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## Alexis du Roy and the challenges of running the world's biggest association of family businesses



Members of FBN and IMD after renewing their relationship this October. Alexis du Roy is on the right sitting down. The others are, standing from the left, Jean-François Manzoni (former Dean of IMD), Farhad Forbes (former chair of FBN), Peter Vogel (IMD Professor of Family Business); Sitting, David Bach (new Dean of IMD), Alfonso Libano Daurella (new chair of FBN)

By [David Bain](#) 22nd October 2024

Twelve years ago, few outside of a select group of family businesses had heard of the Swiss-based Family Business Network. But back then, those who knew about the global association might have viewed it as closed, perhaps even unfriendly.

Fast-forward to today, and that has changed hugely, as the world's biggest association of family businesses presents itself more on a world stage and is open to friendly conversations with not just family businesses but the wider world as well.

**Given that he's been at FBN for 12 years, this suggests that de Roy has the members and the board's confidence.**

That's mainly because of the management style and skills of its CEO, Alexis du Roy de Blicquy – a Belgian national who took the prestigious job in 2013 after working in finance for nearly 20 years. Du Roy, who heralds from a French aristocratic family and is related to one of the wealthiest Belgian dynasties, the Boëls, spent time working for the World Bank and the family-backed investment group [Verlinvest](#) before moving to Switzerland with his Swiss wife, who comes from a family business background, to take the job at the FBN.

The FBN, which has its offices on the campus of business school IMD in Lausanne, hasn't gone full-on transparent with everything it does. It very much values the importance of its members' confidentiality, and du Roy hasn't compromised that at all. As he says, "The values of confidentiality and non-solicitation...are at the heart of the network."

The FBN has a close relationship with IMD, which has helped the organisation enormously with its reputation and global reach.

Set up in 1989, the FBN is a non-profit federation of 33 member associations representing 65 countries—some associations represent more than one country. It has more than 20,000 individual members, with 8,000 of them from the next generation (18-40 year-olds).

The federation is constantly growing, with Morocco's IEF—MAROC joining this year and family business associations from Chile and Panama joining last year.

**Vision for the future**

Six years ago, under du Roy's direction, the FBN devised a vision for its future. It created a three-point plan, which du Roy says was to consolidate the services provided to the associations, segment communities around six global sectors, better communicate to the outside world about family businesses, and become more transparent.

“The last vision was about becoming more open,” says du Roy. “The risk of staying private was greater than the risk of being more public.”

That didn't mean the FBN would become a lobbying group for family businesses worldwide. Lobbying would be very much left to the individual associations. But du Roy wanted the FBN to have a “seat at the table” to ensure family businesses were viewed as an important part of the 21st-century business community.

Some of those efforts were channelled through FBN's so-called Polaris Initiative, designed to champion family business as a force for good. “The initiative was to create pathways for systemic change through responsible business transformation, impact investing, philanthropy and advocacy,” says du Roy.

As part of those efforts and to gain a seat at the table, the FBN built a relationship with the UN Trade and Development Organization. Apart from its long-standing relationship with IMD, FBN has partnered with the business school IESE in Barcelona for its Africa Initiative, MIT for its FBN NxG Award, and the Center for Sustainable Finance & Private Wealth in Zurich for its impact efforts.

Given the huge size of the global family business ecosystem, du Roy and the FBN felt it needed to better segment communities within its members. So it created six communities: the next generation (NxG); now generation, who are business leaders between 35 and 55 years old; impact, which is embodied by the Polaris initiative; large families, those businesses with 50 or more shareholders; entrepreneurs, to encourage an entrepreneurial spirit; and family offices.

The last segment—family offices—was launched six years ago and involves around 40% of the members. Du Roy says the family office initiative has grown rapidly at FBN and is likely to become even more important in the future, reflecting the growing importance of family offices in the world economy.

Du Roy, who is currently preparing for the FBN's biggest annual event—its global summit, which is in Tokyo next week—certainly has his work cut out for him. He has a team of 15 working to help him in Lausanne, but being a non-profit

organisation and managing so many associations through its franchise model inevitably creates challenges.

Not least is keeping all 33 associations—which pay fees to be members of the FBN—happy. The fees make up a big part of the association's revenues. Other revenue is generated by sponsorship and donations.

“With any trade association, you have challenges, and you need strong governance structures to ensure you meet those challenges,” says du Roy.

But sometimes, upheavals happen. In 2023, after a rebranding exercise, the UK association—the Institute of Family Business, now Family Business UK—left the FBN, and the UK is no longer represented directly at the FBN.

Any big association like the FBN will have issues, but people who know the organisation told *Family Capital* they felt du Roy had guided the group with skill and innovation since he joined. *Family Capital* readers [also voted him one of the top family enterprise advisors.](#)

Olivier de Richoufftz, du Roy's predecessor, worked at the organisation for eight years before leaving. Given that he's been at FBN for 12 years, this suggests that de Roy has the members and the board's confidence.

Does he envisage staying on for years to come?

The FBN recently signed an agreement with IMD to continue their relationship. So, the two groups are pretty happy with each other, and that's no doubt partly due to du Roy's professionalism and ongoing commitment.

He's saying nothing about his plans apart from: “The board will decide if I stick around.” But don't be surprised to see du Roy still leading proceedings in five years, if not ten.

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