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Management Accounting as a Strategic Decision Making Tool: An Exploratory Study of Growth Strategy Formulation PT Patra Anugrah Bakti

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ABSTRACT: Project-oriented family companies are faced with the need to integrate economic information, field experience, project risk, and family value in strategic decision-making. This research aims to examine the use, meaning, and integration of management accounting information in strategic decisions for the growth of PT Patra Anugrah Bakti and describe how the dynamics of the family company are reflected in the process. An interpretive qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design was applied through semi-structured interviews with four key informants, namely the Owner, Director, Finance/Accounting section, and Operational Manager, strengthened by non-participant observation and review of internal company documents. Data was processed through interpretive thematic analysis assisted by NVivo software as an instrument for organizing and tracing data. The results of the study show that information on project costs, cost budget plans, cost realization, margins, cash flows, and receivables were utilized before, during, and after the implementation of the project, and were interpreted along with field experience, market conditions, operational capacity, risks, customer relations, reputation, and business sustainability orientation. The combination underpins related diversification decisions, tender pricing, cost control, and project profitability evaluation. Even if the final authority rests with the Owner, the decision-making process still involves cross-functional considerations, while delays in formal information magnify a temporary reliance on direct communication and practical experience.

KEYWORDS : *management accounting, strategic decisions, growth strategies, project-based family companies, information delays*

I. INTRODUCTION

Changing business environments, uncertainty of operational costs, and business sustainability demands are driving companies to make adequate information-based strategic decisions. In this context, management accounting develops into *Strategic Management Accounting* (SMA), which expands the scope of information from just internal costs to customer, competitor, market, planning, and performance control data. The ability of organizations to utilize SMA is greatly influenced by the quality of information systems and the relationship of accounting functions with other parts of the organization [1].

However, the availability of accounting information does not necessarily determine the decision. Cost, margin, and cash flow figures acquire meaning only when they are associated with the operational context, including field experience, market conditions, resource capacity, and project risk. This reality is even more complex for project-oriented companies, as companies must combine historical data with practical knowledge to assess risks that have not been fully captured in formal reports. The combination of formal and informal control mechanisms becomes an integral part of the process [2]. In family businesses, the complexity increases because decisions are not solely oriented towards financial goals, but are also influenced by the owner's authority, reputation, long-term relationships, and business sustainability. Previous studies have shown that management accounting tools can act as a means of communication that bridges family perspectives and managerial perspectives in the professionalization process [3]. However, a review of the literature on management accounting in family companies still highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how the peculiarities of family values are reflected in day-to-day management and control accounting practices. In addition, the concept *socioemotional wealth* explains that economic and non-economic goals are intertwined in family company decision-making, so that strategic decisions cannot be understood only through the framework of economic rationality alone [4].

The research gap that emerges from this description lies in the inadequate procedural explanation of how management accounting information is used, interpreted, debated, and integrated by organizational actors at the moment of strategic decision-making, especially in project-based family companies. Studies of the role of SMA have so far been dominated by a systematic literature review approach that emphasizes the strategic implications of SMA in general, without exploring how the process takes place in a real and real organizational context [5].

A single, exploratory case study approach was chosen precisely to fill this gap, as this design allows researchers to explore in depth how organizational actors actually use and interpret management accounting information in actual decision-making moments, rather than simply reconstructing general patterns from different contexts. This kind of depth of search is seen as more relevant to understand situational and value-laden processes, especially in family companies whose decisions cannot always be explained through the framework of economic rationality alone.

This phenomenon is relevant to PT Patra Anugrah Bakti, a family company engaged in construction and infrastructure services, which is shifting its growth direction from land clearing work to strengthening paving and road maintenance work [6]. This change in business direction is also reflected in the dynamics of the company's turnover, profit, and margin during the period 2015 to 2024, which shows that the shift is not just a technical adjustment, but a strategic decision that demands the availability of more detailed information on material costs, fuel oil, heavy equipment, labor, mobilization, and project risks as the basis for business diversification decisions. Tender pricing, and evaluation of project profitability.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze how management accounting systems and practices are used, interpreted, and integrated in the strategic decision-making process related to the growth strategy at PT Patra Anugrah Bakti, as well as understand how the dynamics of the family company are reflected in the process. This research is expected to enrich the understanding of *Strategic Management Accounting* and *Management Control Systems* as a practice that is interpreted in the decision process, not just a stand-alone variable, as well as provide a contextual contribution to the study of management accounting in project-based family companies in Indonesia, especially in the construction and infrastructure sectors which have received limited empirical attention so far. in depth.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with an interpretive paradigm and an exploratory case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the purpose of the research is not to test the statistical relationships between variables, but to understand the processes, experiences, and meanings built by organizational actors when using management accounting information in strategic decision-making (Busetto et al., 2020). The design of the exploratory case study is seen as appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon in a real context, by utilizing various sources of evidence and paying attention to the relationship between the phenomenon and the organizational context in which it occurs [7].

The research was carried out at PT Patra Anugrah Bakti, a project-based family company engaged in construction and infrastructure in East Kalimantan. The location was chosen deliberately because the company is experiencing a shift in growth direction from land clearing activities to strengthening paving and road maintenance work, thereby increasing the need for cost information, tender estimation, cash flow control, and profitability assessment. The case limits in this study are focused on three strategic decision domains, namely the diversification of related businesses, the determination of project tender prices, and the evaluation of the profitability of projects or business lines [8].

The research informants were selected purposively based on their role and direct involvement in the strategic decision-making process, namely the Owner, Director, Finance/Accounting section, and Operational Manager. The four informants represent the ownership and strategic direction perspective, financial considerations, and field operational conditions so as to provide a comprehensive picture of the decision process being studied.

Data was collected through three complementary techniques, namely semi-structured in-depth interviews with each key informant, non-participant observations of operational activities and internal company meetings, as well as documentation in the form of project cost data, cost budget plans, cost realization, and company financial statements during the relevant period. The combination of these three techniques allows researchers to obtain a comprehensive picture and verify each other between data sources.

The collected data is then analyzed using interpretive thematic analysis through several stages, namely data familiarization, initial coding, grouping of codes into analytical categories, development and review of themes, to the determination of integrative themes that answer the formulation of research problems. NVivo software is used as a data organization, search, and visualization tool, not as a sole determinant of the validity of research findings.

The reliability of the research is maintained through four main criteria, namely credibility strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods, transferability through rich and detailed descriptions of the research context, dependability through audit traces of the entire research process, and confirmability through the researcher's reflexivity to possible subjective biases in the data interpretation process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The ethical aspects of research are also strictly considered through the consent of participants before the interview, maintaining the confidentiality of the company's financial data, and disguising the identity of the informant in reporting the research results.

III. RESULTS

3.1 Overview and Dynamics of the Company's Financial Performance

PT Patra Anugrah Bakti is a family company engaged in construction and infrastructure services in East Kalimantan. Its business activities evolved from land clearing work to paving and road maintenance, a shift that took place gradually as land clearing job opportunities narrowed and demand for road work increased from the company's existing customers. The company's financial data in the range of 2015 to 2024 shows three phases of business structure changes that take place in stages. The first phase, from 2015 to 2018, was marked by the dominance of land clearing work with business margins that tended to fluctuate. The second phase, from 2019 to 2022, is a transition period when road paving work begins to contribute revenue so that the two business lines run in parallel. The third phase, from 2023 to 2024, shows that road paving work is increasingly dominant accompanied by an increase in overall business margins. A summary of turnover, profit, and margin movements in the three phases is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Dynamics of Turnover, Profit, and Margin of PT Patra Anugrah Bakti per Business Phase (2015-2024)

Phase	Period	Average Turnover (IDR billion)	Average Profit (IDR billion)	Average Margin	Business Characteristics
I	2015-2018	27,25	2,17	9,17%	Dominance of land clearing work
I	2019-2022	42,64	3,39	7,88%	Transition, two lines of business running in parallel
II	2023-2024	35,86	5,22	14,53%	Dominant paving and road maintenance work

Source: Processed by researchers from financial data of PT Patra Anugrah Bakti, 2026.

The patterns in Table 1 are not intended to prove a causal relationship between the diversion of business direction and the increase in margins, considering that this study uses an interpretive qualitative approach that does not aim to test statistical hypotheses. The data serves to provide historical context that changes in the composition of work are taking place simultaneously with the increasing need for more detailed cost information, more accurate tender estimates, and more structured project control and assessment.

3.2 Informant Profiles and Thematic Analysis Process

The research data was collected from four key informants representing different positions in the organizational structure, namely Owner, Director, Finance/Accounting section, and Operations Manager. The four positions were chosen purposively because of their direct involvement in the strategic decision-making process related to the company's growth. The focus of information for each informant is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Informant Profile and Research Information Focus

Code	Role	Key Information Focus
INF-1	Owner	Growth direction, final results, strategic risks, family values
INF-2	Director	Strategy coordination, tender feasibility, project evaluation
INF-3	Finance/Accounting	Cost Budget Plan, cost realization, cash, receivables, margin
INF-4	Operations Manager	Field conditions, tools, fuel oil, productivity

Source: Processed by researchers from interview results, 2026.

Interview data, non-participant observations, and internal documentation were analyzed through interpretive thematic analysis assisted by *NVivo* software. Word frequency search, *word cloud*, *tree map*, and *hierarchy chart* are used as text research tools, not as the sole determinant of theme validity. The results of the coding showed that the terms cost, project, information, decision, and field appeared dominantly and interrelated, thus directing the researcher to three layers of meaning, namely the economic-operational layer, the informational-coordinating layer, and the strategic-family layer. The triangulation between data sources then resulted in seven research themes which are described in the following sections.

3.3 Related Growth and Diversification Strategies

The change in the direction of growth of PT Patra Anugrah Bakti emerged in response to the limited opportunities for land clearing jobs and the need to obtain a more stable source of income. The owner explained that the company began to develop the road paving and maintenance business because the opportunities for land clearing were increasingly limited, while *"the need for road construction and maintenance is still quite high"* (INF-1, 2026). Documentation of operational processes in both types of work is shown in Figure 1.


(a) Initial conditions and road opening (b) Land leveling using a bulldozer
(c) Excavation and embankment formation (d) Final result of the access road construction

Figure 1. Documentation of the Operational Process of PT Patra Anugrah Bakti Land Clearing Work

The Director emphasized that the decision is a combination of opportunity considerations and sustainability considerations, because *"if you only rely on land clearing, the income risk becomes great"* (INF-2, 2026). The transition is classified as diversification related because the paving and maintenance work of the road continues to utilize heavy equipment, labor, and field experience that the company already has. Despite sharing the same resources, paving work demands more detailed data on material volume, transport distance, fuel consumption, tool hours, and productivity. The diversification decision was made through a combination of input from the Owner, Director, Finance/Accounting section, and Operational Manager, taking into account equipment capacity, labor, past costs, and market opportunities for road works which are considered more repetitive than land clearing work.

The transition process did not take place through a single decision moment, but rather through a series of repetitive informal discussions between the Owner, Director, and Operations department during the initial paving of the roads. Each time a new project is acquired, the four parties review the adequacy of equipment, the availability of skilled labor, and the readiness of funding before deciding to increase business capacity. This gradual decision-making pattern reflects the family-owned company's prudence in maintaining a balance between growth opportunities and operational risks that are not yet fully familiar.

3.4 Practice of Using Management Accounting Information

Management accounting information is utilized throughout the project cycle, from planning to final evaluation. The information is not sourced from an integrated system, but is collected from transaction documents, field reports, fuel and tool hour records, and financial recaps. The Financial/Accounting Informant explained that the information most often requested by management is related to *"cash position, realization of project costs, project receivables, debts to suppliers, fuel costs, equipment costs, and estimated project profits"* [9], because management needs to ensure the project is still financially secure. The operational activities of the road paving work which are the main source of the formation of cost data are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Documentation of the Operational Stages of Road Paving Work of PT Patra Anugrah Bakti

Meanwhile, from the operational side, management information requests are more focused on *"heavy equipment needs, equipment productivity, fuel consumption, work progress, and field constraints"* (INF-4, 2026). Both views show that the Finance/Accounting section focuses on liquidity, costs, and profitability, while the Operations section describes the activities and circumstances that make up the cost of the project. Information acquires managerial meaning after the two perspectives are combined in project supervision and assessment.

3.5 Tender Pricing

Tender pricing is the clearest decision realm that brings together internal and external information. The process starts from the calculation of the need for tools, fuel, labor, and materials. The Operations Manager explained that the preparation of the tender price involves the owner, the operational section, the finance section, and the field team, where *"the operational section provides an estimate of the needs for tools, labor, fuel, materials"* (INF-4, 2026), while the finance section calculates the cost recap before management determines the final price.

Once the cost needs are calculated, management adds a margin adjusted to the level of job difficulty, field risks, and competitive conditions. The operational informant asserts that *"if the risk of the project is high, the margin is usually made safer"* (INF-4, 2026), but the margin can be made smaller if the project is deemed important for the long-term relationship with the customer, although it is still taken into account so as not to harm the company. Competitor prices are used as a comparator, but the company does not fully follow the market price, as the final price remains limited by the company's ability to absorb the risk of fuel increases, equipment breakdowns, and late payments.

3.6 Integration of Information with Field Experience and Profitability Evaluation

Management accounting data is used repeatedly in three stages, namely before project implementation, during implementation, and after project completion. A summary of the cycle is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The Cycle of Using Management Accounting Information in Strategic Decisions

Stages	Main Information	Results or Outputs
Before the project (*ex ante*)	Historical costs, Cost Budget Plan, resource capacity, risk	Related diversification, tender prices
During the project (*concurrent*)	Realization of costs, fuel, tool working hours, progress	Cost control, early warning
After the project (*ex post*)	Profit, margin, budget difference and realization	Improvement of estimation, project learning

Source: Processed by researchers from the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, 2026.

The Financial/Accounting Informant explains that a project is considered financially successful if *"the actual cost is lower than or in line with the estimate and the company obtains the expected margin"* (INF-3, 2026), although success is also judged by the follow-up contract and the accuracy of customer payments. Small-margin projects can still be considered strategic if *they "open up further employment opportunities, maintain relationships with partners, or strengthen the company's reputation"* (INF-3, 2026), although from a financial point of view it remains an evaluation note. Consistent sources of cost deviations emerged from the four informant perspectives including rising fuel prices, equipment damage, changes in soil conditions, weather, and material delays. The evaluation is then repurposed to design the next tender and improve cost control, forming a continuous learning cycle.

3.7 Limitations of Information Systems and Family Company Dynamics

Management requires a thorough report that includes contract value, cost realization, receivables position, and profit estimates. However, the Finance/Accounting informant admitted that the existing system *"is quite helpful, especially for knowing the cost and profit of the project"* (INF-3, 2026), but some information from the field sometimes comes in late so that reports are not always available in *real time*. The Director corroborates this by explaining that *"field information sometimes changes quickly, while cost reports are not always available in real time"* (INF-2, 2026), so decisions must sometimes be made with incomplete data. The pause in formal information changes the balance of the use of information sources, the greater the gap in formal data, the greater the role of experience and direct communication as a temporary source of information.

In the aspect of family company dynamics, the decision-making structure places the Owner as the holder of the highest authority, but still through a cross-functional consultation process. The Director explained that *"the direction of the owner still has a great influence on strategic decisions"* (INF-2, 2026), but the decision also takes into account the company's condition, financial capabilities, and project risks, with the family values evident in the prudent taking risks and maintaining the company's good name. Influential family values include reputation, customer trust, prudence, and business sustainability orientation, which can increase tolerance for small margins on high-value projects, but also strengthen caution on high-risk projects with large margins.

The overall pattern boils down to the integrative theme of research, namely management accounting as a mechanism that connects information, field experience, risk, and family values in one decision process. The empirical model that summarizes these linkages is shown in Figure 3.

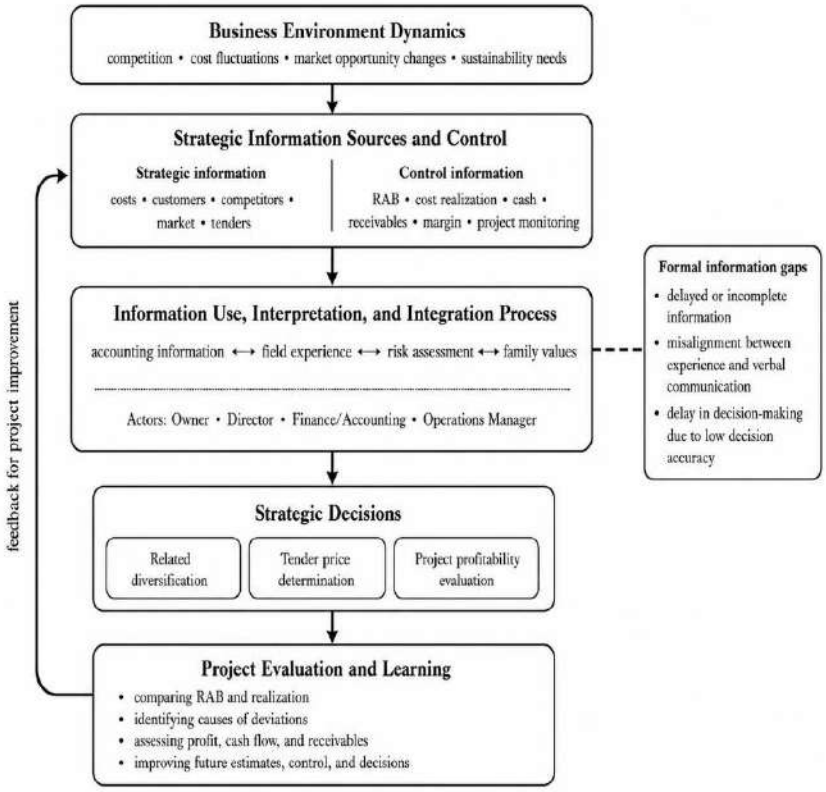

Figure 3. Empirical Model of the Use of Management Accounting in Strategic Decision Making of PT Patra Anugrah Bakti

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1 Strategic Management Accounting in Information Diversification and Use

The findings on related diversification show that management accounting information is not used as the sole determinant of growth decisions, but rather as an interpretive framework combined with field experience, tool capacity, and market situation. This pattern is in line with the idea that the design and utilization of management accounting systems are greatly influenced by the way of thinking of decision-makers, so that identical cost figures can be interpreted differently by actors with different responsibilities. At PT Patra Anugrah Bakti, the Finance/Accounting department interprets the increase in costs as pressure on margins, while the Operational Manager understands it as a consequence of field conditions, and the Owner and the Director interpret it in the context of the continuity of business relationships and long-term reputation [10].

The difference in perspective between the functions does not cause open conflict, but rather complements each other when the four parties sit together to discuss the continuation of the project. The Finance/Accounting section presents financial feasibility limits, the Operations Manager explains the real constraints on the ground, while the Owner and Director weigh the impact on the long-term relationship with the customer. This kind of complementary process confirms that management accounting information in a project-based family company serves as a common point, not as a single authority that unilaterally determines the direction of decisions.

The practice of using management accounting information spread across the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of the project reinforces the view that the decision-making process based on management accounting often takes place through compromise between various interests and viewpoints, rather than through the direct application of numbers. In this company, the compromise appears when the project cost information from the Finance/Accounting department must be juxtaposed with a technical explanation from the Operations Manager before being used as the basis for the Joint evaluation [11]. This condition also reinforces the view that the use of management accounting information in decision-making is limited by the structure of the organizational process and the involvement of the actors who play a role in it, so that the meaning of information cannot be separated from who processes it and how the process takes place [12].

4.2 Tender Pricing and Project Profitability Evaluation

In the realm of tender pricing, the research findings show that cost calculation is not the only factor that shapes the bid price. The company also considers the level of competition, customer characteristics, and field risks before setting a final margin. This pattern reinforces the explanation of the importance of project complexity and historical data as the basis for the formulation of bidding strategies and the amount of markup in the project-based industry. In line with that, finding that the decision to follow or not to follow a tender on a construction company is strongly influenced by risk assessment, resource capacity [5], and the relationship with the employer, not just by mathematical calculation of costs. This conformity indicates that the practice of tendering pricing in project-based family companies in Indonesia has characteristics comparable to findings in the context of other construction industries, namely decisions that are multidimensional and cannot be reduced to a mere margin added cost formula [13].

Regarding profitability evaluation, the finding that small-margin projects can still be considered strategic if they provide relational benefits emphasizes the importance of integrating risk management into the management control system [14]. Effective management control in a project-based organization needs to integrate risk assessment to multiple levels of analysis, not just at the level of a single transaction. This view emphasizes the importance of a resilience-oriented management control system, namely the organization's ability to respond to and recover from cost and operational disruptions. Both of these views are relevant to PT Patra Anugrah Bakti's condition, given that its vulnerability to fuel price fluctuations, equipment damage, and late payments demands a combination of financial readiness and decision-making flexibility based on field experience [15].

4.3 Information System Limitations and Strengthening Needs

The findings on the limitations of information systems, particularly the lag between cost events in the field and the availability of official reports, confirm that the longer the chain of verification and reporting, the greater the scope for experience and direct communication to fill the gap in formal information [16]. Digitization of management accounting can improve company performance if it is followed by strengthening operational planning and budgeting processes, not just replacing manual recording with digital ones. These findings are relevant to PT Patra Anugrah Bapati's need to first standardize the classification of costs and reporting responsibilities before moving on to strengthening the digital system [17].

He also emphasized that the successful use of the management accounting system is greatly influenced by the support of top management and the clarity of user authority [18]. This condition can be seen in this study through the need for the active involvement of the Owner and Director in encouraging cross-functional reporting discipline, because without support from the top of the organization, efforts to improve the information system risk stopping at the administrative level without changing the actual pattern of interaction and decision-making.

The strengthening of top management support should be accompanied by the establishment of a uniform cost reporting format between the Operations section and the Finance/Accounting section, so that the data flowing from the field can be used immediately without the need for readjustment at the management level. Without such uniformity of formats, digitization efforts risk simply moving the problem of manual recording to electronic form without actually accelerating the availability of information for strategic decision-making. This kind of clarity of format also makes it easier for the Director to monitor the progress of cross-functional reporting on a regular basis, without having to wait for a manual recapitulation at the end of each project period.

4.4 Family Company Dynamics as an Integrative Mechanism

The centrality of the Owner in strategic decision-making that still involves cross-functional consultation suggests that family authority and professional participation can go hand in hand, rather than negate each other. This condition reinforces the findings [19], that managerial control in private family companies is greatly influenced by the premise of family decisions, namely family values and preferences that shape the way information is used and interpreted in the control process. At PT Patra Anugrah Bakti, the premise is seen through the prudence, reputation, and sustainability orientation that frames the way the Owner assesses the cost and risk information of other functions before making a final decision.

The finding that family values can increase tolerance for small margins in high-value projects, but at the same time reinforce caution in high-risk projects even with large margins, suggests that noneconomic considerations in family firms do not always work in tandem with risk-taking courage [20]. This pattern expands the understanding that family values can serve a dual function, namely as a driver of relational flexibility as well as a brake on prudence, depending on the inherent nature of the risks inherent in each project at hand.

Overall, the results of the discussion emphasized that management accounting in project-based family companies serves as a framework and limit of economic feasibility, as well as a mechanism that brings together formal information, field experience, risk assessment, and family values [21]. The final authority remains with the Owner, but the quality of strategic decisions is largely determined by the extent to which information from various functions can be integrated in a timely, consistent, and traceable manner, so that the strengthening of the management accounting information system becomes a necessity that cannot be separated from the company's own growth strategy.

V. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that management accounting in project-based family companies serves as an integrative mechanism that connects cost information, field experience, risk assessment, and family value, rather than as a single determinant of growth decisions. The Cost Budget Plan, realization of costs, margins, cash flows, and receivables acquire managerial significance only after being combined with operational experience and reputation, customer relations, and business continuity considerations, while the final authority remains with the Owner through a cross-functional consultation pattern between the Director, the Finance/Accounting section, and the Operational Manager. The main contribution of this research lies in the procedural explanation of how accounting information is used, debated, and interpreted in three episodes of strategic decisions, as well as offering a project worksheet design as a practical application for strengthening the information system of family companies based on construction projects. The limitations of the study lie in the design of a single case study that is qualitative and interpretive so that the findings are not intended to be generalized statistically, as well as the scope of informants that are still limited to the company's internal parties without involving external partners such as customers or suppliers. Further research is recommended to apply *a multicase* design or *longitudinal* approach to project-based family companies in similar sectors to test the transferability of integrative patterns found in more diverse and dynamic organizational contexts.

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