

Women as Successors in Family Businesses – Employee’s Perception

Dr Özlem Özdemir
Senior Lecturer in Innovation and Leadership
University of East London
O.Ozdemir@uel.ac.uk

Dr Sree Lekshmi Sreekumaran Nair
Lecturer
Global Banking School
sreelekshmisreekumar.n@gmail.com

Prof Jonathan Liu
Professor of Management
University of Wales, Trinity Saint David
Jonathan.Liu@uwtsd.ac.uk

Abstract

To ensure business continuity, family businesses (FBs) need to have succession plans and successor selection processes on time. Due to the importance of this process, the succession debate is one of the most researched areas in FB literature. However, studies have primarily focused on incumbent or successor points of view. The process of successor selection involves choosing a new leader by the family business owner or members, independently of third-party approval. Even though the literature suggests employees' perception, acceptance, participation, and influence are significant in ensuring a smooth leadership transition, employee perception has been examined in the business literature, and theories offer explanations for the preferences of employees, mainly aimed at explaining the preferences of employees in terms of gender. This article makes a unique contribution to the FB literature by extending the gender preferences developed in the management and physiological literature to gender and other preferences in FBs. The study aims to demonstrate the importance of kinship, gender, educational background, and professional experience of successors and employees in the acceptance and smooth transition of female successors within family businesses. The research investigates these factors to understand how they contribute to the dynamics of leadership succession and the facilitation of a supportive environment for women taking on leadership roles in a family business context. This dual-focused study examines the relative impact of these changes among fifty-two family business employees in nine countries, providing insights into successor leadership development and factors affecting the acceptance of successor women and their preference for family businesses.

Keywords:

Succession, Family Business, Employee perception, Women entrepreneurship.

1. Introduction

Family Businesses (FB) are vital players in the global economy as they dominate commercial life and represent most businesses worldwide. Two of the three organisations are family businesses, and FBs are many countries' main drivers of economic activities. Therefore, FB continuity is crucial for economic stability and social cohesion. In FBs, the succession process involves transferring business ownership, governance and management (Marques et al., 2022) as an ultimate test of success reflected in sustainability in business (Nandi et al., 2019). It is related to conditions allowing for the continuation of a successful business, which requires displaying entrepreneurship to re-create and develop the company (Gimeno et al., 2010, p.54). Unfortunately, a high percentage of FBs cannot continue for many reasons, and one of the essential reasons has been identified as primogeniture.

On successor selection, a family-intensive governance structure fosters primogeniture as the main succession logic (Calabro et al., 2017). FB literature shows a strong preference for firstborn sons, whereas women have been rarely considered severe candidates for leadership in the family business. Moreover, Family Business scholars recognise that a fair decision process is paramount in family business success as the family members' involvement may create an environment conducive to favouritism (Im & Chen, 2020; Barnett & Kellermanns, 2006), which may lead employees to view their authorities as untrustworthy and biased (Burhan et al., 2020). The employees are a potentially important source of continuity and productivity in organisations, and the employees' acceptance plays a fundamental role in the success of FB's succession, with significant implications and the achievement of strategic goals for both business continuity. Moreover, employee acceptance is crucial for preserving the intrinsic culture and values of the business, which are often intertwined with the family's legacy and the organisation's identity (McAdam et al., 2021). However, even though employee perceptions, particularly regarding leadership transition and strategic decisions, are critical to organisational success and have been widely studied in business literature, many theories focus on the role of gender in shaping these perceptions. Therefore, this article contributes uniquely to FB literature by applying gender preference theories from management to psychology to analysis of gender and other preferences in FBs. This study aims to highlight the role of kinship, gender and other preferences in FBs by highlighting the role of kinship, gender, educational background and experience in fostering the acceptance and seamless integration of female successors within FBs. This approach not only broadens the understanding of gender dynamics in FBs but also

emphasises the importance of diverse factors that influence the successful transition of leadership to female successors. Given that leadership plays a crucial role in employee satisfaction and engagement, it is essential to understand how employees can be effectively engaged during the succession period. Therefore, this study will help identify strategies that facilitate smooth management transfer while understanding the reasons behind employee preferences.

From a theoretical perspective, this study posits that a deeper understanding of employee preferences can equip family business (FB) owners and stakeholders with more effective tools for selecting successors. By examining these preferences, the research aims to enhance decision-making processes in family businesses, particularly in the context of succession planning. Drawing on empirical material collected through interviews with employees of FBs, the critical contribution of this study is that it shows the importance of the kinship, gender, education, and experience of both the successors and employees to accept a woman as a successor and to make this process run smoothly.

2. Theoretical Framework

A considerable body of research explained the preference to work for a woman or a man. Perry, Davis-Blake and Kulik's (1994) gender-based selection theory explains the determinants of gender-based selection decisions with integrated cognitive and contextual perspectives. However, the study mainly focused on the organisation's employee selection process and gender-based selection decisions. Schein et al.'s (1996) "Think Manager-Think Male; A Global Phenomenon" also revealed that regardless of country context, males and females perceive that successful managers possess characteristics and attitudes more commonly ascribed to men than women.

Powell and Butterfield's (2015) study examines the preference to work for a man or a woman as a boss by considering the respondents' age, education level and experiences. This study also shows who preferred to work for a man rather than a woman. Additionally, women preferred to work for a female boss over a male boss more than men did, whereas men preferred to work for a male boss over a female boss more than women. However, such theories do not explain the FB concept. Hence, fresh theories must be developed to elucidate whether individuals prefer working under a female supervisor and how factors such as age, family connections, education, and experience are viewed as criteria by employees.

Employee perception is one of the critical key components of successful succession for the organisation, the family and its employees (Dawson, 2012). Therefore, employee assessment should be considered a significant factor for smooth succession in FBs. Employee assessments focusing on employee values and opinions are essential information sources for helping organisations make significant adjustments like succession. Mussolino et al., 2019; Patricia de Sá Freire et al., 2010; Dawson, 2012 examined the employees' perceptions of FBs regarding changes brought about by the company's succession process. Marcoux, Guihur and Koffi (2016) examined employee contribution to the succession process and explored the positive impacts of various Human Resource Management practices in creating a conducive work environment that supports the success of the succession process. Research indicates that accomplishing the goals of these changes necessitates a fresh approach to intra-organisational integration, aiming to remove detrimental aspects of FBs, like the absence of dialogue and one-sided decision-making.

In these circumstances, the subsequent section will address the family business succession process and explore employees' preferences for working with a new successor. This exploration will consider factors such as gender, education, familial relationships, and the experience of both the successor and the employees.

3. Family ties and accepting woman as a successor.

Families comprise people with a shared history, experience, some degree of emotional bonding, sets of common goals for the future, and whose activities involve group issues and individual concerns (Carsrud, 2006, p.856). These groups of people's involvements are accepted as the main differences between family and nonfamily businesses; however, it also makes them more complex, where family members can be seen in all three circles: ownership, management, and family.

FBs are the unique constitutions as the families own, control and manage the business. In such businesses, the founders aim to continue their legacy via inter-family succession by handing the business to their children. However, although the succession process is vital for FBs, unfortunately, only approximately one-third of FBs survive into the second generation. Moreover, when we look at the FB literature, one of the main reasons for the succession rate is the inability to ensure a successful transfer of ownership and management to the next generation.

Agency theory systematically analyses the relationship between principals and their agents (Greenwood, 2003; Solomon et al., 2021). In the family business context, this theory applies mainly to the relationship between an agent and the owners of a firm as a principle. Even though agency theory explains the owner-and-agent relationship, the owner and agent become one person in most family businesses (Kuruppuge et al., 2018). As a result of this relationship, the agency relationships in family firms are distinctive because they are embedded in the parent-child relationships found in the household and are characterised by altruism (Schulze et al., 2001, p.473) the practice of unselfish concern for the well-being of others and commonly the evidence of nepotism within the FB concept. As a result of altruism, parents tend to offer investment opportunities to their children (Lubatkin et al., 2005), even if they have insufficient skills for international entrepreneurship. Even though hiring the right person is one of the essential functions of human resource management, family members tend to assign their family members to strategic positions in their businesses (Lubatkin et al., 2005; Kontinen & Ojala, 2010; Mussolino et al., 2019). However, in terms of ownership and management, there is significant evidence that family businesses are quite reluctant to accept nonfamily ownership (Gottschalk & Astring, 2020), as they see hiring nonfamily managers reduce the family's control of the firm (Welsh et al, 2016).

Similarly, as noted by Vera & Dean (2005) and Martinez Jimenez (2009), along with visibility, leadership and formation of their identities, women compete for power and authority against a third person: nonfamily managers. In minority-owned family firms, however, the preference for hiring family members may be culturally rooted rather than based on business needs alone (Shinnar et al., 2013; Osnes et al., 2019). However, research indicates that family business owners tend to control their businesses more than anyone else and do not trust anyone, especially nonfamily members. Therefore, they do not like delegating power to someone outside the family.

It is a well-documented practice that governance roles, especially board membership, are reserved for exceptional family members. This practice can often extend to gender-excluded leadership positions. Additionally, empirical research shows an apparent marginalisation of women in senior management in these fields, often preventing their ascension to leadership roles. This pattern of keeping women out of leadership roles continues until there is no choice but to let female family members take those positions, which is called "Primogeniture" in the FB literature. Especially in certain cultures, unfortunately, primogeniture continues to

dominate the value system of FBs. Primogeniture is an approach that explains the situation of women's inclusion as daughters are only accepted as successors when all descendants are female, or the daughter is the firstborn. Therefore, research proved that family ties are not a supportive force for women to be chosen as successors. However, in this research, we examine factors behind the family and nonfamily members' preferences and their demographics.

4. Gender and accepting woman as a successor.

Although women's role in society has changed considerably, they are still overlooked by family and nonfamily members as potential leaders in FBs. In business and within families, the roles and patterns of behaviour are often gender-specific (Discua Cruz et al., 2022; Ahrens et al., 2015).

On the role of gender in the succession process, the literature consistently finds that male offspring are favoured within family firms regardless of suitability (Discua Cruz et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2016; Ozdemir & Harris, 2019; Harris & Ozdemir, 2020; Overbeke et al., 2013) and focus on sons as successors and their relationship with FB owners/fathers. As examined by Wang (2010) and Martinez Jimenez (2009), in the FB succession process, daughters are almost always excluded as candidates due to an interaction of macro (sociocultural attitudes to women) and micro (individual and family) factors. Similarly, Glover & Reay (2015) and Ozdemir & Harris (2019) argue that this gender bias in family businesses may stem from broader societal attitudes and cultural expectations of their gendered roles in society. Even in the case of being the oldest child, women felt less visible than their brothers with respect to the choice of succession (Vera & Dean, 2005), although succession is different when there are both brothers and sisters than when the owner has only one descendant (Chantal et al., 2014).

According to Role Congruity Theory (RCT) (Eagly & Karau, 2002), the inconsistency between women and leader roles leads to prejudicial evaluations against women leaders while underlining preference for men. Therefore, women are more likely to face prejudice than men without considering their talent and performance, and this prejudice causes disadvantages for females. Several authors examined the employees' gender and preferences for working for and with male or female managers. Some studies (Schein et al., 1989; Schein, 2001) show that females have no preferences between a man and a woman to work with. They see women and men as managers who need specific leadership characteristics, and the managers' gender would not be an indicator of being a successful manager. However, the notion of "think manager-

think male” (Schein, 1971) shows one of the most prominent prejudices, associating being a manager with being a man.

(Ridgeway, 1997)’s seminal work examines employee consideration of gender inequality. According to her, employees are likely to show bias toward same-sex others, particularly the “people like me”, with the same training, experience and skills. Stoker, van der Velde and Lammers, 2012 explain this tendency by using Bryne’s (1971) similar attraction effect, asserting that “people like those who are similar to themselves”. Hence, women like leaders who have the same gender and share certain characteristics, and men are especially likely to dislike female leadership traits and prefer male leaders in organisations where female managers are rare (Stoker et al., 2012).

Similarly, as stated by Schein’s (2007) study, men are more suitable for leadership positions as characteristics such as leadership ability are more likely to be held by men than by women. Additionally, according to 2021 Gallup’s Employee Engagement Survey conducted in December 2001, women are slightly more likely than men to prefer a male boss.

Stoker et al.’s (2012) study also shows employees’ preferences. According to their study, although the general stereotype of a manager is masculine, female employees have a stronger preference for female managers. Similarly, Powell and Butterfield’s (2015) study showed that, when they expressed a preference, women preferred to work for a female boss over a male boss more than men did. In contrast, men preferred to work for a male boss over a female boss more than women did. This study is also consistent with Vecchio and Boatwright’s (2002) study, as it asserted that women tend to have a stronger preference for female managers.

Based on the previous argument, we expect female employees to strongly prefer seeing a woman as a new successor. However, we aim to examine this a bit further and understand the reasons for their preferences. Furthermore, we examine the additional demographic characteristics of our respondents who do and do not prefer to work for a woman.

5. The education, experience and accepting a woman as a successor.

The effectiveness of entrepreneurship education is a crucial debate topic in entrepreneurship research. It is debated whether entrepreneurs are born with entrepreneurial characteristics or can develop entrepreneurial skills. Interestingly, no evidence indicates a linkage between

education and being a successful entrepreneur. However, evidence shows a direct relationship between entrepreneurship education and intention (Heuer & Kolvereid, 2014; Stirzaker, 2015). In other words, students who graduate from entrepreneurship fields are more likely to be entrepreneurs than those who graduate from other disciplines.

Chantal et al., (2014) analysed to what extent women are involved in the actual succession process in family firms and gender differences in capabilities and ambition. They found few differences between male and female successors in the level of education, although female successors are more likely to be university-educated than male successors. However, their results show a clear gender difference regarding ownership; men strive more often for full ownership, whereas women opt for shared ownership, even when controlling for relevant variables such as the presence of children (Remery et al., 2014). Similarly, Lee et al. (2016) also find that the socialised gender perspective of the business owner is a key contextual construct. Studies investigating opportunities for women in family businesses reveal instances of (veiled or open) discrimination and present proposals to overcome these obstacles to better use women's potential (McAdam et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2016; Remery et al., 2014).

Business Education, in general, has been studied broadly, but the importance of education in family businesses has yet to be studied widely. Although sons and daughters are equally well educated in FBs, even in management and business, fathers are deeply concerned about whether daughters can effectively manage the demanding tasks associated with the company. Another interesting point is that research shows that education is essential for nonfamily business owners, who do not have the luxury of using their family as a safety net and have to rely on other sources of support (Welsh et al., 2016; Ozdemir & Harris, 2019).

Research also shows that if the successor has proven skills, performance, and experience in leading the organisation, the succession is more likely to be successful Breton-Miller & Miller (2016), not only for the successor but also for the business and the family. However, although the number of positions occupied by women in family firms greater than in their nonfamily counterparts, it is less common to find women as CEOs or chairs of boards (Maseda et al. (2022, p.297). Regarding the succession selection process, research argues that, in addition to education, training, and working experience (Schlepphorst & Moog, 2014; Ozdemir & Harris, 2019), successors need a unique set of skills to adopt strategies at appropriate times in the development of the business, the environment, and the organisation (Hoy, 2012; Discua Cruz et al., 2022). Surprisingly, Gallo and Pont (1996) find that the most successful international

family firms are those whose successors have education and work experience outside their home country and company. Gallo and Pont, (1996) and Dyck et al., (2002) also assert three characteristics commonly measure success or competence: education, working within a family firm and experience working for another organisation. However, at this point, it should be noted that, as observed by (Ahrens et al., 2015), in their study, the female family successor seemed to be equipped with higher levels of human capital than the selected male family successor. Nevertheless, male family successors are chosen not because of higher human capital levels but because of the contest rulers' gender preferences in favour of male family heirs. As found out by Ahren et al.'s (2015) study, male family successors are chosen not because of higher human capital levels but because of the contest rulers' gender preferences in favour of male family heirs.

However, although all employees in both family and nonfamily firms may form perceptions about the fairness of the treatment that they experience within their organisations, family involvement and influence in family firms can have unique effects on the fairness of these firms' human resource (HR) practices as they relate to nonfamily employees (Barnett & Kellermanns, 2006, p.838). Frequently, a nonfamily member employee may feel insecure and threatened by the owner's children, especially if they feel that she or he is not suitable for this new leadership position. Even though the importance of experience within or outside of FOBs has been extensively examined in family business literature (Royer, Jalal & Prezas. 2012) examine CEO succession when the new CEO is hired from outside the firm. They concentrated on two types of incoming outsider succession: those hired from the same industry and those hired from a different industry. Very interestingly, results show that although firms that announce CEO hires from within their industry receive a better market reaction and have better stock performance in the post-succession year, in later years, firms hiring from outside their industry exhibit better stock performance.

Therefore, this study critically evaluates the significance of potential successors' and existing employees' educational qualifications and professional experience in accepting a woman as a new leader within FBs.

In short, this paper contributes to the literature by providing a new perspective on the employment perceptions for accepting women as a new leader by considering successors' family ties, experience, education and gender together with the employees' family ties, experience, education and gender. We specifically aim to answer the following questions:

Research question: What are the influences of kinship, gender, education, and experience on the acceptance of a female successor within family businesses?

6. Method, sample size and data collection

The significant contribution of the current study is that it includes the perspectives of FB employees to analyse FB succession processes and employees' assumptions against women successors. To understand the situations, interviews were collected between 2022 March and 2023 July. The authors collected data on employee perception from different FBs within nine countries: the United Kingdom, Turkey, India, United Arab Emirates, Nigeria, Netherlands, Nepal, Hungary, and China. Such filings represent the definitive source of information for FBs and women as successors.

The population of this qualitative study was the employees of FBs without considering the size or generation. FBs were selected without any restriction as this research only aims to understand employee perceptions against the women successors. As Marshall (1996) mentioned, by purposive sampling, the researcher identifies varied characteristics of the target population and then selects a sample of subjects that match the identified characteristics. With this study, we chose a purposeful sampling of fifty-one FB employees based in nine different countries, which was collected through online interviews, and this study focuses on a qualitative approach. The sole inclusion criterion was membership in a family business. A total of fifty-one family and nonfamily member employees who have experience in any family business were interviewed. The questionnaire contained measures of family tie, work experience, education and gender several demographic questions. The questionnaire was developed in four phases: demographics, family tie, gender, education and experience. A self-developed questionnaire by the authors was distributed to employees working or working in FBs. The sample size included both male and female employees. The sample size is greater than 30, and below 500 is considered suitable (Wright & Crimp, 1995), and the current sample size is fifty-one. Demographic information, which included gender, education, experience, and family ties, was also collected through the survey. The pilot study was conducted before the questionnaire was circulated, and the data analysis was performed through NVivo. To guarantee credibility and validity, a demographic verification was carried out to confirm that the appropriate participants were targeted. The participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality was retained during the study. Neither interviewers nor participants were paid for their study.

To better understand family business, researchers, on occasion, have also used qualitative research tools to understand the goings-on inside the family business (De Massis & Kammerlander, 2020). Like previous studies in the FB field (Micelotta., 2023), this study, both the multiple case deductive methodology and the interpretive approach, which are grounded theory methodologies, focus on examining the data. In this methodology, the deductive study enables us to understand how emerging insights are coherent with or different from prior knowledge. Each case's in-depth analysis and cross-examination are used to identify similar constructs and themes (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). Furthermore, and more specifically, this research fits in the deductive approach, highlighting the idea of "discovering theory from data" (Micelotta, 2023).

We collected and maintained data from the online open-ended interview questions and entered them on Excel sheets. We analysed all data using NVivo 14, the latest version of NVivo. We also used this programme to organise data from transcripts.

7. Results and Discussion

The results will be presented in four sections: Demographics, Family Tie, Gender, Experience, and education. The demographic composition of our research participants reveals a significant female majority, with women constituting 68% of the respondents, and when considering family ties, 54% are from nonfamily ties. 58% of the respondents are 45-59 years old, while 22% are 30-44 years old. 42% of respondents have university postgraduate master's degrees, while 22% have a bachelor's degree, and 22% have graduated from universities. The majority of respondents were from first-generation family businesses, while only 2.27% were from the 6th generation and above and 38% of respondents have only experience in their current family businesses.

7.1. Family Tie and the successor

The results derived from the interviews provide us with a comprehensive range of insights concerning employee viewpoints regarding familial succession within our organisation. It is worth noting that only a minority, approximately 15.22% of respondents, favour appointing an heir from within the family. A slightly more significant fraction, comprising 19.57%, supports this idea.

Interestingly, we observe that the largest group, 45.65%, maintains a neutral stance on this matter, indicating either ambivalence or an absence of solid opinions. Conversely, another segment, equivalent to 15.22%, opposes the concept altogether, while a small number, only 4.35%, strongly disagree with the idea of having a family member as the successor.

These findings underscore and exemplify the diverse array of perspectives among employees when contemplating leadership transition through familial means. As a further examination, we asked our respondents to explain the reasons for their opinions. First, we evaluated the results from the respondents who strongly disagreed with seeing anyone as a family successor. Respondents offered explanations for their views, highlighting concerns primarily about nepotism. Employees expressed reluctance to work under a family member, mainly due to perceived favouritism. They believe family business owners might choose a successor based on family ties rather than merit and capabilities. On the other hand, 15.22% of respondents strongly agree with the idea of seeing an heir from within the family, while 19.57% express support for this idea and agree to see the next successor from the family. Respondents favouring a family successor emphasised the significance of maintaining family culture, believing that only a family member can preserve this unique asset within the business. Some respondents specifically mentioned generational transitions, arguing that passing leadership from the first to the second generation should remain within the family to keep the business dynamics vibrant

Previous studies posited that individuals with familial connections would exhibit a greater inclination towards endorsing a successor from their own family. It was believed that kinship would foster a stronger preference for intra-familial successors than employees without such ties. However, the study's outcomes indicate that possessing a familial bond does not necessarily imply an inherent bias towards favouring a family successor. However, further examination will clarify employee preferences and how family ties, experience, education, and gender influence these preferences.

7.2. Gender and the successor

In examining the focus of employee preferences on women successors, we examined the dynamics surrounding gender interactions within professional settings. This investigation aligns with the fundamental principles outlined by Role Congruity Theory and sheds light on the widely prevalent stereotype known as 'think manager-think male.' Our primary aim was to

delve into the correlation between an individual's gender and their inclination toward working under female leadership.

Before asking their preferences regarding choosing a woman as a successor, we asked whether they would like to work for a woman (Table 1.). The survey findings indicate that a small fraction of participants (27.5%) hold a positive view on having a female boss, while a notable majority (62.5%) remain neutral. A mere 10% explicitly oppose the idea of working under a woman, and notably, this group consists entirely of female respondents. Interestingly, most of those who strongly agree with working for a female leader are also women. Thirty-three of the interview respondents explained their preferences. To understand the reasons behind employees' preferences, we asked our respondents to provide reasons for their preferences.

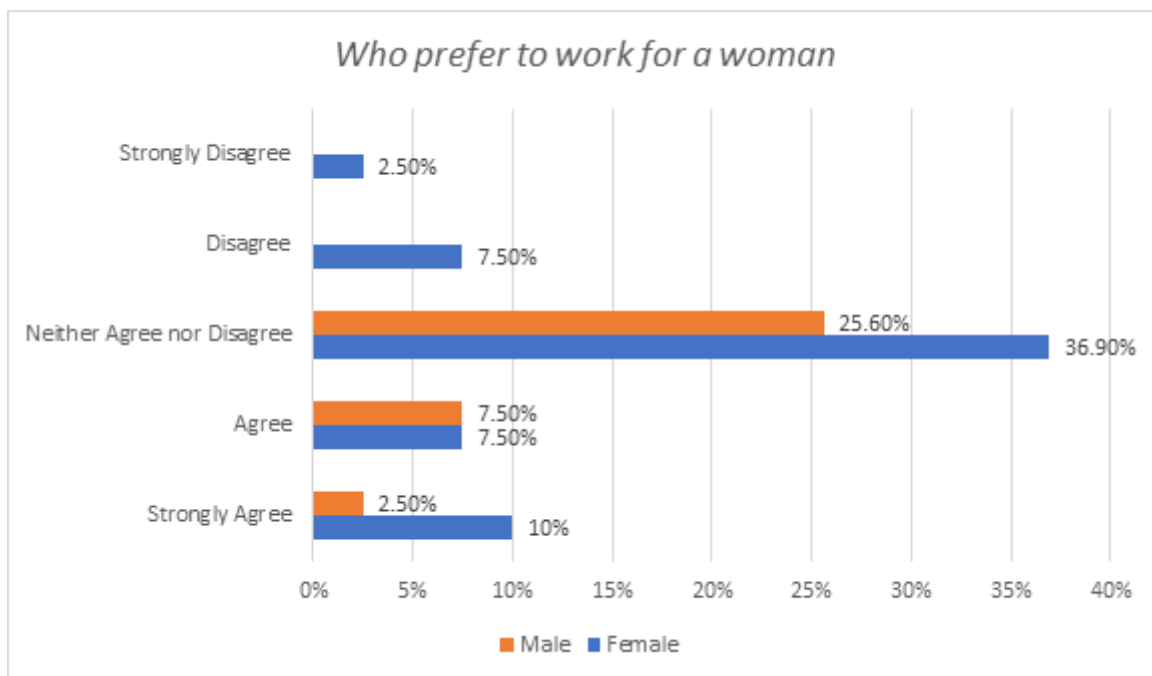


Table 1. Who prefer to work for a woman.

According to Schein et al. (1989) and subsequent research by Schein (2001), individuals' preferences towards working with male or female managers are not influenced by gender. These studies challenge the notion that effective leadership is linked to a person's gender, emphasising that traits define a successful manager, not their sex. However, Schein's coined phrase "think manager-think male" in 1973 exposes a pervasive bias that associates management positions primarily with men, highlighting a significant stereotype in leadership roles. Stoker and colleagues (2012) study made an exciting discovery: contrary to common masculine stereotypes, female employees prefer female managers, which aligns with Powell

and Butterfield's (2015) observation that women tend to choose female bosses more often than men, who strongly prefer male bosses. These findings are further supported by Vecchio and Boatwright's (2002) study, revealing an apparent inclination among women towards female managers. Together, these studies suggest a widespread belief that women are better suited for leadership roles, making them a top choice for succession planning among female employees. Interestingly, the respondents who strongly agreed and those who strongly disagreed were both females, with the majority focusing on leadership talents and capabilities rather than gender.

Regarding employment consideration, we surveyed employees about their succession preferences, inquiring if they would prefer working under a female member of the FB owner's family or a professional woman outside the family.

Based on our interview for the statement "I would like to work for a woman from the family business owner's family," most respondents, 75.61%, expressed neutrality with neither agreement nor disagreement. Those in agreement, combining 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree,' constitute 19.52%, with 7.32% strongly agreeing and 12.20% agreeing. A smaller fraction, 4.88%, disagreed with the statement, and no respondents, 0%, chose 'Strongly disagree', which suggests that most participants are ambivalent about the prospect of working for a woman from the family business owner's family, with a moderate portion in favour and a tiny percentage are against the idea.

We analysed the findings to gain insight into the demographic distribution of employees based on their perceptions. Among those who strongly agree with the desire to work for a woman from the business owner's family, 25% were female, and 5% were male, with a significant majority, 75% from the family that owns the business, while 25% were not from the FB owner's family. In the agreed category, most respondents were also female, at 60% and 40% were male. However, in this group, only 20% were from the FB owner's family, with a substantial 80% being non-FB owner's families. For those who neither agree nor disagree, 71% were female, and 29% were male, showing a more even distribution regarding FB ownership, with 48% from the FB owner's family and 52% from non-FB owner's families. Notably, in the disagree category, all respondents were female and equally split between FB owner's and non-FB owner's families, at 50% each. This data may reflect perceptions and preferences about working for family-owned businesses and could indicate broader societal attitudes towards gender and corporate ownership.

After assessing employee attitudes towards working for a woman from the FB owner's family, we asked our respondents about their interest in working for a female professional in a business context. The interview results reflect various levels of enthusiasm towards the idea of working for a female professional. A fifth of the 20% of respondents strongly agreed with the prospect, suggesting high enthusiasm. Slightly fewer, at 17.5%, agree, indicating moderate support. The most notable portion, exactly half of the respondents, remain neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, which may indicate ambivalence or a lack of strong feelings. A small minority, 10%, disagree, while an even smaller group, at 2.5%, strongly disagree, indicating some level of resistance to the concept. Overall, the responses lean more towards agreement or neutrality regarding working for a woman in a professional setting.

Those who strongly agree with the idea of working for a female professional comprise most women (62%) and a minority of men (38%). Among those who agree with the idea, there is a balanced representation of the family business owner's family (57%) and nonfamily members (43%). Family members up 38% of those who strongly agree with the idea, while nonfamily members 62%. The neutral group, consisting of individuals who neither agree nor disagree with working for a female professional, is predominantly female (70%), with males making up the remaining 30%. Family business ownership status is equally divided within the neutral group, with 50% coming from family business owners' families and 50% not. The disagreeing group is exclusively female, with a significant majority (75%) originating from family business owners' families and the remaining 25% not. All individuals who strongly disagree with working for a female professional are female and belong to family business owners' families, indicating a possible bias or preference within this demographic.

Based on the findings, only two women respondents expressed opposition to working under a female leader, whether she is a Family Business owner's family member or any other woman. However, they agreed on the importance of professionalism in their superior. Among the fifty-one participants, two women, also members of the business owner's family, strongly supported working for someone within the family. Notably, they also concurred that succession should be kept within the family.

7.3. The education, experience and accepting woman as a successor.

Even though research indicates that if the successor has proven skills, performance, and experience in leading the organisation, the succession is more likely to be successful, the most

successful international family firms are those whose successors have education and work experience outside their home country as well as outside their company. Studies (Gallo & Pont, 1996; Dyck et al., 2002) also assert that three characteristics are commonly used to measure success or competence: education, working within a family firm and experience working for another organisation. However, while the importance of experience in FBs has been extensively discussed, education and its importance have yet to be examined enough.

In our research, we asked FB employees about their preferences for a successor's qualifications, focusing on the importance of education versus experience. Based on the interview results, 64.10% of respondents strongly agree that the successor should have a good level of education. Additionally, 20.51% agree with the statement, which indicates that a substantial majority (84.61%) support the idea of a well-educated successor. A moderate group, 12.82%, is neutral on this issue, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Interestingly, no one disagreed with the statement. However, a small minority of 2.56% strongly disagree, showing little opposition to the importance of educational attainment for a business successor.

While there is widespread consensus on the significance of education, some believe it is optional. Additionally, some employees acknowledge the value of education and its role in boosting a successor's self-confidence, yet they advocate for its integration with practical experience.

Data analysis shows that there is joint agreement among employees on the significance of education as a critical attribute for the new successor. Most employees recognise the value of educational qualifications. We conducted a detailed analysis further to understand the correlation between employee demographics and their preferences. The demographic analysis reveals a correlation between employees' educational levels and their preference for a successor's educational attainment. Employees with higher education levels are more inclined to desire a successor with substantial educational credentials. Conversely, those indifferent to the new leader's educational level tend to have lower educational qualifications than those who favour working under a well-educated successor.

The interview data indicates a strong consensus on the importance of work experience for an individual poised to become a business successor (Table 2.). A significant 76.32% of the participants strongly agree with the necessity for substantial work experience. In comparison, another 15.79% agree, summing up to an overwhelming 92.11% who favour work experience

as an essential qualification. A minority of 7.89% remain neutral, suggesting they might consider other attributes equally significant. Remarkably, there is a complete lack of dissent, with none of the respondent's expressing disagreement, emphasising a collective endorsement of work experience as an essential criterion for a business successor.

Table 2. Significance of Successor Education for Employees

<i>Independent work experience is the only way to be equipped for the job, otherwise it is a poor upbringing for the business</i>
<i>Some family members start as soon as they graduate, they are all very unprofessional.</i>
To know what they are doing, to make the right <i>decisions they should have work experience, and not only in their family business</i> . They should experience what it is like to work for others, so that they can at least have a sense of empathy when it comes to their approach to their own employees.
A focus on experience helps you build a team aligned with your company's goals and mission. <i>It can help you find the best ways to interact with customers and build trust.</i> It can help you utilize digital tools and other modern technologies more effectively.
<i>Being a good manager requires knowledge of the business being sustained.</i>
<i>The more experience people get, the more accurate decisions will be.</i>
<i>Experience always brings much capability to manage new cases and brings more idea and solution</i>
<i>Experience is the best teacher</i>
<i>Without spending enough time in the sector and the company, the person is much more unlikely to show managerial skills.</i>
<i>A good leader should have enough relevant experience</i>
They should have an experience but <i>from another business, not their family business.</i>
If it's a running concern, <i>prior training, and work exp is necessary</i>
<i>Experience shortens time</i>
Experience is crucial , but it's something acquired over time. <i>What matters is combining that experience with education and continuing to improve and educate oneself.</i> Education is an endless journey.
Of course, <i>it is certain that work experience gained outside of the family business will be very beneficial during a person's future career in the family firm and for the firm, but it is also very valuable for a family member with no experience to complete management training within the family company so that he or she can master every aspect of the company.</i>

Employees recognise the significance of both education and experience. However, 76% strongly emphasise the value of experience, while 64.10% place similar importance on the educational level of successors. It is evident that employees with more years of experience prioritise practical experience over education more than their less experienced counterparts. Interestingly, only a few employees remain neutral regarding the importance of experience, and these individuals are notably from the business owner's family, well-educated, and over 45 years old.

After assessing employee preferences concerning education versus experience, we inquired which they valued more in a successor. We asked if they prioritised a successor with substantial

experience in their family business or other workplaces. Our interviews show that most people think it's important for a successor to have good experience in their own company. About 39% strongly agree with this, and around 18% agree. That means more than half of the people asked to think it is a good idea. About 26% do not have a strong opinion either way. A small number of people, around 8%, do not think it's necessary, and another 8% do not agree with the idea at all. Although most employees place a higher value on experience, some highlight the significance of gaining experience outside the successor's family business. While 76.32% strongly agree that experience is essential, only 39.47% acknowledge the value of experience within their family businesses.

Regardless of their stance on choosing a successor from within the family or their personal experience in family businesses, respondents universally acknowledge the value of experience in leadership. Interestingly, about 16% of employees prefer a leader with experience outside the family business, citing concerns about nepotism and bias. Notably, those employees are all nonfamily business members and younger ones. Those who advocate for a leader with experience within the family business believe it is crucial for the successor to be familiar with their enterprise's specific challenges and workload. Some also value the continuity of family management styles and strategies, and new leaders should copy their families to manage the business.

While most employees value experience highly, some stress the importance of the successor having experience beyond the confines of their family business. To comprehend the preferences for a successor with external experience, we contrasted the views of employees who believe experience is crucial with those who advocate for experience outside the family business. According to interview transcripts, none are opposed to experience per se, but 16% believe it is essential, specifically when gained outside of their family enterprises.

Finally, we invited our interviewees to share their thoughts on succession and gender-related issues. Our interviewees from family businesses, regardless of gender or familial ties, expressed discontent with gender discrimination, nepotism, and glass ceiling barriers. Despite these challenges, the interviewees emphasised the importance of education and inherent leadership qualities. A common theme among the participants was the value they placed on experience, and there was a notable dissatisfaction with the idea of inexperienced individuals taking on leadership roles.

8. Findings and Discussion

In this research study, the majority of the 252 respondents were nonfamily members (86.5%), and 63.9 were between the ages of 20 and 39. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents worked 5-10 years in their FBs. 70.2% of the respondents graduated from the university, and 8.3% graduated from universities abroad.

In this article, we attempt to provide a conceptual framework that addresses two critical questions in FBs: To what extent do education, experience, and family ties influence the perception of employees in order to accept a woman as a new success.

As discussed above, the Agency Theory mainly analyses the relationship between the owner and the managers; due to the nature of FBs, owner-manager relationships can be embedded in the parent-child relationships. Therefore, the owner may easily consider their children as an agent. Moreover, Agency Theory posits that family owner-management promotes communication and cooperation within the family (Schulze et al., 2001). On the items of how employees perceive management in their FBs, the first examination was conducted by examining the family tie. Literature shows a strong preference for firstborn sons, whereas women have rarely been considered severe candidates for leadership in the family business. Even though the literature indicates that family firms dare to disregard primogeniture (Calabro et al., 2017), it still dominates in many cultures,

The According to results, family members do not have a problem to work with a wo As seen on the findings, there is a positive relation between family ties and accepting a woman as a successor. However, interestingly, there is no significant relationship between family ties and the employees prefer to work for a woman from the family. In terms of ownership and management, previous studies, mainly consistent with Agency Theory, stressed the importance of the family tie, especially for succession selection. As a result of altruism, family members tend to offer the new leading position to their children. However, interestingly, when considering family ties and the employees prefer to work for a woman from the family, there is no significant relation. From this, there is no relation between family ties and the employees' preference to work for a woman from the family. Employees prioritise the capabilities of a new leader over their family connections (Table 3.) However, they are reluctant to work under a leader selected solely based on familial ties.

Table 3. Employees opinions on whether successor should be family members.

If you have a <i>successful successor and the control mechanism is working</i> , then this should not be a problem
They're usually being <i>biased</i>
I would rephrase the word "should" with "can be from the family on the <i>qualifications & capacity</i> "
<i>Nepotism</i> harms the business
Depends on if there are <i>qualified & interested family members</i>
If a member of the family is cut for the job and has what it takes, I don't see why not they should not run the business. However, the role shouldn't be passed down just for the sake of keeping it a family business . We see many examples where the children feel forced to work at the family company when their dreams are actually very different.
Sometimes <i>the successor can be qualified enough to manage the business sometimes may not be</i> .
The successor does not need to be from the family especially if <i>there is no one in the family with the right qualifications and/or interest to pursue the business</i>
<i>talent and capability are the criteria to be able to choose a successor</i>
The company has a strong corporate culture and may be run by professionals too, but <i>a family member may also be involved</i> .
If a successor is not capable enough to continue or manage the business , a professional can be chosen by the board of directors
A successor can be from the family or a professional depending on the work experience and the qualifications , years spent in the company and his/her eagerness of being in the company.
Should be run by the person that is most qualified , in line with the founding families' principles and will maximise returns for the family and
<i>It is important to promote individuals based on merit</i> . Failure to do so may lead to a decline in employee motivation.
To protect the family culture

Several authors examined the employees' gender and its preferences to work for and with the male or female managers. Even though very few studies have shown that there are no preferences between a woman and a man to work with and that they need certain specific characteristics, the Role Congruity Theory underlines the preferences for men and sees men as more suitable for leadership positions. Schein's (1971) "think manager-think male" notion shows the significant bias against the woman managers. However, research also asserts that employees are likely to show a bias toward same-sex others. In terms of family forms context, previous research revealed that family firm CEO predecessor's gender preferences for male family successors, which observes a prioritising of sons over daughters (Ahrens et al., 2015; Discua Cruz et al., 2022). However, there is no research examining employee perceptions towards female successors. Hence, after evaluating previous research, we asserted that female family member employees more likely accept a woman as a successor than male family member employees. According to the results, this study shows that accepting women from the family has a positive autocorrelation among female family member employees.

Regarding experience and education, the effectiveness of education is an important debate topic in business and management literature. However, unfortunately, in the FB context, even though sons and daughters are equally well educated, boys are almost always preferred for leadership positions over daughters. This preference can be seen because of "Nepotism" which creates demotivation and disturbance between the nonfamily employees. Even though the importance of experience has been examined in FB literature, in this article, we attempted to shed light on this issue by discussing the women's experience and education specifically. A significant relationship has been found between experience and preference for work. Additionally, the employees prefer to work for a woman who has experience in their FB than outside of their FB.

9. Conclusion and Future Studies

While presence of women in workplaces is increasing, women are still underrepresented in FBs. However, according to the UK Family Business Sector Report (2021), family SMEs are likelier to have female leaders than nonfamily firms -81.2 % of family SMEs, compared to 52.6 % of nonfamily SMEs. Similarly, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2020 report indicates three economies (Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Madagascar) where the female rate exceeds the male rate. Although women tend to enhance their presence in FBs, 31% of global family businesses have women on board, and 18% of current family business leaders are female.

In this paper, we aim to contribute to the literature by providing a new perspective on the perceptions of employment in FBs regarding accepting women as new leaders, considering family ties, experience, education, and gender.

In this study, correlation is used to determine the answer to this question; "Is there any relation between gender, education, experience, family ties and accepting a daughter as a successor in FBs between employees or not?". The findings are acquired from family and nonfamily member employees, and a significant relation can be seen when analysed. As the body of academic research suggests, gender status beliefs affect women's presence in workplaces, FBs, and business life. However, this study shows that experience is also a critical factor for employees and women's presence in FBs. Even though the literature repeatedly indicates that the family members easily accept woman as a successor rather than nonfamily members, our results show that other variables like the experience can be the determinant factors for family members' assumption.

Unfortunately, as was repeatedly found out in previous studies (Miller et al., 2003; Wang, 2010; Soost & Moog, 2021), family member male successors are still favoured. However, according to our results, educated employees, both from the family and not, consider the family tie or gender of the new successor, and are open to working with someone professional and educated. Extending the meaning of education is the limitation of this study and the suggestion of future studies. Education has been examined in family business literature for education in schools and education relevant to industry. Therefore, future studies may ask about the importance of education for the successor selection by separating formal education and industry-relevant education. Similar to the previous research, our study reveals that female employees prefer to work with female leaders.

Previous research (Miller et al., 2003; Sharma et al., 2013; De Massis, Kotlar and Manelli, 2021) examined the training within or outside the family business and revealed the importance of acquiring relevant education. This study showed that employees want to work with someone with experience in their FBs. Further, experience is more important than education for employees. Furthermore, we acknowledge that the study has not captured the industry and industry-specific gender stereotypes. Thus, it would be interesting for future research to investigate the industry and its effect on gender stereotypes.

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