

Call for papers (Sinergie-SIMA 2026 Management Conference)

Thematic group: [Small & Family Business](#)

Special session: Leadership for Sustainable Value Creation in Small and Family Firms, in partnership with [ISBE \(Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship\)](#)

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Proposed Journal outlets: The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Issues of sustainability have become a central challenge for contemporary organizations. As businesses are tasked with the balancing of economic viability, social value, and environmental responsibilities over time, their leadership must navigate the paradoxical tensions these complex goals bring (Schad and Smith, 2019). This challenge may be particularly salient, and even familiar, in small and family-oriented firms (Rovelli et al., 2025; Spence, 2016), where strategic decisions are closely tied to organizational continuity, long-term survival, and the values of key decision-makers (Stafford et al., 2013). In these contexts, leadership plays a crucial role in shaping how sustainability is understood, prioritized, and implemented (Bauweraerts et al., 2022; Rovelli et al., 2025)

Unlike nonfamily organizations, family firms have been found to blend formal leadership structures with informal authority, shared values, and intergenerational relationships (Edwards and Meliou, 2015; Mussolino and Calabrò, 2014). This shapes strategic choices and organizational behavior (Rovelli et al., 2025). Moreover, family firm leadership is often characterized through its socioemotional and relational context, affecting motivation, decision-making, and risk-taking in ways that differ from other organizational forms (Berrone et al., 2012; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007). Leading some to suggest that family firm leadership will be more sustainability-oriented in its approach (Cruz et al., 2014; Brumana et al., 2024). Often, it is the affective attachment and a shared sense of responsibility of family firm leaders that motivate sustainable behaviors in their entrepreneurial endeavor (Hadjielias and Discua Cruz, 2024). However, these considerations are equally relevant in small firms, regardless of family-orientation, where informal leadership structures and close interpersonal relationships shape decision-making and resource allocation, making leadership practices central to organizational survival, legitimacy, and long-term growth (Battisti et al., 2019; Taymaz, 2005). These dynamics give rise to distinctive leadership processes in small and family firm that shape sustainability strategies and outcomes while being responsive to the context of the business (Rovelli et al., 2025; Fries et al., 2021).

This themed session aims to advance our understanding of how leadership and sustainability in small and family businesses unfolds. We do this by offering a comprehensive examination of the leadership characteristics, roles, behaviors, and practices in small and family firms as they navigate the challenges of sustainability. We invite contributions that explore how leaders' individual

attributes, values, and experiences, as well as the collective, formal or informal, leadership arrangements, shape the interpretation, implementation, and long-term embedding of sustainability-oriented strategies and outcomes. This call looks to advance theory and practice in sustainable leadership within small and family firms but also consider what can be learned from small and family firm leaders as we look for broader solutions to the grand challenge of sustainability.

Possible research questions

We invite submissions that address a broad range of topics, including but not limited to:

- How do generational and legacy aspects influence leadership succession and the integration of sustainability priorities in SMEs and family firms?
- What role do gender, diversity, and team composition play in shaping sustainable leadership practices in SMEs and family firms?
- How do family (founders and descendants) and nonfamily leaders differ in leadership styles, psychological traits, and decision-making related to sustainability?
- How do specific leadership traits and behaviors influence sustainability-oriented organizational outcomes in SMEs and family firms?
- How do leadership cohesion, conflict, and informal governance mechanisms impact sustainability performance in SMEs and family firms?
- Are new and hybrid leadership forms emerging to address sustainability challenges in evolving family business ecosystems?
- What role(s) does spatial/social embeddedness play in small and family business approaches to sustainability?

We welcome quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, and conceptual contributions.

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