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Organizational Dynamics

Volume 21, Issue 3, Winter 1993, Pages 59-71

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[https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616\(93\)90071-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(93)90071-8)

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A psychoanalyst looks at the behavior patterns in family firms, finding dramas that resemble both soap operas and Greek tragedies.

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The Dynamics of Family Controlled Firms: The Good and the Bad News

MANFRED F. R. KETS de VRIES

*That business was built specifically for my family.
Anybody who wants to come in, there's an open place for him.
If the business is destroyed as a result of that, so be it.*

—SAM STEINBERG

Once upon a time, there was a potter who made the most beautiful pottery in the world. Everyone who saw his pottery immediately fell in love with it and wanted to buy it. As a result, the potter's shop flourished and became known far and wide. After some time, demand for his products became so great that he found it impossible to do all the work himself. The potter started a factory and hired people to help. As the years went by, he employed more and more workers. Eventually, the potter spent all day managing the factory. He no longer had time to make pottery. Sometimes he longed for the good old days when things seemed so much simpler and he did everything himself. He didn't really like to be so dependent on others, since very few people could live up to his standards of excellence.

Fortunately, his children were now older and had begun giving him a hand. They be-

came increasingly helpful in managing the business. Although the potter was reluctant to let go, he began to realize that he really had no choice. His health and endurance were no longer what they used to be. But he wanted to keep the business in the family. He liked to see the family name on the building. For him, the business was a way of keeping the family together. After all, the reason for having worked so hard was to create a better life for all of them.

When the potter died, he left the company to his two sons and only daughter. The pottery plant and the sales outlets continued to prosper under their guidance. More and more plants opened. The operation expanded across borders and diversified into related products such as glass, crystal, and silverware.

When the children's children became older, they were also brought into the busi-

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