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Walking in the Path of Socio-cultural Traditions: Family Enterprise and its Governance in Ghana

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Abstract

This qualitative multiple-case study examined how socio-cultural traditions influence governance practices, family identity and sustainability within Ghanaian family enterprises and their implications for culturally rooted governance. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants drawn from 12 family enterprises operating across diverse sectors in Ghana. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, generating nine themes organised around three research objectives. The findings show that inherited family values, extended-family and community expectations, family reputation, spirituality and traditional wisdom provide important reference points for governance. However, these socio-cultural influences generated both opportunities and tensions, particularly where family obligations conflicted with professional management requirements. Participants also described hybrid governance arrangements that combined formal structures, including written policies, boards and family constitutions, with culturally embedded practices such as family elder consultation and intergenerational values transmission. Succession emerged as involving not only leadership transition but also the transfer of family identity, business knowledge and cultural values. Drawing on Socioemotional Wealth, Stewardship Theory and the Three-Circle Model, the study contributes context-specific evidence showing that governance within the participating enterprises was neither exclusively traditional nor entirely formalised. The study proposes an adaptive, culturally rooted approach that integrates culturally legitimate values with professional governance mechanisms to support accountability, family continuity and enterprise sustainability.

Keywords: Family business governance; socio-cultural traditions; Ghana; ancestral values; succession planning; structural hybridization; Socio-Emotional Wealth



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1. Introduction

1.1 Importance of Family Enterprises: Socio-Cultural and Economic Value in African and Ghanaian Society

Family business enterprises assume a greater proportion of the economic growth across the globe. They constitute the small and medium scale business enterprises that underpins the economic development of most nations. In particular, the economic wealth of nations can be gauged by the prevalence of these family small and medium scale enterprises. Over the past four decades, family business enterprises have become one of the predominant sources of employment in most developing countries. Family businesses operate at the nexus of family, ownership, and business processes, which makes their governance especially complicated, in contrast to businesses where ownership and family ties are mainly kept apart. As a result, decisions may take into account factors other than just money, such as family control, relationships, reputation, and legacy. Family involvement fosters stewardship and long-term orientation; however, these advantages rely in part on the organization's professionalization and governance practices (Dartey et al., 2024).

This sociocultural aspect is especially important for African family businesses. Extended family links, communal orientations, and culturally ingrained expectations for family and community responsibilities are common characteristics of indigenous African households. The values passed down within indigenous African business-owning families include moral and ethical, economic, spiritual and religious, and cultural components, according to recent research (Kupangwa et al., 2024). These principles may have an impact on relationships, corporate decisions, and expectations for the next generation, indicating that formal organizational structures are not the only way to understand governance.

This interplay between family ties, sociocultural customs, and corporate governance is especially significant in Ghana. Agyenim-Boateng et al. (2023) assert that family roles, religious influences, and regulatory expectations all contribute to governance practices in Ghanaian family-owned enterprises, which are a combination of legally declared governance arrangements and traditionally imbedded practices. Specifically, traditional expectations and family ties foster trust, identity, and continuity, but they can also lead to power struggles, governance concerns, and challenges when formal company requirements conflict with family interests (Owusu - Acheampong et al., 2026).

1.2 Family Enterprise Governance: Tradition, Identity and Professionalisation

Family-enterprise governance goes beyond traditional corporate control measures. It includes the traditional systems and connections that facilitate the coordination of family involvement, ownership interests, management authority, and intergenerational continuity. As such, organizational accountability, overlapping family and business roles, traditional family succession, conflict, identity, and maintaining relationships over generations are all important aspects of governance in a family firm. Because of these features, the family business is a unique governance environment where both non-economic and economic factors are often inter-related.

Often, culturally ingrained values might set behavioral standards for commitment, honesty, accountability, and respect. Kupangwa et al. (2024) discovered that native African families that own businesses consciously pass on moral, economic, spiritual, and cultural qualities to the next generation. This creates a systematic pattern of cultural beliefs and values within the business over a long period of time. However, professional conduct and standard of behaviour prevails because growing organizational complexity requires formalized procedures and more transparent management structures. Piyasinchai et al. (2024), assert that professionalization can bolster the benefits of family ownership on sustainability reputation and financial performance. Cultural and family values may strengthen commitment, identity and stewardship, while some family expectations may conflict with merit-based management, formal accountability or professionalisation.

Evidence from Ghana suggests that family-owned enterprises operate using both legally expressed and customary governance systems instead of just one (Essel, 2025). However, conflicts over authority, family involvement, and accountability may also arise from such cohabitation. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend how family businesses manage these conflicts in order to understand governance in socio-culturally entrenched business environments.

1.3 Socio-Cultural Context of Ghanaian Family Enterprises

Since family-enterprise governance are integrated into the broader family, cultural, religious, and community interactions, the Ghanaian context offers a meaningful lens for analyzing these relationships. Evidence from Ghana highlights that family roles, formal regulatory expectations, religious influences, and traditional governance systems often coexist in family-owned firms (Agyenim-Boateng et al., 2023). Often the day-to-day operations are managed by family members and all financial decisions are made by employees from the family only. They often wield the power to hire and fire within these family business enterprises.

1.4 Research Problem and Gap

Even with the significant advancements in family-business research, there are still differences in how governance is understood in different institutional and cultural contexts. While formal governance, ownership, succession, professionalization, and firm results have been highlighted in a large portion of the established literature, culturally ingrained governance methods in African family businesses have gotten relatively little attention. By shedding more light on the significance of indigenous family values and their generational transfer of management authority from the past to the new, this study seeks to bring more awareness to the governance of family business enterprises.

The literature on family business enterprise is also scant on the ways socio-cultural factors such as inherited family values, expectations from extended families, family reputation, spirituality, and indigenous cultural knowledge interact with enterprise continuity, family identity, and governance systems. This study contributes to the field of family business enterprise by highlighting the role of extended families, family reputation and its spirituality.

1.5 Research Objectives

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To investigate the influence of socio-cultural customs on governance systems and practices in Ghanaian family enterprises.
- To examine the relationship among governance systems, family identity and sustainability.
- To develop a culturally rooted governance model for entrepreneurial families in Ghana.

1.6 The Context and Unit of Analysis

The study focuses on Ghanaian family businesses. The family business serves as the main analytical unit, and key informant reviews on governance methods are provided by owners, co-owners, successors, family elders, family representatives, and non-family employees. This distinction is crucial since the study aims to comprehend governance as an organizational and family-enterprise reality rather than just participant perceptions. Therefore, comparing socio-cultural and governance experiences across various family-enterprise contexts is made possible by the qualitative multiple-case approach. It also offers context-specific proof of how sociocultural factors prevails in Ghanaian family businesses' governance procedures.

Ultimately the study interprets the relationship between family identity, stewardship responsibilities, ownership, and business governance using the Socioemotional Wealth perspective, Stewardship Theory, and the Three-Circle Model. It examines how these perspectives are expressed in a sociocultural rooted Ghanaian setting rather than presuming that they function in the same way in all contexts. This offers a chance to contextualize well-established family-business beliefs using data on relationships between extended families, inherited values, reputation, spirituality, and intergenerational cultural transmission.

For family business owners, successors, managers, and advisors looking for governance solutions that uphold culturally significant values without sacrificing responsibility, professional management, and continuity, the study offers practical insights. Studies from the field of Ghanaian family business enterprise highlights that formal and traditional governance arrangements can coexist rather than be mutually exclusive (Klugah, 2025). To this end, the study changes the practical question from whether family businesses should adopt modern or traditional governance to how to properly mix the advantages of both while handling any potential conflicts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Socio-Cultural Traditions and Family-Enterprise Governance

Family-enterprise governance extends beyond formal structures such as boards, policies and managerial controls because socio-cultural values can influence authority, decision-making and relationships within the enterprise. Expectations of proper business conduct in African family companies may be influenced by familial duties, social ties, reverence for elders, spirituality, and family reputation.

Family business enterprise often utilize unofficial guidelines for regulating organizational behavior, family and cultural values are especially significant. Moral and ethical, economic, spiritual and religious, and cultural values are intentionally passed down to future generations (Kupangwa et al., 2024). Similarly, Dumbu et al. (2025) revealed that intergenerational continuity and family-business sustainability are influenced by hard labor, honesty, transparency, accountability, integrity, teamwork, religious devotion, and family ties. These results show how culturally transmitted values can support formal government by establishing standards for accountability, trust, and proper behavior.

Odame (2024) states that in Ghanaian family-owned businesses, traditional embedded decision-making methods are integrated with legal and boardroom structures. The concurrent influence of traditional values, religious orientations, and legislative frameworks on governance practices demonstrates that formalization does not always eliminate culturally embedded governance. In most instances, family enterprises often establish hybrid systems that combine traditional and modern governance techniques.

On one hand, generational disparities may lead to conflicts in decision-making, respect for elders helps maintain institutional expertise and continuity. On the other hand, relational, cohabitation, and compassion principles can encourage transparency, organizational identity, reputation, and long-term value creation, according to recent Ubuntu-oriented research (Kupangwa et al., 2026). Therefore, sociocultural traditions should be viewed as institutional resources whose impacts rely on how they are integrated into family-enterprise governance rather than as intrinsically advantageous or as barriers to contemporary government.

2.2 Governance Systems, Family Identity and Enterprise Sustainability

Traditional belief systems dictate how ownership, power, accountability, and family participation are managed over generations; thus governance systems are essential to the survival of family businesses. Similarly, the business may represent the family's ideals, reputation, and intergenerational legacy, and family identity is equally significant. Ahmad (2025) opined that through family's social capital, owner-family identification and family governance methods have a favorable impact on transgenerational sustainability. Therefore, when bolstered by efficient governance, a strong sense of family identity can foster commitment, trust, and continuity.

Another crucial link between sustainability, identity, and governance is succession. Selecting a successor is only one aspect of effective succession; other aspects include role definition, knowledge transfer, leadership development, and intergenerational responsibility preparation. According to Adekomaya and Schachtebeck (2025), succession planning is crucial for intergenerational sustainability, organizational resilience, and leadership continuity in South African family businesses. Over the past years, it has been noted that sustainable family business succession is significantly influenced by future direction, family ties, values, employees, and community development (Scholtz et al., 2024). These results support the assertion that succession should be a strategic governance process rather than something that happens only when an incumbent CEO leaves the company. As such, there is a close relationship between sustainability, family identity, and governance. While social capital and family identity can offer dedication and continuity over generations, formalization and professionalization can fortify organizational structures (Ahmad, 2025; Piyasinchai et al., 2024). While maintaining organizational resilience, succession plans often permit the transfer of leadership, expertise, and family values (Adekomaya & Schachtebeck, 2025). Therefore, a balance between professional management, family identity, leadership readiness, and intergenerational continuity is necessary for sustainable family-enterprise governance.

2.3 Culturally Grounded Governance in African Family Enterprises

Family businesses function within social and institutional contexts that influence power, relationships, and decision-making as acknowledged by culturally grounded governance (Owusu-Acheampong, 2024). Therefore, an adequate balance between legal systems and culturally rooted behaviours may be necessary for governance in African family companies. Adjabeng, (2022) stated that family-owned firms in Ghana blend formal legal and boardroom procedures with traditionally imbedded decision processes. Their results also demonstrate how legislative frameworks, religious beliefs, and traditional values all have an impact on governance practices, indicating that good governance is inextricably linked to the institutional and cultural context of the business.

Family business enterprise when properly incorporated into modern organizational procedures alongside cultural traditions can offer significant governance resources. While family reputation may promote long-term orientation and responsible behavior, indigenous values can reinforce trust, communal responsibility, and dedication. Along with adaptability and long-term investment orientation, reputation is still a particularly valuable asset for family firms, (Duah et al., 2026). However, when they erode accountability or allow family priorities to take precedence over organizational needs, culturally ingrained family bonds and allegiances can provide governance risks (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2024).

2.4 Theoretical Foundations

2.4.1 Socioemotional Wealth Perspective

An essential theoretical framework for understanding why family businesses might pursue goals that go beyond short-term financial gains is the Socioemotional Wealth (SEW) approach. The non-financial advantages that family owners receive from their businesses, such as family control and influence, identification with the company, emotional attachment, reputation, social relationships, and the desire for intergenerational continuity are how modern scholarship conceptualizes SEW (Reina et al., 2023). As a result, family businesses' governance choices may take into account not only financial factors but also the family's wish to maintain its identity, power, and heritage.

Often socio-cultural customs may become entwined with the identity and non-economic priorities of the owning family, hence, SEW is especially pertinent to the current study. Ernst et al. (2024) highlight the ways religious can intersect with SEW concerns in family business decision-making, demonstrating how values and beliefs may impact governance beyond solely economic calculations. Similarly, Ahmad (2025) stated that through family social capital, owner-family identification and family governance practices support transgenerational sustainability. Their study's results imply that governance decisions meant to maintain the business throughout generations may be influenced by the maintenance of family identity, relationships, and inherited values.

SEW seeks to protect family control, identity, or heritage which ultimately increase dedication and long-term focus. However, it often results in choices that put family interests ahead of openness, professionalism, or organizational efficacy. Heo et al. (2025) contends that because governance practices and strategic choices are influenced by the larger connections and institutional frameworks in which families operate, SEW must be understood via the social embeddedness of family enterprises. Similarly, a new synthesis of the "dark side" of family business suggests that, in some circumstances, an overemphasis on family control and heritage can lead to nepotism, cronyism, and questionable governance practices.

2.4.2 Stewardship Theory

Stewardship theory suggests that organizational players may be driven more by duty, long-term organizational welfare, and collective interests than by self-interest. This perspective is especially pertinent in family businesses since owner-managers may see themselves as stewards of the family's enterprise, reputation, and legacy. This kind of stewardship focus can promote dedication, trust, prudent resource management, and choices meant to protect the business for future generations. Stewardship theory in modern family-business research describes the unique sustainability behaviour and long-term orientation linked to family ownership (Battisti et al., 2023; Piyasinchai et al., 2024).

Professionalization and governance ties are also intimately linked to stewardship behavior. Piyasinchai et al. (2024) explained -that by simultaneously reducing opportunistic behavior and boosting stewardship behavior, professionalization can reinforce the beneficial benefits of family ownership on financial performance and sustainability reputation. This is crucial because family stewardship and professionalization should not always be seen as opposing governance philosophies. Instead, when formal structures create more defined roles, accountability, and management techniques, they can strengthen family businesses' long-term focus.

Another crucial component of stewardship-oriented governance is trust. Trust between controlling families and non-family executives can promote stewardship behavior and improve family businesses' performance in terms of sustainable development. These connections, however, rely on controlling families' willingness to award the proper authority and create governance structures that can balance the interests of the family and the organization (Zhang et al., 2025). Therefore, trust must function in conjunction with accountability, appropriate authority, and competent management.

2.4.3 Three-Circle Model

By conceptualizing family businesses as the meeting point of three interdependent systems—family, ownership, and business—the Three-Circle Model offers a helpful framework for comprehending the structural complexity of family businesses. People may work in one or more of these areas concurrently, resulting in a variety of interests, obligations, and expectations. Despite the model's basic status in family-business research, current studies continue to show its applicability in describing how changes within the family impact organizational governance, managerial responsibilities, and ownership structures (Daspit et al., 2024). The model has been expanded in recent research to account for evolving family structures and the growing complexity of modern business families.

The development of distinctive governance mechanisms such as boards of directors, family councils, and executive committees to address the unique requirements of the ownership, family, and management domains is encouraged by the growing complexity of family businesses (Parada et al., 2025). Nagy-Tóth and Nagy (2025) assert that the Three-Circle Model is still applicable for analyzing succession because leadership transitions entail interrelated changes in ownership, business management, and family ties.

The Three-Circle Model is used in this study to explain how sociocultural expectations may transcend family, ownership, and commercial borders in Ghanaian family businesses. Ownership decisions and administrative authority are influenced by kinship duties, respect for elders, and succession expectations, all of which may have their roots in the family realm. Therefore, the model is helpful in determining the points at which formal government responsibilities cross with family and sociocultural links. However, it is insufficient on its own to explain why certain Ghanaian traditions affect governance behavior because it mainly discusses structural correlations rather than the cultural meanings underlying them.

2.5 Research Gap

Formal governance frameworks, family identity, sociocultural norms, professionalization, and succession all have an impact on family-enterprise governance. Yet little study has looked at the interactions between family identity, sustainability, governance structures, and sociocultural customs in Ghanaian family businesses. The manner in which culturally entrenched practices are maintained, modified, or formalized when businesses professionalize and change generations is not adequately explained by current research. By analyzing these connections and creating a culturally grounded governance model for Ghanaian family businesses, this study fills this gap.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

The study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design to examine how socio-cultural traditions influence governance practices, family identity and sustainability within Ghanaian family enterprises. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences, interpretations and meanings attached to governance practices within their socio-cultural contexts. The multiple-case design enabled evidence to be drawn across different family enterprises while recognising the contextual characteristics of each case.

The study was interpretive in orientation and relied on semi-structured interviews to generate detailed accounts of governance arrangements, family relationships, cultural values and intergenerational continuity. This approach was particularly suitable for examining culturally embedded practices that may not be adequately captured through predetermined quantitative measures. Consistent with contemporary qualitative research principles, emphasis was placed on contextual understanding and participants' lived experiences rather than statistical generalisation (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Lim, 2024).

3.2 Study Context, Population and Unit of Analysis

The study was conducted in the Ghanaian family-enterprise context, where family ties, sociocultural values, and intergenerational expectations are often intertwined with firm ownership and administration. Those actively involved in the ownership, administration, or governance of family businesses in Ghana made up the target group. Founders, successors, and family members in administrative or decision-making positions received special attention since their firsthand experience allowed them to offer firsthand views of family dynamics, governance procedures, and the impact of sociocultural norms. Therefore, rather of aiming for statistical representativeness, participants were chosen based on their capacity to offer information pertinent to the phenomenon being studied, in line with qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

The individual participants were important informants, and the family business was the main analytical unit. This distinction was crucial because, rather than taking individual perceptions as the ultimate phenomenon of interest, the study aimed to comprehend governance systems and socio-cultural influences at the firm level. Additionally, a multiple-case approach allows for the analysis of a current occurrence in several organizational settings while maintaining contextual awareness (Yin, 2018). The study involved 15 participants in all, selected from 12 family businesses. The inclusion of several businesses allowed for the comparison of similar and dissimilar governance methods across instances and offered diversity in family-business experiences.

3.3 Sampling and Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who possessed direct knowledge and experience of the governance and socio-cultural dynamics of family enterprises. This technique was appropriate because qualitative inquiry requires the deliberate selection of information-rich participants who can provide detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2024). A maximum-variation orientation was incorporated by selecting participants from different family enterprises and roles, enabling the study to capture diverse experiences while identifying recurring patterns across cases. Similar purposive maximum-variation approaches have been applied in recent African family-business research to capture diversity in family and business experiences (Maphosa & Maphosa, 2023).

Participants were eligible where they were directly involved in the ownership, management, governance or succession processes of a family enterprise and possessed sufficient experience to discuss its family and business practices. The final sample comprised 15 participants drawn from 12 family enterprises. The participants occupied diverse roles within the enterprises, including founders and co-founders, successors, family elders, a family council member, non-family personnel and other family members involved in ownership or governance. This diversity enabled the study to capture different perspectives from the family-enterprise system. This position is consistent with the information-power principle, whereby a focused research aim, specific participant knowledge, theoretical grounding, quality of dialogue and analytical strategy influence the amount of data required (Malterud et al., 2016).

3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the 15 participants across the 12 family enterprises. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate because they provided a common structure across participants while allowing flexibility to probe individual experiences and explore culturally embedded family-business practices in greater depth. Salvato and Corbetta (2023) particularly emphasize the value of qualitative interviewing in family firms because the overlap between family and business relationships creates complex dynamics that require detailed and flexible inquiry.

An interview guide was developed around the study objectives and covered socio-cultural traditions, governance practices, family identity, succession and enterprise sustainability. Questions were predominantly open-ended, allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own terms while follow-up probes were used to clarify and deepen relevant responses. The interviews were conducted individually to encourage full disclosure of sensitive family and governance matters freely.

3.5 Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, which was appropriate for identifying and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning across participants' accounts. Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasise that reflexive thematic analysis is particularly suitable for interpretive qualitative research because themes are developed through active engagement between the researcher, the data and the research questions.

The analysis followed six iterative phases. First, the interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarisation with the data. Second, relevant segments were systematically coded according to their meanings and relationship to the research objectives. Third, related codes were grouped into potential themes reflecting patterns concerning socio-cultural traditions, governance, family identity, succession and sustainability. The themes were subsequently reviewed against the coded extracts and the wider dataset, refined and clearly defined before the final thematic structure was developed. Although presented sequentially, these phases involved movement between coding, theme development and interpretation as understanding of the data evolved (Byrne, 2022). The analytical process ultimately produced nine themes, which were organised under the three research objectives to provide a coherent structure for presenting and interpreting the findings.

The final themes were interpreted in relation to the study objectives and theoretical perspectives rather than being treated simply as summaries of frequently mentioned topics. Particular attention was given to both shared patterns and contrasting experiences across the participating family enterprises. This interpretive approach is consistent with recent methodological guidance cautioning against rigid template-driven analysis in qualitative family-business research (Köhler et al., 2024).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study to protect participants and the potentially sensitive information associated with family-enterprise relationships and governance. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement and the intended use of the information provided before voluntarily consenting to participate. Participation was voluntary, and participants retained the right to withdraw without adverse consequences. Such ongoing attention to informed consent is particularly important in qualitative interviews where participants may disclose sensitive or unanticipated information (Potthoff et al., 2023). These measures were intended to respect participants' autonomy, minimise potential harm and protect the integrity of information shared during the research process.

4. Discussion and Contributions

The findings revealed how socio-cultural traditions shaped governance practices, how governance interacted with family identity and enterprise sustainability, and how culturally embedded practices can inform governance within Ghanaian family enterprises. Participant accounts are integrated with relevant literature and the study's theoretical perspectives to provide an interpretive discussion of the findings. Reflexive thematic analysis produced nine themes organised around the three research objectives.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The 15 participants represented diverse positions within family enterprises, including founders and co-founders, successors, family elders, a family council member, non-family personnel and other family members involved in ownership or governance. Participants also varied by gender, age, ethnicity, industry, business generation and business age. The enterprises represented sectors including hospitality, agriculture, manufacturing, retail and trading, construction, logistics, funeral services, real estate and transportation. This diversity provided contrasting perspectives on how governance and socio-cultural practices operate across different family-enterprise contexts. Table 1 presents the participants' characteristics.

Table 1: Summary of Participant Characteristics

Participant Code	Role	Gender	Age Range	Ethnicity	Industry	Generation	Business Age
P1	Co-Founder/Owner	Female	46-55	Akan	Hospitality	1 st	5-10 years
P2	Founder	Male	56-65	Ewe	Agriculture	1 st	21-30 years
P3	Successor/CEO	Male	36-45	Akan	Manufacturing	2 nd	11-20 years
P4	Family Elder	Female	66+	Ga-Adangbe	Retail/Trading	1 st	31-50 years
P5	Non-Family Manager	Male	36-45	Akan	Construction	2 nd	More than 50 years
P6	Founder/Chairman	Male	56-65	Dagomba	Logistics	1 st	11-20 years
P7	Successor/Managing Director	Female	36-45	Ewe	Hospitality	2 nd	5-10 years
P8	Family Council Member	Male	46-55	Akan	Manufacturing	3 rd	31-50 years
P9	Founder	Female	66+	Akan	Funeral Services	1 st	More than 50 years
P10	Successor/CEO	Male	26-35	Ga-Adangbe	Real Estate	2 nd	11-20 years
P11	Non-Family Employee	Female	26-35	Ewe	Retail	2 nd	5-10 years
P12	Co-Founder	Male	46-55	Akan	Transportation	1 st	21-30 years
P13	Next Generation Member	Male	18-25	Akan	Hospitality	2 nd	5-10 years
P14	Family Elder	Male	66+	Ewe	Agricultures	1 st	More than 50 years
P15	Shareholder (Non-Active)	Female	46-55	Ga-Adangbe	Manufacturing	3 rd	31-50 years

4.2 Research Objectives One: Socio-Cultural Customs and Governance Systems

4.2.1 Theme 1: Ancestral Values and Foundational Principles in Governance

This theme explored how ancestral teachings, family traditions, and foundational values inherited from previous generations shape the governance systems of family businesses in Ghana. Participants consistently emphasized that governance is not merely a set of formal rules but is deeply rooted in moral and ethical principles passed down through generations. These values form the bedrock upon which business decisions, employee relations, and stakeholder interactions are built.

A co-founder and owner of a hospitality enterprise explained how inherited family values shaped her approach to governance, “my granny always tells me that in life, be truthful, be honest, be determined, and you will always have a clear conscience. Do no harm to anybody, and goodness will always come your way. These things have always shaped my life from the very day till today, and have passed these values on to my children till today.” (Participant 1).

A family employee of a retail trading business elaborated on the importance of integrity and ancestral traditions as a foundational principle, “We cannot separate our business from our ancestors. The ancestors gave us this land, this wisdom, this business. When we make decisions, we think: 'what would our ancestors think? What would they want us to do?' This is not a burden; this is guidance.” (Participant 4)

The findings indicated that inherited family values constitute an important informal governance mechanism within the participating family enterprises. Honesty, integrity, respect, hard work and ancestral guidance were not presented merely as personal values; participants described them as principles influencing leadership, decision-making and, in some cases, employee selection. This finding is consistent with recent African family-business research showing that indigenous values and culturally embedded belief systems continue to influence how business-owning families understand responsible behaviour, relationships and continuity (Kupangwa et al., 2024, 2025). From a Stewardship Theory perspective, these findings suggest that governance may be shaped by a sense of responsibility for preserving the family enterprise and its inherited values. They also resonate with the Socioemotional Wealth perspective because protecting family identity, reputation and intergenerational legacy can influence family-enterprise decisions.

4.2.2 Theme 2: The Influence of Extended Family and Community Expectations on Governance

This theme examined how extended family structures and community expectations shape governance practices in Ghanaian family businesses. Unlike the nuclear family model prevalent in Western contexts, Ghanaian family structures are expansive, encompassing multiple generations, lineages, and sometimes entire clans. These extended networks create both opportunities and challenges for business governance.

A family elder in the retail/trading sector, explained how extended-family participation influenced major governance decisions:

In our family, the extended family is the business, and the business is the extended family. You cannot separate them. Every major decision, whether to expand, whether to hire, whether to distribute profits, must be discussed with the family council. The elders must give their blessing. This is how our ancestors taught us. (Participant 4)

However, extended-family expectations also created governance tensions. A founder in the agricultural sector, described the difficulty of balancing kinship obligations with the economic interests of the enterprise:

My brother's son needs a job. My sister's husband needs support for his children's school fees. These are not requests; they are expectations. If I refuse, I am seen as someone who has forgotten where I came from. So, I must balance, how do I help my family without destroying the business? This is the hardest part of governance. (Participant 2).

A successor in the hospitality sector explained the cultural expectation of community support:

In our culture, you cannot separate your business from your community. The community gave us the land, the community provides the labour, the community buys our services. Therefore, we have a duty to give back. This is not CSR as they teach it in business school; this is who we are as a people. (Participant 7).

A non-family manager in the construction sector described the tension between family expectations and business efficiency,

Sometimes the family expects things that are not good for the business. They want to hire unqualified relatives. They want to give contracts to family members even when they are not the best. As a non-family manager, it is difficult to speak against these things because you do not want to be seen as disrespecting the family. (Participant 5).

A family elder in the agricultural sector defended the extended family's role in governance

Some people say the extended family is a burden. They say we slow down decisions, that we expect too much. But they do not understand. The extended family is our strength. When the business faces difficulty, it is the extended family that rallies together. When someone steals from the business, it is the extended family that enforces justice. The extended family is not a problem; it is the solution. (P2).

The findings indicate that extended-family and community expectations function as both governance resources and governance constraints within Ghanaian family enterprises. Family councils, elders and communal relationships provided culturally legitimate mechanisms for consultation, accountability and collective decision-making, while expectations regarding employment, financial support and preferential treatment of relatives created tensions with professional governance practices. These findings align with the Three-Circle Model, which explains governance as an interaction among family, ownership and business systems (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996), and are supported by recent African family-business research showing that kinship networks can simultaneously strengthen trust and complicate merit-based governance (Agyapong & Acquah, 2021; Maphosa & Maphosa, 2023; Kupangwa et al., 2025). Collectively, the evidence suggests that effective governance in Ghanaian family enterprises requires balancing legitimate family participation with clearer boundaries around managerial authority and resource allocation.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Structural Hybridization - Modern Governance with Cultural Sensitivity

This theme examined how Ghanaian family enterprises create hybrid governance structures that combine modern business practices with culturally sensitive approaches. One participant described the automation and computerization of governance processes,

We have structures put in place; our place is more automated. Everything is computerized. So, if one way or the other, a decision needs to be made, we quickly get a signal, and then we put our heads together. We have other investors, external investors, that we quickly put heads together to think through the way forward, and then that's it, we make the best decisions that will benefit all of us. (Participant 14).

A family council member in the manufacturing sector described a more structured governance system that incorporates cultural provisions,

"We have a family constitution that we developed with the help of a consultant. It defines the roles of family members, the criteria for joining the business, the succession process, and how disputes are resolved. But we also have cultural provisions, for example, the elders have a special role in reviewing major decisions, and there are provisions for supporting extended family members." (Participant 8).

A successor in the real estate sector described a progressive approach to governance hybridization, *"My father was very traditional; he made all decisions, consulted elders, and kept everything in the family. But I have seen the problems that it creates. Now, I am introducing more formal structures, a board, regular meetings, and written policies. But I am doing it slowly, with respect for my father and the elders. I am not rejecting tradition; I am building on it."* (Participant 10).

These accounts indicate that professionalisation within the participating enterprises did not necessarily involve replacing traditional governance practices. Recent studies indicate that cultural and family values remain embedded in strategic decision-making and can be deliberately transmitted and institutionalised as enterprises evolve (Kupangwa et al., 2025).

4.3 Research Objective Two: Governance systems, family identity, and sustainability

4.3.1 Theme 4: Reputation, Family Name, and Identity as Governance Anchors

This theme examined how family reputation, name, and identity serve as anchoring mechanisms for governance decisions. In Ghanaian culture, the family name carries significant social capital, and protecting this reputation is a powerful motivator for governance practices.

A non-family employee in a third-generation manufacturing enterprise, explained how the family name influenced quality-related decisions; *"We cannot afford to cut corners because our family name is on everything we do. If we produce poor-quality goods, people will say, 'Ah, the Aidoo family does not know how to do business.' This is more important to us than making extra profit."* (Participant 15)

A next-generation member of a hospitality family enterprise, emphasized that inappropriate business conduct could affect the reputation of the wider family; *If you behave badly in business, the whole family suffers. Our competitors will talk, the community will talk, and the family name will be damaged for generations. This is why we are so careful about every decision we make."* (Participant 13)

A founder and chairman in the logistics sector, described reputation as an important consideration when evaluating business opportunities; "We will not take a contract if we cannot deliver quality. It is better to lose money than to damage the family name. Our reputation is the most valuable asset we have." (Participant 15)

The findings indicate the value placed on family reputation as an informal governance mechanism, shaping standards of quality, integrity, strategic decision-making and stakeholder relationships. Kupangwa et al. (2023) identify business reputation as one of the values underlying strategic decisions in indigenous African family businesses and argue that such values can contribute to business outcomes and long-term survival. The findings also resonate with the Socioemotional Wealth (SEW) perspective, particularly its emphasis on family identification with the enterprise and preservation of family legacy. In the present study, participants' willingness to protect the family name, even where this could involve foregoing immediate financial opportunities, illustrates how non-financial family considerations can influence governance choices.

4.3.2 Theme 5: Succession Planning and Generational Preparedness

This theme examined how succession planning and generational preparedness link governance systems to family identity and business sustainability. The findings reveal a complex picture where succession is universally recognized as critical for sustainability, yet formal succession planning remains underdeveloped, with participants relying on informal preparation methods.

A retail trading family older employee emphasized the importance of family succession, "This business is the Asante family's legacy. It must stay in the family. I have trained my children from childhood to understand the business. Even if they have other careers, the business is still part of their identity." (Participant 9)

A founder in an agricultural business enterprise, reflected on the consequences of inadequate succession preparation and the need to plan more deliberately for the next transition; "The transition from my father to me was difficult because we had not planned for it. We learned from that experience. Now I am planning for my own succession, even though my children are not interested yet." (Participant 2)

A non-family manager in a family construction business discussed the potential role of non-family managers in succession, "Sometimes the family cannot provide the right leadership. In those cases, I believe they should consider non-family managers. But in Ghana, this is difficult because family members often feel threatened by outsiders. The key is to have a plan, a clear role for the family, and a clear role for the non-family manager." (Participant 5)

The findings suggest that generational preparedness involved more than identifying a future leader; it encompassed the transfer of values, business knowledge, family identity and commitment to the enterprise. At the same time, successor disinterest and informal preparation created potential vulnerabilities for continuity. This interpretation is consistent with Owusu-Acheampong et al. (2024), whose review of succession planning in Sub-Saharan African family businesses identifies family dynamics and distinctive socio-cultural conditions among the factors shaping succession processes.

The findings also indicate that succession within these enterprises was culturally embedded rather than exclusively managerial. The use of stories, proverbs, family socialization and inherited values illustrates how successor preparation can involve transferring the meaning and identity associated with the enterprise alongside managerial responsibilities.

4.3.3 Theme 6: Governance Structures and Business Sustainability

This theme explored how governance structures, both formal and informal, contribute to the long-term sustainability of family businesses. Sustainability encompasses financial viability, intergenerational continuity, and cultural preservation. An older family member in the retail/trading sector described how business growth created the need to move from highly personalized governance towards more formalised procedures; "When I started the business, I did not have anything in writing. Everything was in my head, in my heart. But as the business grew, I realized that I needed things in writing. Now, we have policies for everything: employment, salaries, promotions, succession. This protects the business and protects the family." (Participant 14)

A hospitality co-owner described formal employment and HR systems, "There are offer letters that are being given. We even go further to the CID headquarters to take fingerprints, get police reports on every staff, and cameras and video coverage are all over. The only place you don't put cameras is inside the bedrooms and the washrooms, or the bathrooms, even the kitchens." (Participant 1).

An agricultural family business also had a family member who is a manager described the challenges of implementing better governance; "I know we need better governance. We need a proper board of governance, we need better succession planning, and we need to formalize our family involvement. But implementing these changes is difficult. There is resistance from older members of the family, there is fear of disrupting current operations, and there is a lack of understanding of what good governance looks like." (Participant 2). The relationship between governance and sustainability is also supported by recent empirical evidence. Ahmad (2025) found that family governance practices and owner-family identity contribute to transgenerational sustainability, with family social capital playing an important mediating role.

4.4 Research Objective 3: Culturally rooted governance model

4.4.1 Theme 7: Spiritual and Religious Integration in Governance

This theme examined how spiritual beliefs and religious practices are integrated into family business governance. In Ghana, where religion plays a central role in daily life, it is unsurprising that spiritual considerations influence business governance.

A managing director in a family hospitality industry strongly emphasized the role of prayer in her business; "Oh yes, as a Christian, as I am, as an evangelist, as a Methodist, we pray. Fortunately for me, I'm surrounded by a lot of Christian workers. I have one Muslim, one person he also prays, so we give room for everybody to practice their religion, so whilst we are having our morning devotions and all that, anytime he also prays five times in a day, we do that." (Participant 12)

The owner of a family funeral services business described the role of prayer in decision-making, "I cannot make a major decision without prayer. It is not just about asking God for guidance; it is about seeking spiritual wisdom. In our culture, we believe that the spiritual world influences the physical world. So, before we invest, before we expand, before we hire, we pray." (Participant 9)

An owner of a family agricultural business enterprise described religious obligations in the following statement; "as Christians, we cannot engage in dishonest practices. We must pay fair wages, treat people fairly, and honor our commitments. These are not just business principles; they are religious obligations." (P2).

These findings broadly support recent African family-business research identifying spiritual and religious values as part of the value systems embedded within business-owning families (Abaddi, 2025). However, the present findings extend this argument by showing that spirituality may operate differently across enterprises rather than constituting a single culturally prescribed governance mechanism. From a Stewardship Theory perspective, religious and moral obligations may reinforce responsible conduct and concern for stakeholders.

4.4.2 Theme 8: Cultural Wisdom as Governance Framework

This theme examined how cultural wisdom, including proverbs, sayings, and traditional teachings, serves as a governance framework in Ghanaian family businesses. Proverbs and wise sayings are central to Ghanaian culture and provide practical guidance for business governance.

A family hospitality co-owner shared two proverbs that always serve as a guidance principle in the business governance,

There is this proverb in Fante: 'obra pa ogya owura kwan.' Adwene papa, nhyira ta echire. The explanation I got was that if you have a good mind, even if the devil himself is planning something negative against you, because you have a good mind, that negative plot against you will turn to something good for you. If you have a good character, that good attitude will always lead you everywhere you go in life. (Participant 11)

A non-family manager in a family construction business described the importance of community support, "*Woforo dua pa a, na yepia wo', when you climb a good tree, we give you support. This means that if you are a good leader, people will support you. This is why we must govern with integrity and fairness.*" (Participant 5)

The findings demonstrate that cultural wisdom functioned as a mechanism through which governance values were communicated and transmitted within the participating family enterprises. The emphasis on integrity, fairness, transparency and intergenerational learning reflects recent evidence that values in indigenous African family businesses shape behaviour and strategic decision-making (Kupangwa et al., 2023). More specifically, Kupangwa et al. (2024) found that African business-owning families deliberately transmit moral, ethical and cultural values to the next generation. Thus, the contribution of cultural wisdom lies in complementing formal governance structures with culturally meaningful principles that family members understand and can transmit across generations.

4.4.3 Theme 9: Balancing Tradition and Modernity in Governance

This theme explored how Ghanaian family enterprises navigated the tension between traditional cultural practices and modern business requirements in their governance approaches. Participants demonstrated strategies for integrating traditional values with contemporary governance demands.

A co-owner in a family hospitality industry described the challenges of adapting to technological changes while maintaining traditional values, "*Gone are the days we're using typewriters, now everything is being done on your phone and AI. In the AI era today, in the next five years, nobody knows what will come. So, in a technological world, you should expect anything, as long as the world is revolving. You should also be able to re-engineer your business.*" (Participant 14).

A family manufacturing co-owner emphasized the need for balance, *"You cannot succeed in Ghana if you ignore either tradition or modernity. The business that tries to be purely Western will fail because it will lose community support. The business that tries to be purely traditional will fail because it cannot compete. The challenge is to find the middle way."* (Participant 3).

This finding closely reflects Tetteh et al. (2023), who found that Ghanaian family-owned businesses blend traditionally embedded governance practices with formal legal and organizational arrangements. Their study further demonstrates that traditional values, family relationships and regulatory requirements can coexist in shaping governance practices. The present study extends this evidence by showing that the traditional–modern balance is not limited to governance structures but also involves technological adaptation, professional management and decisions concerning family participation.

Table 1: Summary of Overarching Themes, Major Themes and Interpretative Comments

Objectives	Major Themes	Participant Codes	Interpretative Comment
Socio-Cultural Foundations of Governance in Ghanaian Family Enterprises	Theme 1: Ancestral Values and Foundational Principles in Governance	P1, P4, P6	Participants explained that ancestral teachings, honesty, integrity, respect, hard work, and moral values guide governance decisions. Business leadership is viewed as protecting the family legacy rather than only pursuing financial gains.
	Theme 2: Extended Family and Community Expectations	P2, P4, P5	Participants indicated that extended family relationships and community expectations influence business decisions, employment, resource allocation, and responsibilities. These relationships create both support systems and governance challenges.
	Theme 3: Structural Hybridization – Combining Tradition and Modern Governance	P1, P6, P8, P10	Participants revealed that family enterprises integrate formal governance systems such as policies, boards, and documentation with traditional practices such as elder consultation and family involvement.
Family Identity, Governance Systems, and Sustainability	Theme 4: Reputation, Family Name, and Identity as Governance Anchors	P5, P6, P13, P15	Participants emphasized that the family name serves as a governance mechanism because business decisions affect family reputation, trust, and social standing.
	Theme 5: Succession Planning and Generational Preparedness	P2, P4, P6, P7	Participants highlighted that succession is necessary for continuity, although many businesses depend on informal mentoring, storytelling, and values transfer rather than structured succession processes.
	Theme 6: Governance Structures and Business Sustainability	P1, P2, P4, P12	Participants indicated that formal governance structures, written policies, and clear procedures strengthen sustainability, reduce conflicts, and support long-term survival.
	Theme 7: Spiritual and Religious Integration in Governance	P2, P7, P9	Participants described spirituality and religion as important influences on ethical decisions, leadership behaviour, employee relationships, and business direction.
	Theme 8: Cultural Wisdom as a Governance Framework	P1, P4, P5, P8	Participants explained that proverbs, traditional sayings, and indigenous knowledge provide guidance for leadership, conflict management, accountability, and transmission of values.

Table 1: Summary of Overarching Themes, Major Themes and Interpretative Comments

Objectives	Major Themes	Participant Codes	Interpretative Comment
Developing a Culturally Rooted Governance and Adaptive Sustainability	Theme 9: Spiritual and Religious Integration in Governance	P2, P7, P9	Participants described spirituality and religion as important influences on ethical decisions, leadership behaviour, employee relationships, and business direction.
	Theme 10: Cultural Wisdom as a Governance Framework	P1,P4,P5 P8	Participants explained that proverbs, traditional sayings, and indigenous knowledge provide guidance for leadership, conflict management, accountability, and transmission of values.
	Theme 11: Balancing Tradition and Modernity in Governance	P1, P3, P5	Participants showed that sustainable governance requires balancing cultural traditions with modern approaches such as technology, professional management, and formal structures.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The qualitative multiple-case study examined how socio-cultural customs influence governance systems, the relationship among governance systems, family identity and sustainability, and the development of culturally rooted governance within Ghanaian family enterprises. Semi-structured interviews with 15 participants drawn from 12 family enterprises generated nine themes organised around the three research objectives.

Regarding the first objective, the findings showed that inherited values such as honesty, integrity, respect and responsibility provided important reference points for governance. Extended-family and community expectations also influenced decision-making, employment and resource allocation, creating both support and governance tensions. Participants further described hybrid governance arrangements in which formal mechanisms, including governing boards, policies and family constitutions coexisted with culturally embedded practices such as consultation with older family generation.

For the second objective, family reputation and identity emerged as important governance anchors, while succession was associated with the transfer of leadership responsibilities, business knowledge and family values across generations. Formal governance structures were also perceived as increasingly important for managing growth, succession and potential family conflict, although the degree of formalisation varied among the enterprises.

The third objective reviewed the spirituality, religious values, proverbs and how inherited cultural teachings influenced governance in different ways across participants. The findings further revealed an ongoing need to balance culturally meaningful traditions with technological change and professional management. Collectively, the findings suggested that governance within the participating Ghanaian family enterprises was neither exclusively traditional nor entirely formalized, but reflected context-specific combinations of cultural values, family relationships and contemporary governance practices.

5.3 Recommendation

Formalize Culturally Appropriate Governance Structures: Family businesses should develop hybrid governance frameworks combining formal policies with cultural practices. Family constitutions should incorporate consultation with older generation the family, extended family provisions, and documented succession plans to ensure clarity and accountability across generations.

Prioritize Systematic Succession Planning: Succession planning should begin early with formal documentation of leadership transition processes. Mentorship programs, gradual responsibility delegation, and values transmission through storytelling and practical exposure preparation of successors while maintaining family identity.

Leverage Cultural and Spiritual Values: Family businesses should intentionally integrate proverbs, indigenous wisdom, and religious practices into governance. Prayer, morning devotions, and inclusive accommodation of diverse religious beliefs foster ethical conduct, trust, and organizational commitment.

Engage Community as Strategic Partners: Community engagement should be recognized as a governance responsibility, not just corporate social responsibility. Support for local infrastructure, employment, and cultural events builds social capital, trust, and reciprocal business support.

Invest in Professional Development and Documentation: Family businesses should provide governance training for members and employees while documenting policies, roles, and procedures. Written documents ensure consistency, reduce disputes, and preserve knowledge beyond leadership transitions.

5.4 Limitations of The Study

This study has several limitations. The small sample of fifteen participants from twelve family businesses limits generalizability to all Ghanaian family businesses. The focus on businesses primarily in the Greater Accra and Ashanti regions does not account for regional variations in governance practices. Self-reported interview data may be subject to social desirability bias, where participants present their governance practices favorably. The cross-sectional design cannot capture governance evolution over time. The qualitative methodology cannot establish causal relationships between governance practices and business outcomes. Despite these limitations, the findings offer valuable insights into family business governance in Ghana's socio-cultural context and provide a foundation for future quantitative and longitudinal studies.

Future research should employ quantitative methods with larger samples to establish generalizable findings on family business governance in Ghana. Longitudinal studies are needed to track governance evolution over time and across generations. Comparative research across ethnic groups, industry sectors, and geographic regions would identify cultural and contextual variations in governance practices. Studies examining the relationship between governance practices and financial performance would provide evidence for policy development. Additionally, research exploring gender dynamics, technology adoption, and the effectiveness of hybrid governance approaches would offer valuable insights for family business sustainability.

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