Foreword

A snappy, incisive and thoroughly researched book, Women in Family Business Leadership Roles is a useful academic tool for those keen to understand how and why women operate in family businesses, a domain so often unwisely and mistakenly assumed to be run by men, with their wives labouring over the bookwork after finishing the dishes and their children’s homework. Women in Family Business Leadership Roles successfully explodes that myth.

Professors Barrett and Moores are leading researchers into the machinations of the family firm. They combine the latest academic research with 13 case studies and explore various theoretical approaches to understanding the role of women in a family business, a domain where they have been quietly achieving for some time. They carefully examine an international sample of case studies and the characteristics of leadership and how they apply to women. The experience of innovation and the challenge of incorporating radical innovation as a means for preparing for the future are discussed, with deference to the expressed desire for the family firm to continue to exude the family feel with all its special advantages.

Barrett and Moores detail the factors which have led some to success, and pick over and examine the pitfalls. Social theories are compared and contrasted to help explain the differences between men and women, as well as how they behave generally and within the context of small, medium and large family firms.

Inevitably the book also explores female archetypes and the importance of popular perceptions of successful women—both for the women entrepreneurs themselves and for others. This text will be extremely useful in helping women—and their families—understand the dynamics of their family business.

Business is a life spent in detail, often described as the ‘weeds’. It has to be, of course. Financial survival is a very detail-dependent business, and wrong assumptions, sloppy processes and unnecessary risk taking can all irrevocably damage a family business, especially one with limited financial reserves. Business people inevitably spend most of their time caught up in the detail; they often describe this as working for the business instead of the business working for them.

Women in Family Business Leadership Roles is an opportunity for women to step outside the all-consuming detail, look for the patterns of success and failure and understand when this is the result of gender or of other factors. It
is a diagnostic, an explanation and a confirmation. I know all that will be welcomed by those in small business who often live and work in isolation from others in similar situations.

The case studies and examples of entrepreneurship and commercial successes are accompanied by a detailed look at how being female has made this different, if indeed it has. The book explores the lack of research on women in business and management and argues that the invisibility of women in business partly resides in the focus of business and communities on the ‘heroic’ approach. Previous analyses of women’s experiences as entrepreneurs had been inadequate, further discouraging more investment in women.

The book presents a dazzling display of research exploring whether, and to what extent, women and their businesses differ from men and men-owned businesses; allegations about difference in management styles and risk adversity are also featured. While it does not deny the importance of having more women representatives in business, it certainly questions the impact of gender on their success. It points to a number of barriers, such as family background and family responsibilities, as well as those accursed assumptions about how women should behave and what makes them so special.

The subject areas are broad, but the figures, while more modest, build a convincing case for female entrepreneurship. The book starts from the premise that the successful entrepreneur must combine risk-taking with innovation and prudent management, and explores how women contribute to this within the confines of often small family businesses. It relies on the experiences and stories of women in family businesses, what sort of innovators they are and how women understand and use the continuity of ‘sameness’ so often associated with the successful family business.

But the book is much more than a theoretical trawl through the research gaps. It looks at the characteristics of leadership and how they apply to women, the experience of innovation as a means for preparing for the future and how the family business can be a way of incorporating radical innovation.

It is an expansive and detailed insight into what lies behind the successful businessperson. Men can learn as much from this book as women—almost.

Pru Goward
Leader, politician and passionate advocate for women in the mainstream