly changing and demanding due to globalization & advanced mode of technologies, it creates significant impacts on FOB's sustainable performance (Sabir & Tahir, 2015). FOB hierarchies & their ownership structures also require agile transformation which is necessary for firm sustainable performance (Sabir & Tahir, 2015).

Transitioning from the 20<sup>th</sup>-century model, where sustainable firm performance resided on economies of scale, control, and command-based hierarchies, planned episodic changes, and tight & rigid processes, toward a more entrepreneurial and agile mindset which has pertinent implications for the entire organizational systems (Shoemaker, 2018). The twenty-first-century global business model resides on more risky and VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) aspects. Family-owned enterprises require that sort of capabilities that cope up with insufficient insights, foresight, and understanding broadly to the challenges of the business landscape. The amplification of VUCA situations may highlight a quantum shift in decision approaches to managing innovation and sustainability through sensing novel opportunities (Schoemaker, 2018). VUCA conditions call for an entrepreneurial agile mindset possessing agile operant resources in organizations that can architect novel firm capabilities that urge innovative offerings by sensing opportunities by bringing new business models geared toward sound strategic orientation for FOBs (Tece, Heaton & Schoemaker, 2018). These agile operant resources of FOBs owners are an unexplored area which addressed in this study.

Resources gain importance and often remain debatable topics from the last decades. Traditional resources (land, labor & capital, etc.) and capabilities are no longer remain as a source of firm sustainable performance. Rapid trends of globalization and increased market competition have forced firms to search for other novel sustainable ways. Novel themes

emerged by encouraging management to strategically exploit unique resources and capabilities that drive the sustainability of FOBs. Barney (1991) proposed a Resource-Based View in which firms understood as a bundle of assets and capabilities possess heterogeneous nature of strategic resources or capabilities, which helps in catering to sustainable firm performance. Therefore, management needs to pay efforts toward nurturing and exploiting those strategic resources. RBV emphasized more on tangible resource uniqueness through VRIO rather than intangible resources like knowledge, skills, etc. Therefore, Knowledge Base View (KBV) emerged in 1996 as an extension of RBV. KB view determines firms as heterogeneous entities loaded with knowledge (Grant, 1996 & Carolis, 2002). KBV proposed knowledge as the most strategically significant resource of the firm. KBV emphasizes intangible resources as a source of sustainable firm performance. In previous literature, Barney (1991) classified resources into physical, human & organizational capital form. R-A theory extended his work in more grained view by categorizing resources into financial, organizational, informational, physical, legal, and relational. R-A theory suggested the hierarchy of resources in terms of basic & higher-order resources (Hunt, 2000a). These higher-order resources are grounded on basic resources and are known as higher-order competencies (Teece, 2012). These basic & higher-order resources have been further classified into operant & operand resources proposed by Vargo & Lusch, 2008 in Service dominant logic. S.D logic emphasized the primacy of operant resources on operand resources by differentiating among them (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). This differentiation indicated the pertinent role of agile operant resources for firm sustainability, and these agile operant resources drive firm strategic orientation. Arnould et al., (2014) was the one who introduced the significant role of customer operant resources in value creation. He (2014) indicated in future research the role of other actor's operant resources may enhance firm performance in many ways (Paredes & Barrutia, 2014). Therefore, this study spotted this gap and intended to surface the hidden pertinent role of agile operant resources of FOB Owners.

Today's business operates in different conditions as in past. Organizations are becoming more dynamic, intricate, and ambiguous (Van Velsor et al., 2010). An organization's ability to manage, reassemble, respond proactively, and decisively by taking short-lived opportunity advantage to become the key to sustained performance in today's dynamic business environment (Kotler, 2014; Leavy, 2014). Two deep trends gradually changing the landscape of businesses i.e. the rapid pace of change and growing level of complexity and interdependence. These challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be coped up by adopting higher-order competencies (Teece et al., 2018). Higher-order competencies encourage firms to do the right things at the right time (Teece et al., 2018). The development of these capabilities can provide firms a safeguard around the common pitfalls of the environment. It helps the organization to judge & monitor its external environment which is good for the assessment of the current durable business model. A firm having a strong business model can better sense & seize opportunities before competitors do. Strong higher-order capabilities can even enable the firm to shape the surrounding business ecosystem in its favor by setting standards,



influencing the development of regulations, or other means. These capabilities are based on agile operant resources which are complex to create & deploy (Heaton, Schoemaker & Teece et al., 2018). Therefore, this research intended to surface the hidden agile operant resources that support firm strategic orientation.

Agile Organization philosophy is based on these sets of higher-order competencies because agility develops the possibility of quick responses and compatibility with the environment which permits the firm to enhance its strategic orientation” (Yeganegi & Azar, 2012). Agility refers to the ability to quickly thinking responsively. It can be only possible through scanning the environment with swift (agile) operant resources. Agility depends upon the dynamic package of operant resources based on higher-order competencies which enable the firm to get a sound strategic orientation (Ambrosini, 2003). An increased level of agility raises the ability of the firm to respond proactively to unexpected environmental changes (Sune & Gibb, 2015; Schuiling, 2014). Strategic orientation provides firm sensing long-term opportunities and threats by converting threats into favorable business strategies. Thus, this research aims to explore the hidden role of agile operant resources based on agile competencies of FOB Owners which supports organizations for attaining sound strategic orientation that drives further sustainable firm performance. The following research questions are addressed & answered through this study:- How agile Competencies based on agile operant resources of FOB Owners in FOBs facilitate Sustainable firm Performance? How FOB Owners’ agile operant resources support firm Strategic Orientation?

## **2 Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Family-Owned Businesses (FOBs)**

Around the globe, a huge range of family-owned businesses exists (Anderson & Reeb, 2003). Due to this broader range, the interest of studying the family firms and their significant impacts on firm performance is increasing in many folds. In the development of national economies, family-owned firms have been recognized as an important governance structure of business organizations. Many researchers pay large attention to family businesses due to effective control structure and pertinent impacts on ownership (Qureshi et al., 2013). A recent study by Faccio and Lang (2012) proposed that 44% of 5,232 firms were included as a sample of study businesses based on family-owned businesses (Fahad et al., 2011). Family-owned businesses can be possessed by one or more members of one or more Families with the pertinent ownership interest having significant commitments with overall well-being in business (Miller, 2005). Due to the wide range of inclusion in the family's own business and literature, it's complex to develop a consensus on a definition. However, the central notion of family business resides in their direct control and managed ways as it is controlled and managed by multiple family members across from multiple generations (Shanker & Astrachan, 1996). It's complex to define family businesses due to the wide range of characteristics of family-owned firms. According to Handler (1989), “family firms where all

the operating plans and decisions affected by the family members who are in service of management or board”.

In this era, the most dominant form of business is family businesses. Two main reasons drive outperform of family firms upon non-family firms. Firstly, top management of family firms comprises family members having more influential firm-specific knowledge which supports better decision making. Secondly, they have a long-term investment horizon to take future decisions. Therefore, family firms have a positive impact on family ownership that drives firm performance (Fahlenbrach, 2004). Moreover, family firms start from micro and small firm's level and rapidly growing toward prosperous businesses. Zitz (1995) categorizes family businesses in two ways i.e. intention-based and structural-based approach. Intention based approach refers to a firm's approach based on preferences and values of family members whereas a structure-based approach resides toward family management and ownership (Qureshi et al., 2013). Another characteristic of family-owned businesses is in which most of the shareholders belong to the same family and actively participate in the management and operations of the company. Each family has its uniquely rich history, unwritten rules, values, and communications methods (Qureshi et al., 2013). Many other unique attributes serve to strengthen the family business comprises love, care, unconditional acceptance, emotional attachment, generational hierarchy, closeness, commitment, loyalty, stable relationships, safety, support, rituals, growth, and development, etc. All these attributes reflected through business ownership styles and ways that often support and its intensity may harm the company (Qureshi et al., 2013). These characteristics in actual the operant resources of the family business owners which drive firm success toward many dimensions.

In the past few years, Pakistan has been experiencing phenomenal economic growth in the domain of unlisted companies' especially family-owned businesses. Small family-owned firms often gradually become private limited companies. Shares held by a small group of shareholders having limits on transferability. These families owned listed companies are becoming the backbone of Pakistan's economy (Qureshi et al., 2013). Swift agile growth of small companies is actively fueling the growth of Pakistan's private sector. Family businesses possess unique agile operant resources used by FOB owners to sense long term opportunities, investing in long term projects by developing loyal relationships with all shareholders. This study aims to identify those agile operant resources of FOB owners that support in facilitation of family business strategic orientation.

## **2.2 Strategic Orientation as a Broader Concept**

Strategy can influence a firm through multiple ways such as its structures, activity and its relation builds with the market (Vales & Bednall, 2010). An organization can use strategy as a key to solving problems by creating new capabilities that improve business performance (Sarker & Palit, 2015). Firms can create this capability through the effective utilization of resources. Tangible and intangible resources both are used to form capability that drives firm



sustainable performance (Cheng et al., 2015). An organization can adopt the best strategies which spot to establishing industry position (Porter, 1980) by focusing on their resources and competencies to attain fit through internal and external competitive factors that facilitate sustainable firm performance and business efficiency (Ali et al., 2010; Blument & Danis, 2006). Strategic orientation is an ability to think and operate broadly to align business strategy with firm objectives. The resource-based view also proposed that a firm's unique resources and capacities ultimately determine its strategy and performance (Barney, 1991). By coupling these unique resources, firms develop 'strategic capabilities' that drive strategic orientation. Extensive empirical researches are available on the strategic orientation of organizations in their context. Strategic orientation refers to the manner in which an organization senses opportunities by adopting the external environment (Miles & Snow, 1978). Firms adopt environmental patterns to ensure firm growth and survival (Ketchen et al., 1997) and these patterns refer to static configurations which used to examine the link among firm strategy and performance (Dess, Newport & Rasheed, 1993). The strategic orientations of a firm can strong when firms can influence customers, respond to competitors, and environmental changes (Aaker, 2001) which lead to the continuous exploration of new ideas and information (Chen et al., 2015). Strategic orientation guides the strategic direction of a firm towards exploring the new set of resources especially corporate resources which drive firms toward a new horizon of growth and innovation (Al- Ansaari et al., 2015). Strategic orientation indicates a manner in which firms adapt to the external environmental changes and ensure their sustainability by transforming their business model accordingly. Organizations can sense, seize, and respond to these changes which establish strategic orientation with the help of agile operant resources. Firms indicate these changes through sensing environmental forces seize these changes and then transform business models to ensure their sustainability. Firms develop an effective and long-term strategic orientation through using agile operant resources and capabilities because higher-order resources (dynamic capabilities) support in developing sustainable firm performance (Obeidate, 2016). This research explores those agile operant resources of FOB Owners which supports the development of strategic capability that forms strategic orientation.

Strategic orientation can be explained as "the set of strategic directions implemented by an organization to form proper behaviors which spot in the continuous superior performance of the business (Cheng & Huizing, 2014). Strategic orientation shows the aggressive behavior of the enterprise toward competing in the market and exploring the new horizon of innovation through developing competencies. Strategic orientations are based on four major dimensions such as entrepreneurial, market, learning, and resource orientation (Cheng & Huizing, 2014). In entrepreneurial orientation, firms peruse new market opportunities by allocating the niches in existing areas (Hult & Ketchen, 2011). Firms having strong entrepreneurial orientation involved in constant scanning and monitoring environment to identify new opportunities which strengthen the firm competitive position in the market (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Entrepreneurial orientation is based on some characteristics that are tolerant of

risk, perusing innovative ideas, follows a proactive approach toward sensing opportunities, and supporting the innovation process actively (Keh et al., 2007). While scanning the environment, entrepreneurially oriented firms seek new hidden opportunities that support to meet the needs of the market by managing risk (Keh et al., 2007).

Resource orientation is the most internal orientation based on the deployment of unique bundles of the firm's internal resources. Its focus is to create an immobile and heterogeneous nature of resources that supports the firm to strengthen its inside orientation (Barney, 1991). Thus, resource orientation is based on the belief that each firm possesses some unique set of resources that spots the firm to ensure its sound strategic orientation (Cheng et al., 2014). Learning orientation refers to a firm capacity to modify and managed with modern technologies and strategies to deal with customers and the market at large. When firms focus to learn from the environment and experience then the culture of learning enriches and behavior formed which contributes to firm performance (Lee & Chen, 2011). Learning orientation act as value supports to create knowledge and use it within an organization. Learning helps to shape and reshape behaviors (Baker and Sinkula, 1999). Market orientation is based on acquiring, disseminating, and using market information for the creation of superior performance (Narver & Slater, 1990). Firms having strong market orientation can better see customer needs and offerings such as the stage of Idea generation till implementation. Market-oriented firms can actively collect and analyze market information (Cheng et al., 2014).

### **2.3 Strategic Orientation in Family-Owned businesses**

Family firms are more focused on goals embedded with family rules and far from other traditional firm value maximization goals (Sharma et al., 1997). Among the most important family rules are survival, financial independence, family harmony, and family employment (Donckels & Frolich, 1991). Due to this family firms are considered as more risk-averse and less growth-oriented. To averse from risk and focusing on growth opportunities family firms need sound strategic orientation. Many drivers live behind the family firm's long term sustainability and family commitment and cohesion are considered as the significant drivers of longevity and sustainability (Astrachan, 2010). Another study highlighted the long-term view and strategic adaptability and professionalism as the source of family business sustainability (Rahra & Craig, 2008). Behind all these sources the role of resources cannot be ignored as RBV argues that firms attain and maintain a competitive position through a specific combination of tangible and intangible resources (Moore, 2009). However, scant research is available on the role of FOB owner's hidden agile operant resources that support firm strategic orientation (Astrachan, 2010). This paper addressed this research gap by proposing a framework that exhibits the role of hidden agile operant resources possess by family business owner's support to cater strategic orientation.

## 2.4 Conceptualization of Resources

Despite the frequent use of the word ‘resources’ in academic literature, the concept remains still ambiguous. Basically, “*Resources are economic or productive factors required to accomplish an activity, or as means to undertake an enterprise and attain desired outcomes*” (Barney, 1991) Traditional view of resources based on basic resources comprises of land, labor & capital (Wilson, 1960). In the context of strategic resources, firm resources are considered as strengths that firms can use to conceive of and implement their strategies (Andrews & Guth, 1969; Porter, 1981). Several authors contributed to the domain of resources through categorizing lists of resources based on firm attributes (Hit & Ireland, 1986). To facilitate these discussions further, resources are classified into three categories i.e. physical capital resources (physical technology, plant & equipment, firm geographical locations and raw material, etc.), human capital resources (training, experience, judgment, intelligence & relationships, etc.) and organizational capital resources (firm structure, formal & informal planning, controlling, coordinating systems & informal relationships, etc.) (Williamson, 1975; Becker, 1964; Tomer, 1987). Barney (1991) proposed two notions of resources such as tangible & intangible in the resource-based view. RBV emphasized tangible resource heterogeneity and VRIN (valuable, rare, inimitable & non-substitutable) nature of resources as a firm strategic source of catering competitive advantage (Barney, 1994). The knowledge-based view emphasized intangible resources as a firm strategic resource (Grant & Carolis, 2002). They specify resources as heterogeneous entities loaded with knowledge. Resource-advantage theory (R-A) grounded on RBV defined resources as tangible and intangible entities (Morgan & Hunt, 2000). It establishes the logic that superior financial firm performance is attained by obtaining a competitive advantage in resources. R-A theory differentiates resources into basic & higher-order resources also known as competencies & capabilities (Hunt, 2000). R-A theory proposed a framework of firm resources through the lens of S-D logic by providing hierarchy & classification of resources. However, S-D logic is based on RBV & R-A theory. S-D logic further classified resources into two categories i.e. operant & operand resources. This study will pick the notion of S-D logic Operant resources and highlight the role of agile operant resources of FOB Owners in facilitating the sustainable firm performance of Family-owned businesses in Pakistan.

**Resources** traditionally are considered economic or productive factors required to accomplish an activity or a goal (Wilson, 1960).

These are of two types:

- (i) **Tangible/Static/Operand:** On their own, we have less they provide less value. These are land, labor & capital (Wilson, 1960)
- (ii) **Intangible/Dynamic/Operant:** It acts on operand resources to evolve, transform, or multiply. These are knowledge, skills & competencies (Lusch & Vargo, 2004).

#### **2.4.1 Definition of Operant Resources**

*“It employed to act on operand resources and other operant resources. These resources can evolve, transform, and multiply. They are intangible, continuous, and dynamic. It provides a basis to consider concepts such as knowledge, skills & competencies as operant resources (Constantin & Lusch; 1994; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).”*

However, this study highlighted the pertinent role of agile operant resources possessed by FOBs owners that supports to cater to firm strategic orientation.

#### **2.5 Role of Resources in Strategic Orientation**

RBV provides the sound theoretical foundations for understanding the significant role of resources in catering firm competitive advantage. Those resources that possess VRIN nature are supported to drive competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Although, VRIN nature of resources alone cannot cater to superior performance instead firm managers need to orchestrate these resources to harness potential advantages (Morrow et al., 2007; Sirmon, Gove, and HiH, 2008). Hence, resource orchestration is concerned with the embeddedness of resources with the owner's actions in the firm (Hitt et al., 2011; 64; Ndofor, Sirmon and He, 2011). Firm managers can influence firm performance by structuring the firm's resources portfolio and bundling the unique (VRIN) nature of resources (Ireland, Hitt, and Sirmon, 2003). Dealing in the dynamic competitive environment, possession of appropriate resources acting as the first step toward establishing and sustaining an advantageous position in the market. Even effective management and timely adding and shedding in resource inventory are quite critical to ensure the achievement of competitive advantage and its sustainability over a sustainable period (Sirmon, Hitt, 2003).

Due to rapid change in environmental conditions, the organization faces many unpredictable changes day by day which are essential to cope up with time. Those firms who scan the environment timely can better able to cope up with all these uncertain changes. To maintain success in the long run firms need to engage in a continuous cycle of internal creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1934) which is possible through free up resources for strategic regeneration and renewal (Kuratko & Hodgetts, 1998). An organization can cater to sound strategic orientation through pertinent strategic resources i.e. knowledge, skills, and competencies. These resources having VRIN attributes therefore, they are dynamic in nature, Vargo and Lusch (2008) labeled them as operant resources. These operant resources support firm in sensing opportunities and converting threats into favorable opportunities which facilitate firm strategic orientation. These resources having agile characteristics based on dynamic nature and evolve over time as changes occur in the market environment. Same as in the case of family firms (which usually consider rich in resources) family owners have direct control in the operations and management of firms. Each FOB owner possesses agile operant resources that drive firm strategic orientation by sensing novel opportunities from the

environment and developing compatible strategies to convert threats into favorable opportunities. Therefore, this study identifies the hidden operant resources possess by FOB owners that impact firm strategic orientation which causes FOB sustainability.

### **3 Research Methodology**

This study is based on the relativistic school of thought. It acknowledges that there is no specific or absolute truth and each view is rooted in their difference of perceptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The paradigm of this study is interpretivism which encourages multiple interpretations of reality (Meriam & Tisdell, 2015). It is used exemplary nature of research which studies the developmental nature of the phenomenon with their complete picture and particular characteristics (Damon & Colby, 2000). This research is used as an abductive approach which starts from the sets of observations and seeks the most likely explanations for the observations (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2011). In the context of this research, some theorist observation indicates that agile operant resources act as a pertinent source of sustainability in terms of strategic orientation but it requires more in-depth clarity and evidence to support this surprising puzzle (observation) through qualitative data, therefore, this study adopted abductive reasoning as nature of research to explore this observation theoretically. In this study, we used theoretical sampling based on grounded theory (Thomos, 2006). The saturation level of answers guided the number of informants selected for the study (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, this research catered responses of 30 informants where saturation level occurred. Theoretical sampling plays a vital role in theory construction. This sampling aims to develop the properties of theoretical categories as evident in our case. While determining theoretical sampling, the authors gathered significant information based on certain questions about the properties of the theoretical categories formalized by the researcher (Charmaz, 2015). Theoretical sampling encouraged researchers with the freedom to determine the range of variations in emerging categories or themes.

During interviews, informants were asked several semi-structured questions what are the pertinent operant resources must possess by FOB owner for business sustainability? How you used operant resources to sense opportunities and threats? Initially, those firms are chosen for interviews, which have a rich history being family firms in the last 20-40 years. Mostly interviews are taken from 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation. A total of 30 interviews were conducted at Director and CEO level (especially family owners) in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation. Well-known companies' interviews were conducted. Their names are hidden due to privacy and anonymity issues. A total of 30 informants were interviewed of which 28 are males and 2 were females. All are acting as active participants in their family business at the CEO, Director, and Head of Department level. Most informants belong to 2<sup>nd</sup> generation but some are from 3<sup>rd</sup> generation usually the second round of interviews were conducted to cater maximum voice of informant responses but some informant responds to maximum information in round 1. Their minimum working experiences somehow 10-35 years of handling family business in many diversified sectors or industries. Their minimum

qualification lies in graduation - Master level. The mode of the interview is selected based on the informant's convenience. Some of the interviews were conducted by personal office visits but most of them were conducted through telephonic way due to the Covid-19 crisis by maintaining Government restrictions of lockdown and following precautionary measures. Some of the interviews are audio recorded after taking permission first. Rests of them are not allowed so field notes & Notes are used preferably to capture the information. Those organizations are selected which possess a rich history of the family business and having minimum firm age 11-50 years of business sustainability preferably resides head offices in Lahore, Pakistan. Most of the business having the nature of sole-owner, partnership businesses & all are listed in the Pakistan stock exchange having 11-50 years of successful history of progress in Pakistan. The beauty of this study is to cover many industries' perspectives about the Role of agile operant resources in firm strategic orientation. The rationale for handling this diversification is the commonality of agile Operant resources in each sector almost the same. Therefore, this study presented the cumulative perspective about the pertinence of operant resources in family-owned business and their strategic orientation.

#### **4 Data Analyses**

Research questions of this study contribute naturally to the abductive qualitative approach, wherein the findings emerge from the analysis of raw data are not restrained through the prior theoretical lenses (Thomas, 2006). There is sparse research on agile operant resources of family business owners toward their strategic orientation, especially in the Pakistan context. Hence, there is ample scope for the development of indigenous constructs and newer theories explaining the pertinent role of agile operant resources in family business sustainability through strategic orientation thus facilitating an abductive approach as opposed to a deductive one (Pandey, 2018). Therefore, a variant of grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) popularly known as Gioia methodology has been used to surface the hidden magical role of agile operant resources of family owners for the strategic orientation of family-owned businesses. Gioia's method is a well-developed and accepted method that balances the needs for new concepts development through inductive and abductive approaches of research based on rigorous standards (Gioia et al., 2013). The method is widely used in strategic management, organizational behavior, management, and marketing literature (Arino et al., 2016; Bettis et al., 2015). However, the use of Gioia methodology in the family business domain is relatively new. Gioia's method considers both the researcher and informants as knowledgeable agents, who are capable and competent enough to analyze socially constructed realities (Gioia et al., 2013). This research used Gioia methodology as a technique for data analysis. In the domain of management sciences, Gioia is known for its new concept development technique. In Gioia's methodology, the researcher's first focus to report informants exact words or statements arise during interviews then emphasize emerging themes and patterns from the data while considering the inter-relationship among variables in the research. Researchers who adopt this method claim that the differentiating point among

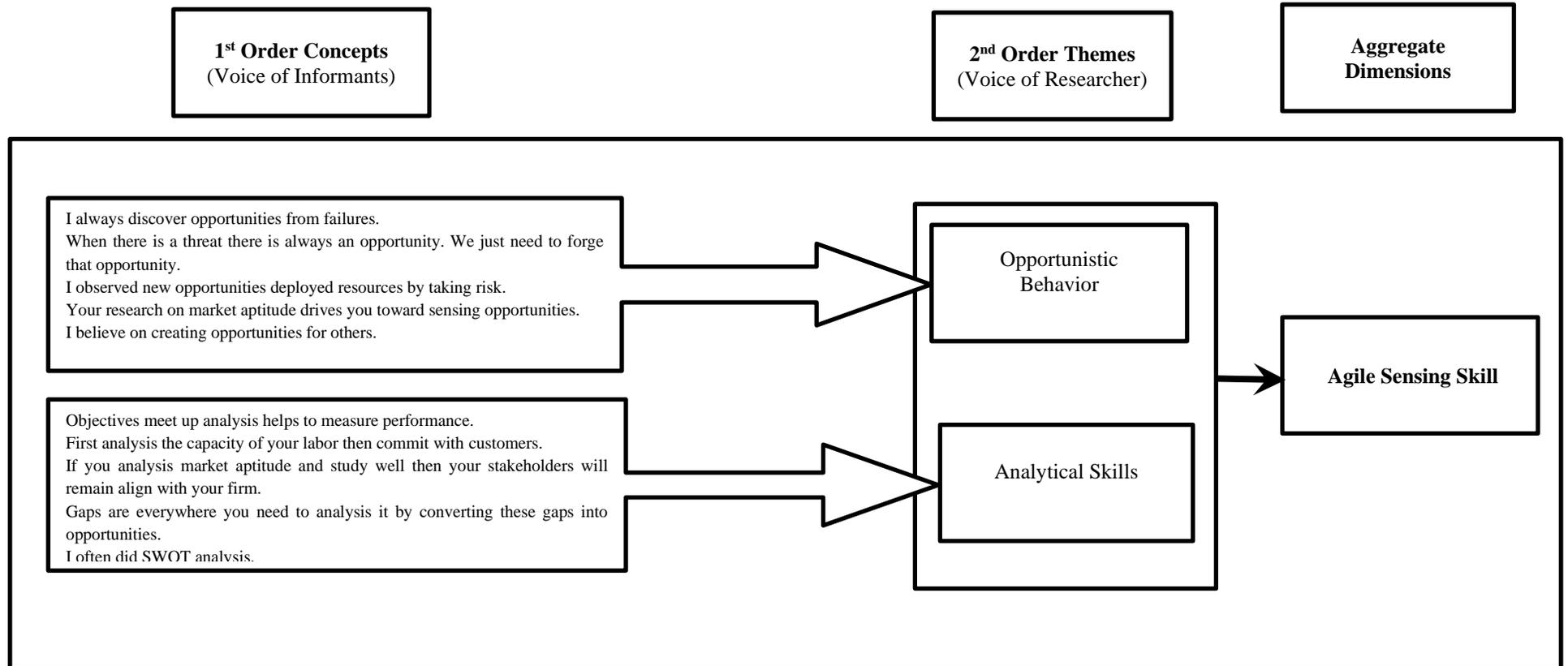


grounded theory and Gioia is the relationship matrices among the variables. It helps to present the abductive & Inductive nature of research more vividly and transparently. It comprises three levels of analysis. In 1<sup>st</sup> order analysis, the voices of informants are considered. These voices are catered through the interview responses of informants regarding multiple open-ended questions about the study. The second-order concept represents the voice of the researcher and is somehow grounded in theory. However, the third-order (Aggregate Dimension) themes present higher-order concepts. When a workable set of themes and concepts are in hand then the repentance and culmination of themes lead toward theoretical saturation which is referred by Glaser and Strauss, 1967. Consistent repentance of second-order themes refers to an indicator of saturation level (point) in interviews.

## **5 Findings/Results**

### **5.1 Agile Sensing Skills**

Each individual possesses sensing skills but skills effective utilization varies by person to person. In today's challenging business world, where one side scarcity of resources and their efficient utilization and deployment becomes the challenge for firm survival and sustainable performance. Being FOB Owner, it's essential to possess those agile sensing skills which support in scanning environment by seizing suitable opportunities and supports in the transformation of business toward the road of sustainability. These agile skills are essential for firm strategic orientation. Agile sensing skills refer to the swiftness in observing & sensing patterns of an owner which enhances over time. These agile sensing skills enhance opportunistic behavior by sharpening analytical skills. As **Figure No. I** mentioned below.



**Figure No. I** Data Structure

**Source:** Author's figure on the base of informant's responses

### **5.1.1 Opportunistic Behavior**

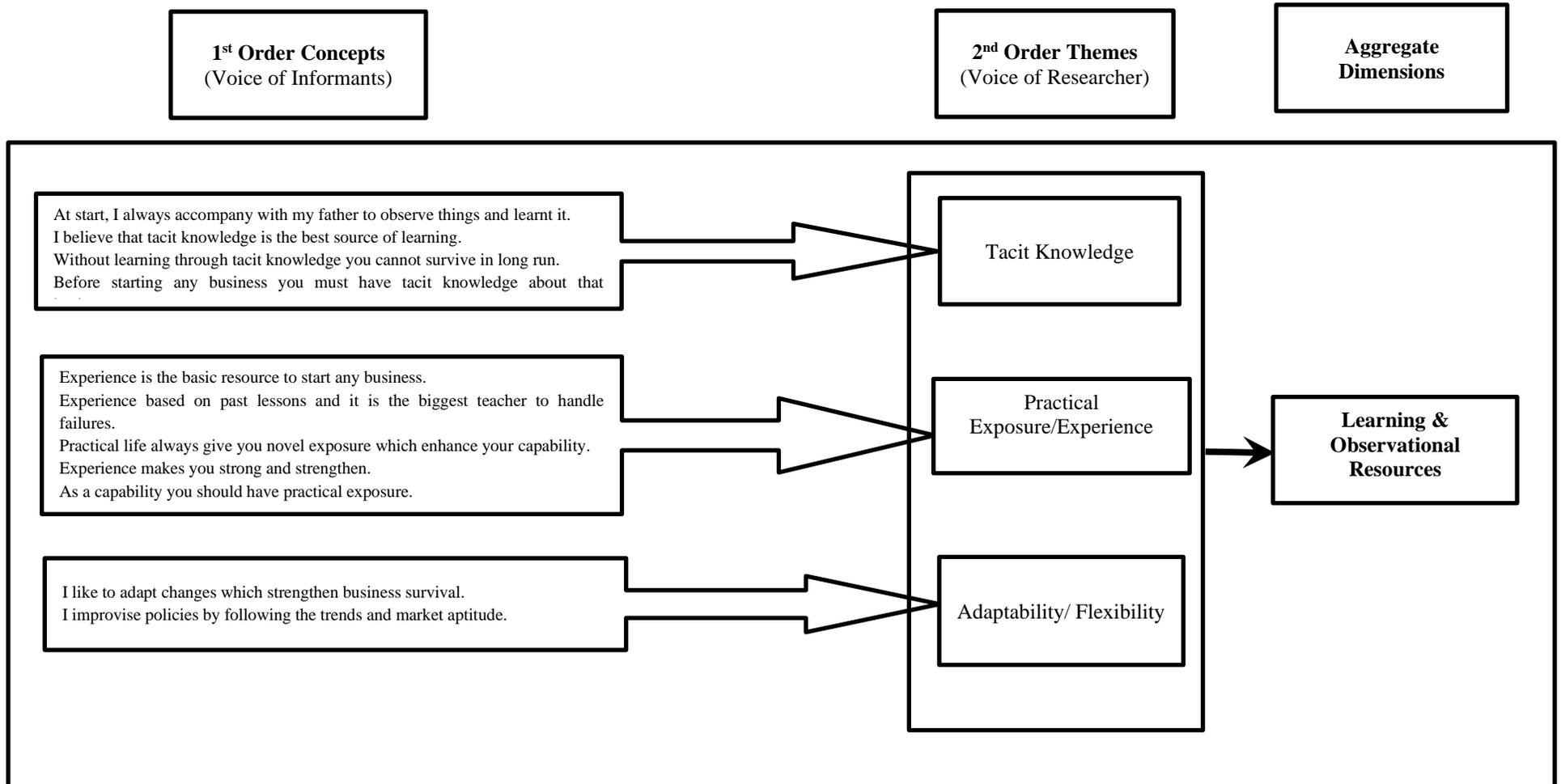
Opportunistic behavior defines a perceived way of capturing economic value which has neither been explicit previously nor tapped in the present competitive market (Baron, 2014). It's a behavior to capture opportunity by sensing the environment and make it a profitable source for your own business. It's a dynamic ability of an owner in which they sense opportunity and make it useful by converting into their favorable model through opportunistic behavior (Ellis & Williams, 2011). These are multiple other resources (operant) that able an individual to identify and capture Opportunities i.e. knowledge, social network, and thinking patterns, etc (Gaglio & Katz, 2001). It became the behavior of an individual to forge opportunities in the market. For example, as informant 3 reported that "Your research on market aptitude drives you toward sensing opportunities". Many businessmen seek opportunities from failures. As informant 12 stated that "I always discover opportunities from failures" and informant 17 stated that "When there is a threat there is always an opportunity. We just need to forge that opportunity". It's an inside ability of an individual (FOB owner) to forge opportunity in surroundings.

### **5.1.2 Analytical Skills**

Analytical skills are the operant significant resource of FOB owner. FOB Owner uses skill sets to analyses opportunities and threats in the market. It's a source of measuring performance. It helps in aligning stakeholder's interests by sensing opportunities in the market. As informant 3 stated that "If you analysis market aptitude and study well then your stakeholders will remain to align with your firm". Analytical skills help in analyzing market niches. As informant 14 reported that "Gaps are everywhere you need to analyze it by converting gaps into opportunities".

## **5.2 Learning & Observational Resources**

Learning is an action that occurs through observation. People observe through absorbing many realities from books, lectures, practical exposure, inspiration & tacit knowledge, etc. It's an inner-ability of an individual to observe from their surroundings and trying to adapt a suitable amount of change. These inner abilities possessed by an individual are the hidden agile operant resources that improve over time through many ways mentioned in



**Figure No. II** Data Structure

**Source:** Author's figure on the base of informant's responses

Learning ability enhances over time with practical experiences. By the passage of time, multiple experiences occur in life that impacts on individual which changes the whole paradigm of learning. Same as in the business world, learning improves through certain & uncertain changes in the environment. Especially, in the context of Family firms, FOB owners gain inspiration from their ancestors, observe favorable & unfavorable environmental changes through tacit knowledge, practical experiences & their adapt-ability etc which enhance the learning capacity to adopt favorable changes in the business. Over time, these changes enhance the absorptive capacity of an individual to learn & solve problems. These capabilities exist in the form of firm intangible (operant) resources and enhance the adaptive abilities of the firm owner to handle market changes. It acts as the dynamic capability to form other capabilities (Zahra & George, 2002). Due to its non-imitation ability, it acts as a strategic operant resource and sharp weapon to drive firm sustainable performance (Zahra & George, 2002). However, tacit knowledge, practical experience, and person adaptive capabilities are important to enhance the Owner's learning & observational skills that strengthen their capacity to sense opportunities.

### **5.2.1 Tacit Knowledge**

Tacit knowledge is the main operant resource having the characteristic of non-imitation and the best source of sensing opportunities through learning. While taking interviews each informant highlights the pertinence of tacit knowledge in the family business. For example, informant 1 stated that “At the start, I always accompany with my father to observe things and try to learn it”. Tacit knowledge plays a major role in sensing opportunities’ that drive family business success. For example, informant 11 stated that “Without learning through tacit knowledge you cannot survive in long run. “To startup any business tacit know-how is essential. As informant 22 stated “Before starting any business you must have tacit knowledge about that business. Some of the informants emphasize tacit knowledge as a sharp weapon of learning. Informants 6 stated that “I believe that tacit knowledge as the best source of learning”.

### **5.2.2 Practical Experience**

Another agile operant resource is a practical experience. Many informants emphasize an important detriment of experience to startup any business. For example, informant 6 stated that “Experience is the basic resource to start any business”. It helps in handling failures. Informant 8 stated that “Experience based on past lessons and it is the biggest teacher to handle failures”. Past lessons increase your stemma. Informant 11 stated that “Experience makes you strong and strengthen”. Your past lessons gradually become your capability later. Informant 9 stated that “Practical life always gave you novel exposure that increases your capability”.

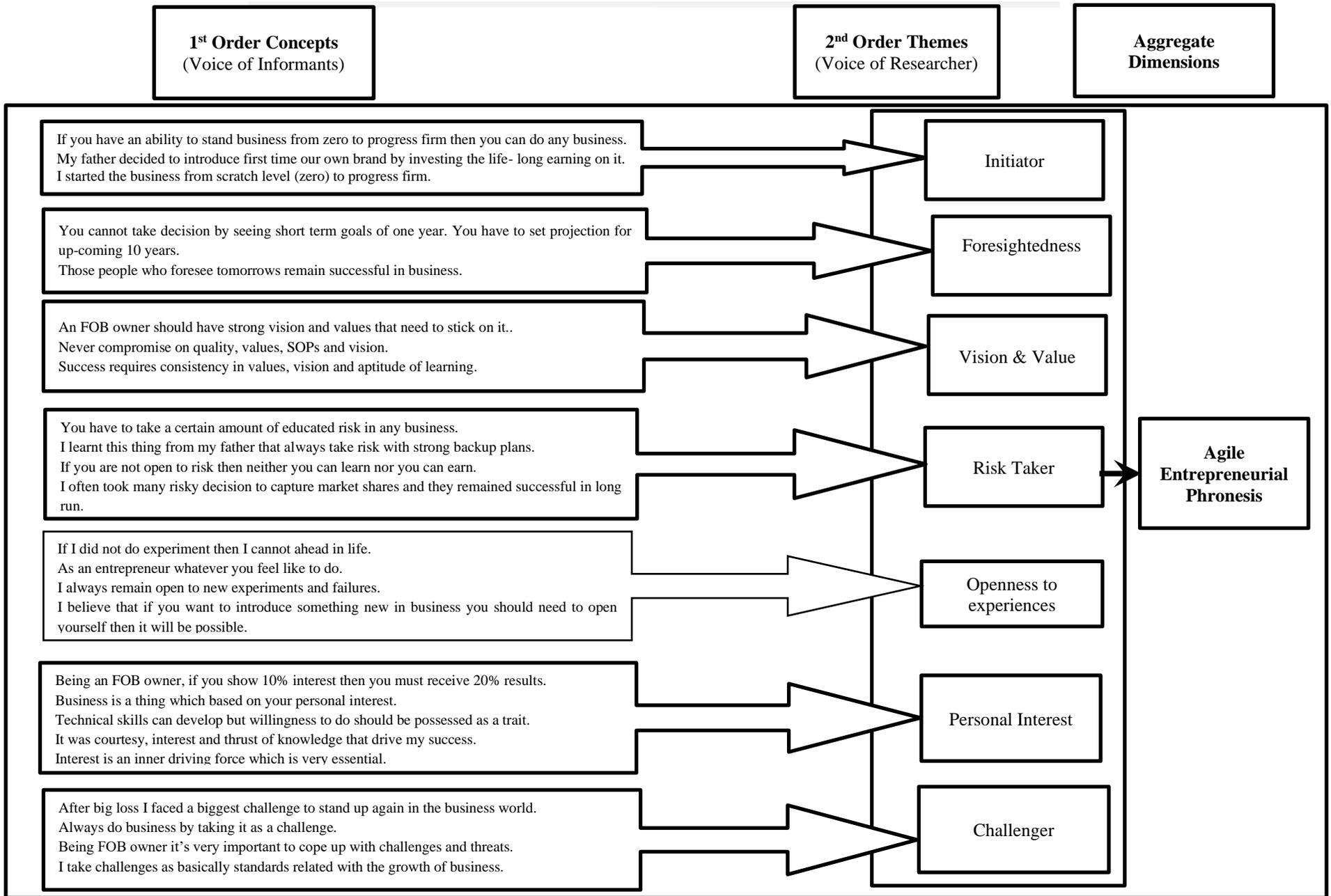


### 5.2.3 Adaptability and Flexibility

Adaptability refers to a person's ability to adapt to changes and make it responsive effectively and efficiently. The role of environmental scanning is very important. When you scan the environment by analyzing the possible opportunities which are essential for business then you can cater to it through adaptive ways. When you did not adapt then failure occurs. Informant 3 indicated that “failure occurs when you did not follow trends and not flexible enough to cater to the new things” changes adaptation drives business survival and sustainability in today’s volatile business world. Informant 16 stated that “I like to adapt changes because it strengthens business survival and sustainability”. Informant 27 stated that “if you did not improvised and have no flexibility in policies then you will collapse in business”. Adaptability is the pertinent intangible resource of every business.

### 5.3 Entrepreneurial Phronesis

Our research shows that FOB owners possess some agile entrepreneurial Phronesis based resources which in turn support improving Owner sensing skills. We identified some entrepreneurial Phronesis resources raised during interviews that drive firm sustainability in below (**Figure No. III**). However, phronesis indicate the practical and theoretical wisdom of a person (FOB owner) which he used to seize opportunities. By utilizing effectively and efficiently, an entrepreneur manages all these phronesis resources by engaging environment to create a favorable situation for business.



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### **Figure No. III Data Structure**

**Source:** Author's figure on the base of informant's responses

#### **5.3.1 Initiator**

Initiation is the force of courage and determination. It supports taking steps and move ahead by handling all challenges in the business world which is very essential to being an entrepreneurial family firm owner. For example, as Informant 11 reported that "If you have an ability to stand business from zero to progress firm then you can do any business". The initiative enhances stamina and confidence in yourself. As Informant 3 stated that "My father burns all boats into the fire and decided to introduce our brand first time by investing the life-long earning on it". Up and down are the parts of the business world being FOB owner, "you should know to start the business from scratch level (zero) to progress firm." Informant 22 reported.

#### **5.3.2 Foresightedness**

Foresightedness is to analyze future projections. It creates a unique variation in the thinking patterns of the firm owner. It helps in taking decisions and drive business success. As informant 30 reported that "You cannot take decisions by seeing short term goals for one year. You have to set projections for up-coming 10 years". Informant 29 reported that "These people who foresee tomorrows remain successful in business".

#### **5.3.3 Vision & Values**

Another important resource of an entrepreneur is vision and values. Each family owner possesses some set of values toward their ancestors that act as foundational premises to compete in today's volatile business world. As informant 9 stated that "As FOB owner should have strong vision and values that need to stick on it". They set some standards for doing business. For example, informant 12 stated that never compromise on quality, values, SOPs and vision". Sticking on vision and values is considered as the gimmick of success in a family business. For example, Informant 7 stated that "success requires consistency in values, vision, and aptitude of learning".

#### **5.3.4 Risk Taker**

It's the pre-requisite characteristic of every entrepreneurial business firm. Each business should take a certain amount of calculated risks to move in an uncertain environment (Choi & Shepherd, 2004). As all informants' emphasis on this resource. For example, informant 3 stated that "You have to take a certain amount of educated risks in any business". In family firms, risk-taker consider as an ability and source of learning. As informant 27 reported that "If you are not open to risk then neither you can learn nor you can earn". New avenues

cannot explore without knocking at the door of risks. For example, informant 13 claimed that “I often took many risky decisions to capture market shares and it remained successful in the long run”. It’s a way of exploring success horizons in the business world. As informant 5 stated that “I learned risk-taking from my father that always takes a risk with strong backup plans”.

### **5.3.5 Openness to Experience**

Openness to experience is the most pertinent resource of entrepreneurial resources in which the family owner open to experience toward change by taking steps ahead. An entrepreneur explores and exploits opportunities by sensing the environment (Zahrira, 2011). New experiences open new doors of opportunities. For example, as informant 7 reported that “If I did not experiment then I cannot move ahead in life”. Same as Informant 9 stated, “I always open for new experiments and failures”. For innovation, you always need to try new things that ensure business survival and growth. As Informant 29 reported that ”I believe that if you want to introduce something new in business you should need to open yourself then innovation will be possible”.

### **5.3.6 Personal Interest**

The main hidden driving force (operant resource) of doing business is the intrinsic willingness and personal interest to do it. A person cannot excel in any business if you do not have their interest in it. Therefore, personal interest is the most central factor (intrinsic) in a human which motivate to do any business activity. Most of the informants' emphasis this factor during the interview. For example, as informant 11 reported that if you show 10% interest then you must receive 20% results”. Informant 15 claimed that “Business is a thing which is based on your personal interests”. Other skills can be developed over time but inner willingness is the internal factor (intrinsic agile operant resource) possessed as a trait. As informant 8 said that “Technical skills can be developed but willingness to do should be possessed as a trait”. Personal interest is the main determinant behind success. As informant 19 reported that “It was courtesy, interest, and thirst of knowledge that drive my success in business”.

### **5.3.7 Challenger**

Being a firm owner, you need to handle multiple challenges in the business world. Challenge to handle market conditions, the aptitude of change by sensing opportunities. In short, the business world is full of challenges. You need to address all these challenges for attaining business success. For example, informant 22 reported that “Always do business by taking it as a challenge”. As informant 11 stated that “Being FOB owner, it’s very important to cope up with challenges and threats”. Challenges are the tools of growth as informant 7 said that “I take challenges as basically standards related to the growth of the business”.

## 6 Discussion and Conclusion

Resources often remain the burning agenda of research in each decade. Although its pertinence evolves overtime because most researchers categorize resources in different ways. As a start, land, labor, and capital were considered as resources of the firm (Porter, 1981). Then several researchers contributed to the domain of resources by categorizing a list of resources on the base of firm attributes (Hit & Ireland, 1986). To enhance these discussions resources are further classified into three categories i.e. physical (Technology, Plant and raw material, etc), human capital (training and experience, etc), and organizational capital resources (firm structure, etc) (Williamson, 1975; Becker, 1964; Tomer, 1987). The era of the 1990s always remembers due to the famous evolving view of resources as RBV (Resources Based View) proposed by Barney (1991). RBV classifies resources into tangible and intangible dimensions and emphasized resource heterogeneity as the (VRIN) nature of resources as the strong determinant of competitive advantage (Barney, 1994). Firms create competitive advantage when managers develop and deploy resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) in an existing market Peteraf, 1993) and exploit them in some additional markets (Amit & Schoemaker, 1995). VRIN attributes of resources secure firm sustainable performance in the industry. These VRIN characteristics usually lie in firm intangible resources (Bingham & Eisenhardt, 2008).

Meanwhile, KBV (knowledge-based view) emphasizes the significance of intangible resources (knowledge, skills, and abilities) as an indicator of firm competitive advantage (Grant & Carolis, 2002). R.A theory categorizes resources in basic and higher-order resources (Morgan & Hunt, 2000). However, S.D logic evolved in 2004 and pick the notion of R.A theory and RBV by labeling resources as an operand (tangible) and operant (intangible) (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). They (2008) emphasized the pertinent role of operant resources on operand resources as a source of value creation through foundational premises (FP4) (Vargo & Lusch, 2010). Another research highlighted the significant role of customer and firm operant resources blend with operand resources as a source of superior firm performance (Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008). This study identifies the gap by mentioning the role of other actors may support to improve firm performance. Hence, previous researches evident that the role of operant resources always remains pivotal in the facilitation of firm sustainable performance. Thus, this study is conducted to fill this niche (gap) by exploring the hidden role of agile operant resources and its facilitating role in sustainable firm performance.

Organizations can attain strategic orientation through these dimensions i.e. resource orientation, learning orientation, technological, market, and entrepreneurial orientation. However, this research focuses on firm inside & outside orientation which resides on resources entrepreneurial, and learning orientation. Behind these orientations, multiple agile operant resources are deployed by firm owners which facilitate firm strategic orientation that drives sustainable performance. Although resource orientation describes how firm resources

drive firm performance in today's dynamic business environment (Collis & Montgomery, 1995). The central notion of resource orientation is based on deploying a unique set of resources to exploit all environmental favorable opportunities or to neutralize threats (Peteraf, 1993, Teece, Pisano, and Shuen, 1997). As compared to other orientations, resource orientation focuses on internal/inside deployment of unique resources these unique resources are operant having heterogeneity based attributes. The uniqueness of these resources is based on agility which makes it capable to cater rapid environmental changes. Therefore, agile operant resources of family firm owners are the hidden resources that drive firm resource orientation which strengthens firm strategic orientation.

***Proposition 1:- For Family-Owned Firms, the more their agile operant resources the greater their firm strategic orientation.***

Another dimension that supports to cater strategic orientation is firm entrepreneurial orientation. Entrepreneurial orientation is based on capturing new market opportunities (niches) by renewing existing areas of operations (Hult & Ketchen, 2001). Those organizations that possess a strong entrepreneurial orientation tend to scan the environment constantly by identifying new opportunities that strengthen firm sustainable competitive positions (Covin and Miles, 1999; Lumpkin and Uess, 1996). Firm entrepreneurial orientation is based on some factors and set of beliefs i.e. tolerance of risk, pro-activeness, innovation, autonomy, and competitive aggression (Keh et al., 2007). These factors drive firm entrepreneurial orientation collectively but behind these factors, an agile mindset is based on agile phronetic operant resources or competencies. These agile phronetic operant resources drive the agile mindset of family firm owners to enhance firm entrepreneurial orientation. In actuality, these are the agile operant resources that form the agile mindset of firm owners that facilitate entrepreneurial orientation. These agile operant resources are initiator, foresightedness, vision and values, risk-taker, openness to experience, personal interest, and challenger. All these attributes are possessed by family firm owners which support in facilitation of entrepreneurial orientation that leads toward firm strategic orientation. This study highlighted those hidden agile phronesis based operant resources that act as a vehicle to drive the entrepreneurial mindset which facilitates firm strategic orientation.

***Proposition 2:- For Family-Owned Firms, the more their agile entrepreneurial phronesis enhance the greater their strategic orientation.***

Another avenue to gain sustainable firm performance in family firms is learning (Hurley, 2002; Tajeddini 2009a, b). There is a strong rationale lies behind it as when a company considered as skilled in creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge by reflecting new knowledge through own behavior then firms more likely to respond in a rapidly changing dynamic environment which constantly remain in flux (Davis et al., 2007). Learning develops a strong set of values and beliefs which promote new knowledge, insights, and awareness

within an organization (Huber, 1991; Sinkula, 1994). Several scholars argue that new avenues of knowledge have the potential to cope with all organizational changes such as “an organization learn when its units acquire useful knowledge and have sound potential to change behavior positively. In actuality, learning orientation becomes the firm valuable capability over time (Tajeddini, 2016). It is considered as firm capacity to continuously evolve with new patterns of thinking. Same as other firms, family-owned firms already have long survival rich history which ingrained in learning. Because long-term survival and sustainability can only possible when a firm possesses a strong learning orientation (Tajeddini, 2016). Sound learning orientation based on agile operant (intangible) resources of family firm owners. Because they sense new evolving patterns of change from the environment and transform firm practices accordingly (Tajeddini, 2016). Therefore, it’s an agile operant resource possessed by each family firm owner which supports firm learning orientation to establish strategic orientation). Sound learning and observational resources comprise agile operant resources i.e. tacit knowledge, practical experience of the person (individual), and adaptability that drives firm strategic orientation.

***Proposition 3:- For Family-Owned Firms, the more their Swiftness in learning & observational abilities enhance the greater their Strategic Orientation***

Sensing skills possess by each person but agile sensing skills are rare. Agile sensing skills support in the scanning environment by sensing opportunities and converting threats into favorable opportunities. Persons who possess these skills have opportunistic behavior by analyzing market trends and niches. It’s essential for organizational survival and sustainability that its owner must smell opportunities by adopting proactive behavior then they can seize it in a better way. These agile sensing skills are based on their agile operant resources which enhance firm strategic orientation.

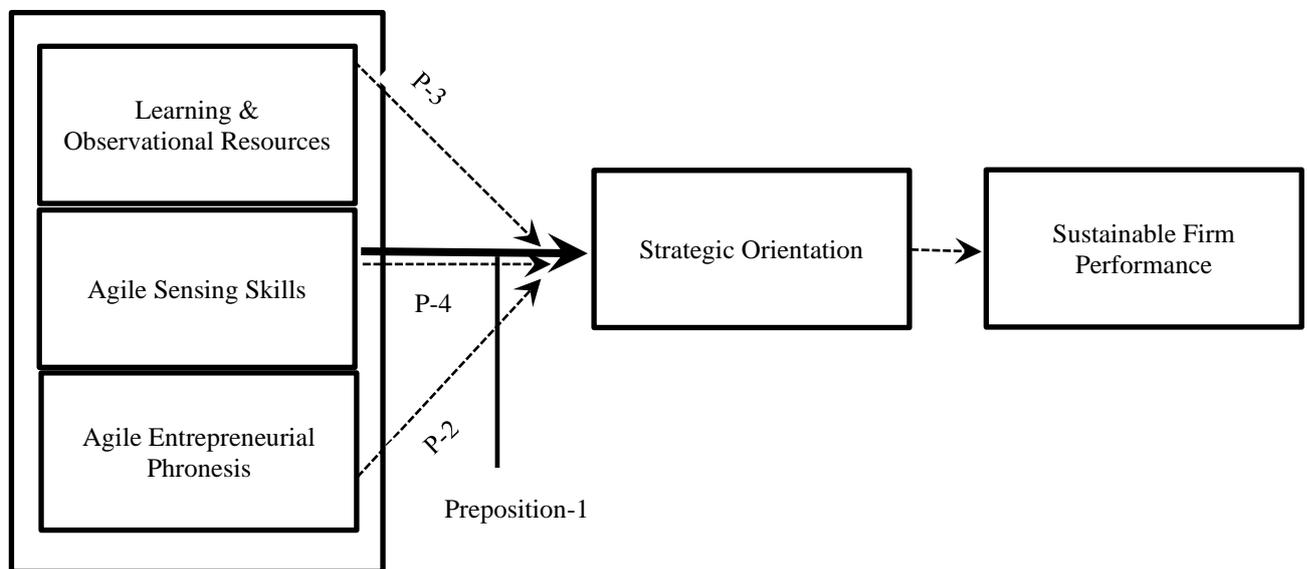
***Proposition 4:- -For Family-Owned Firms, the more their agile sensing skills enhance the greater their Strategic Orientation.***

This research has been conducted to shed some light on hidden agile operant resources of FOB owners that drive strategic orientation in family businesses. Previous literature immensely indicates the pertinent role of resources in the family firm’s strategic orientation. Many types of resources are discussed in previous studies empirically and conceptually. We spot the gap in the literature about the hidden role of agile operant resources in developing strategic orientation. The first contribution of this study is to surface the hidden role of agile operant resources possessed by family firm owners which supports to cater firm strategic orientation. The second contribution of this research is to propose a theoretical framework extracted from the actual voices of informants (family owners) that outline how agile operant resources impacted family firm strategic orientation. In light of the above detailed logical discussions and propositions, this study proposed a conceptual model in **Figure IV** which

indicates the pertinent role of agile operant resources i.e. observational & learning resources, agile sensing skills, and agile entrepreneurial resources collectively drive family firm's strategic orientation that leads toward sustainable performance. Theoretical contributions emerged from our investigation about the strategic orientation phenomenon. However, it is essential to further examine empirically the role of agile operant resources.

Based on the above responses of informants, it can be inferred that each FOB owner possessed these agile operant resources but the sharpness of these resources enable owners to sense new opportunities and threats that drive firm strategic orientation.

### Agile Operant Resources



**Figure: IV** Proposed model for FOBs sustainable firm performance through Firm Strategic Orientation

**Source:** Authors figure on the base of informant's iterative responses

### Theoretical Contributions

This study has importance & utility for both academics and practitioners of FOBs alike.

This study resides on relativistic aspects of phenomenon & relativity often introduce toward novel terms which gives a significant contribution toward literature. It enhances & strengthens the ground realities of Phenomenon (Strategic orientation) with multiple subjective insights. This study provides a conceptual model to academics that enriches with data that adds value toward theory development in the domain of firm Strategic orientation. This research also provides a novel set of agile competencies as a source of catering to sustainable firm performance. This research may encourage academicians to further explore



the role of other actor's operant resources working in FOBs & other firms. Above mentioned framework can also be used for future empirical research.

### **Practical Contributions**

This study remains beneficial for practitioners especially Owners of Family-Owned Businesses (FOBs) because it suggests the central notion of sustainable firm performance for competing in today's volatile business world. This study proposed a framework for FOBs operating in Pakistan through providing novel insights for establishing sustainable firm performance which indicates the pertinence of agile operant resources. It also opens new avenues of innovation & growth for FOBs by determining the primitive significant role of Individual FOB Owners Operant resources. The practical exposure of experiences serves as the fundamental tool of learning new knowledge which helps the corporate sector to compete in a better way. Managers can adopt these agile operant resources which support firm strategic orientation that leads toward sustainability. Each FOBs may adopt these agile competencies to ensure firm sustainability in today's dynamic business world.

### **Limitations & Future Directions**

These are the following Limitations & Future directions:

This study is limited to family firms in Pakistan. Future studies may focus on all types of firms that did not come under the category of family-owned firms. This research studied the phenomenon of sustainability/Sustainable development through firm strategic orientation but future studies may focus on other constructs while studying family firm sustainability. As this research highlighted the multiple themes, concepts & variables under the strategic orientation theme, therefore, future research may conduct some Quantitative research on these mentioned dimensions & variables. This study may also conduct in different contexts of other countries. In future research, conceptual models can be tested through empirical data. Culture & sub-culture dimensions should be considered for the study. Another qualitative study may also be conduct specifically in one sector to locate the essence of sustainability within one sector. It's a broader nature of research based on many dimensions so each dimension can be studied empirically. It can be studied at different intervals of time. As qualitative researches always consider enriching with data so the role of agile operant resources in enhancing the culture of the firm can also be studied in the future. Future research may also be conduct in Asian countries & their ways of developing sustainability in family-owned businesses.

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