Journal of Industrial Policy and Technology Management, 4(1), 2021, 77-92

Effects of Incumbent's Commitment in Family Businesses on Succession Planning

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Received: April 28, 2021 Accepted: May 29, 2021 Published: June 01, 2021

Abstract: As many of the researchers agree succession planning is one of the key factors on the sustainability and survival of family businesses over generations. Nevertheless, majority of the family businesses all over the world does not consider succession planning as it is required. This situation has multiple reasons. One of the most mentioned reason is that the leaders of the family businesses are not willing to start the transfer process as they are supposed to do. In this regard, the target of this research is to analyse the reasons behind leaders' intentions for succession planning under the construct of organizational commitment perspective. When it comes to the family business literature review it is well known that leader's commitment to the family business impacts the succession planning. Particularly, as affective and continuance commitment has been perceived as effecting succession planning negatively, normative commitment has positive effects on succession planning.

Keywords: Family Business, Succession, Organizational Commitment.

1. Introduction

A family business is defined as a business governed and/or managed by a family or a small number of families. Family Businesses are unique and important forms of economy since they can create a sense of business stability in its organizational structure and economic environment, they also represent a significant labor force (Astrachan & Shanker, 2003). Besides ownership and management of the business, family business is defined by the intention to transfer the business to the next generations (Chua, et al., 1999). Central to the progression of the transfer are leadership experience, authority, decision-making power, and equity. Including the biggest holdings, one third of the family businesses in Europe will have to face with succession process in 10 years (PWC Türkiye, 2018). According to PWC report 18% of family businesses do not know how it will happen.

There is no doubt that the main problem regarding family businesses is having a short-term life period. Most of the newly established family businesses fail in the first five years. The average lifespan of a family business is about 24-25 years. Only 30% of those family businesses manage to survive within the second generation, and only half of them survive within the third generation. Monk (2000) stated that many factors influence the lifespan of the business. In addition to factors that affect family and non-family businesses in common such as operational inefficiencies, lack of financial planning and understanding, lack of strategic planning, a decline in the market, management or ownership succession directly affects the lifespan of any family business. There is a consensus in family business literature that succession is an important factor, even the turning point in a family business's lifespan (Handler, 1994). Willingness of a successor to take over the business, relationship between successor and predecessor, competence and preparation of successor directly affect the success of the succession process. Therefore, there is plenty of research investigating the willingness and commitment of successor. Although willingness and commitment of successor has been seen one of the most mentioned factors in the related academic literature there is a lack of literature research considering incumbent's willingness and commitment.

Going through the family business and commitment literature research, the target of this study is to analyze whether there is a link between incumbent's willingness or unwillingness to succession planning attempts alongside attempt to understand reasons behind neglecting of succession planning. In this regard, the following questions will be tried to be answered: Whether the founder's commitment to the family business is only the affective commitment or not? What lies behind the motivation of a second-generation leader for succession? Is there any willingness of the founder for the succession planning? How does this willingness effect the succession process and the successor?

2. Succession Planning in Family Businesses

Among the various goals a family business pursues, business' continuity across generations is necessary to define family businesses (Basly & Saunier, 2020). CEO succession represents one of the most relevant and critical events that family businesses will have to face, sooner or later (Handler, 1994) (Daspit, et al., 2016). It is a unique feature because researchers define family business with the transfer intention of business to the next generations (Chua, et al., 1999).

In this regard, succession planning has various definitions. Sharma et al. (2001) described succession planning as an orderly process that includes stakeholders' attention (Marshalll, et al., 2006). Churchill and Hatten (1987) have developed a life cycle approach to describe the succession process between father and son in a family business (Churchill & Hatten, 1997). Handler (1990) describes the succession as slow, evolutionary and a mutual role adjustment process between the founder and successor (Handler, 1994). There seems to be a growing consensus about succession being considered mostly as a process than an isolated event (Cabrera-Suarez, et al., 2001) and the success of the process is defined by positive performance outcomes and satisfying the stakeholders (Le Breton-Miller, et al., 2004).

Numerous studies have explored the attributes of the incumbent as predictors of a successful succession process and as critical variables in succession planning. Ward (1987), in fact, has claimed that the business owner is the most important factor in the success of succession (Le Breton-Miller, et al., 2004). Succession intention suggesting that different generations' preferences align. The organizational intentions regarding succession can be easily predicted as the convergence of individual intentions (Campopiano, et al., 2020). However, despite the importance of planning, unfortunately the literature review indicates that succession planning is not often taken seriously by family businesses (Handler, 1989).

3. Commitment in Family Businesses

Family members play an important role in survival of the family businesses. Their contribution in terms of social network, financial capital, and human capital are shaped with their commitment to the family businesses. Nonetheless, the level of their contribution may differ from each other since they cannot be equally qualified or competent. This lack of competence may be compensated by family members' dedication for the success of the venture or their commitments towards their businesses (Sharma & Irving, 2005). In fact, there are various reasons behind why successors show commitment to join their family businesses (Handler, 1989; Sharma, 1997). At his point organizational commitment research helps us to identify different mind-sets that drive the commitment of successors. Side-bet theory of Becker (1960) links commitment to individual's perceived extraneous interests come in with being a part of an organization (Powell & Meyer, 2004). Strong organizational commitment, combined with a culture of stewardship, encourages strategic flexibility, which allows family businesses to probe and respond to environmental changes (Zahra , et al., 2008), which is particularly important to survive in dynamic environmental conditions. Family business leaders indicate the significance of commitment to business as one of the most desirable attributes in next-generation family members (Dawson, et al., 2015).

According to Meyer and Allen (1990) there are 3 mind-sets of commitment namely, affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. And accordingly, they are related with the mind-set of a person involving in an organization. Organizational commitment helps to understand employees' motivation to keep working in an organization. Meyer and Allen (1991) say that it is a desire and related with emotional attachment, a cost-calculated situation or obligation caused by the lack of alternatives or an obligation caused by norms or thoughts of a society or people around you.

After conducting a literature review on Google Academic, Science Direct, Sage, Ebsco Host databases, Table 1 shows most cited research articles on the construct of commitment in family businesses.

Table 1. Research on Commitment in Family Business Literature

Authors	Year	Type	Content
Dennis R. Laker and Mary L. Williams	2003	Theoretical	The present study examined the effect of nepotism on employee satisfaction and organizational commitment.
Randolph T. Baker, George W. Rimler, Evadro Moreno and Thomas E. Kaplan	2004	Theoretical and Empirical	Article investigates the values, succession, and commitment issues found in a convenient sample of 26 family-owned businesses.
Pramodita Sharma, P. Gregory Irving and Natasha Krivokapic	2004	Case Study	Using the organizational commitment literature, four bases of successor commitment and resent antecedent factors proposed. Preliminary tests using five cases are shared, as are research and practical implications.
Miguel A. Gallo Kristin Cappuyns	2004	Theoretical	The study measures the degree of commitment to the family business among family members who do not actually work in the firm.
Sharma and Irving	2005	Theoretical	Commitment in Family business is investigated in 4 bases of commitment. Continuance commitment is divided into two bases as calculative and imperative.
Howard Van Auken and James Werbel	2006	Theoretical	Article asserting that the survival of a family business as partially dependent on spousal commitment.
Rania Labaki	2007	Theoretical	Article suggests a bidimensional commitment concept, building on theories of social identity and organizational behavior as well as on the family business literature.

Authors	Year	Type	Content
Lorraine M. Uhlaner Roberto H. Floren and Jurgen R. Geerlings	2007	Empirical	This paper examines owner commitment and relational governance in the privately held firm.
Shaker A. Zahra, James C. Hayton, Donald O. Neubaum, Clay Dibrell and Justin Craig	2008	Empirical	Using data from 248 family businesses, culture of commitment to the business is positively associated with its strategic flexibility—the ability to pursue new opportunities and respond to threats in the competitive environment.
Manuel Carlos Vallejo	2009	Analytical	Study analyzes the commitment of the non-family employees and propose a model of commitment, with the aim of studying the implications that this variable may have for family businesses.
Anna F. Carmon, Amy N. Miller, Amber Raile and Michell Roers	2010	Theoretical	This study proposes a model of identification for family business employees based on these considerations.
Fei Yi Gao and Shanshan Bai	2011	Empirical	Based on a sample of 186 family businesses in China, this study examined the transformational leadership behaviors of Chinese family businesses owners, and their influence on family employees' organizational commitment.
Magda LM Hewitt, Leon Janse van Rensburg and Wilfred I. Ukpere	2012	Theoretical	This article discusses the current level of knowledge in succession and commitment theories within a family business context. The different theoretical approaches to commitment include the behavioral attitudinal and motivational theories.
Jeremy A. Woods, Thomas Dalziel, and Sidney L. Barton	2012	Theoretical	Theoretical concept to examine how outside board members effect the employee commitment.
M. Katiuska Cabrera-Suarez and Josefa D. Martı´n-Santana	2012	Empirical	The objective of this work is to study the relationships between the successor's commitment and his/her perception of the success achieved in the succession process in family businesses.
Scott Wolford	2012	Analytic	Explaining a leader-centric model of crisis bargaining in three aspect. In equilibrium, the sensitivity of an incumbent's political survival to making concessions interacts with the resolve of the successor to affect both the terms of settlement and the occurrence.
Dominique Otten-Pappas	2013	Empirical	Article examines to what extent female successor commitment displays characteristics and which insights its sheds on successor commitment theory.
Josip Kotlar and Alfredo De Massis	2013	Empirical	Among 76 organizational members across 19 family businesses, study identifies goal diversity as a direct consequence of the overlap between the family, ownership, and business systems.

Authors	Year	Type	Content
Christian Koropp, Dietmar Grichnik, and Franz Kellermanns	2013	Empirical	Based on a study on 280 German family businesses, there is a significant relationship between both financial knowledge and positive experience with debt suppliers and owner-managers' financial attitudes toward debt.
Esra Memili, Thomas M. Zellweger and Hanging Chevy Fang	2013	Empirical	Based on a study of 326 family businesses, ownership attachment is an important antecedent to affective organizational commitment.
Raj V. Mahto, Peter S. Davis and Dmitry Khanin	2014	Empirical	Study investigates what influences families' commitment to continue a family business, or continuation commitment. Analysis of a dataset of 2,168 family businesses from a nationwide survey provided support for most hypotheses.
Kimberly A. Eddleston and Robert M. Morgan	2014	Analytic	The articles in this special issue aim to close this apparent gap by providing a more in-depth and granular understanding of the complexities of trust, commitment, and relationships in family business, often challenging established paradigms and common wisdom.
Segaro, E. L., Larimo, J. and Jones, M. V.	2014	Empirical	The purpose of this paper is to determine how aspects of organizational culture, typical to family businesses, influence internationalization. Empirically examined 80 internationalizing family small and medium establishments from the manufacturing sector in Finland.
Alexandra Dawson, Pramodita Sharma, P. Gregory Irving, Joel Marcus and Francesco Chirico	2015	Empirical	This study examines the antecedents of different bases of organizational commitment and intention to stay of later-generation family members who are currently working in their family businesses. Evidence from 199 Canadian and Swiss firms indicates that when these individuals' identity and career interests are aligned with their family enterprise, they experience affective commitment.
Isabella Hatak, Teemu Kautonen, Matthias Fink and Juha Kansikas	2016	Empirical	This study explains how the interplay between innovativeness as a firm' specific resource and family commitment as a family-specific resource affects performance.
María de la Cruz Deniz-Deniz, Maria Katiuska Cabrera-Suarez and Josefa D. Martín-Santana	2016	Empirical	207 family executives show a significant positive influence of managers' affective commitment on the establishment of goals related both to internal (employees) and external (customers and community) non-family stakeholders.

Authors	Year	Type	Content
Hannele Rautamaki and Tarja Römer-Paakkanen	2016	Empirical	Study examines the potential successors' next generation representatives' commitment and willingness to continue their family business in the Finnish context. The framework for the empirical study originates from Sharma and Irving's (2005) paper.
Mario Franco and Solange Franco	2017	Empirical	This study aims to investigate whether organizational commitment in small and medium-sized family enterprises is associated with their employees' contextual performance.
Andrew J. Dhaenens, Laura E. Marler, James M. Vardaman and James J. Chrisman	2017	Theoretical	This paper addresses the relationship between mentoring and organizational commitment within the family business context, suggesting that mentoring in family businesses results in different commitment outcomes depending on the familial status of the members in the mentoring dyad.
Francesco Chirico, Carlo Salvato, Barbara Byrne, Naveed Akhter, and Juan Arriaga Muzquiz	2018	Explanatory	Study aims to heighten awareness to the concept of commitment escalation as it bears on a failing family business.
Raj Mahto, William C. McDowellb and Peter Davis	2019	Theoretical	Study investigates how various types of participation affect family members' influence in the firm and their attitude toward the firm.
Raj V. Mahto, Gautam Vora, William C. McDowell and Dmitry Khanin	2020	Empirical	Building on social identity theory, they develop and test a model of turnover intentions in a family business. Based on a survey of 111 family member employees, a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis applied to examine the model.
Sami Basly and Paul-Laurent Saunier	2020	Explanatory and Empirical	This research offers an explanatory model of family business continuity intentions based on a data sample of 46 French family SMEs the findings show that family members' commitment to the firm is positively related to the owning family's influence on the firm.
Duarte Pimentel, Juliana Serras Pires and Almeida	2020	Empirical	The study explores differences between non-family employees of family and non-family businesses regarding the perceptions of organizational justice and levels of organizational commitment.

3.1. Incumbent's Commitment to Family Business

There are two basic terms to describe the person who leads any family business: "founder" and "incumbent". While the term "founder" refers to the person who establishes the business, the term "incumbent" describes the family member in the highest managerial position after the founder (De Alwis, 2016). “Founder” is the first owner of the business, therefore founder commitment to his or her own company might be slightly different from a later generation incumbent. That can partly be explained as the ownership is a central primary attribute of human survival. Building something to pass to next generation creates emotional attachment in another level (Nicholson & Björnberg, 2008). Furthermore, Zellweger and Astrachan (2008) suggested that because of the individualized owner-possession interaction, owners may develop attachment to their ownership stakes, which creates an emotional value to the owners.

In family businesses, family business owner-managers tend to consider their organization as extensions of themselves or they identify themselves with the business itself. Etzioni (1996) suggests that commitment to any community requires a set of shared values, norms, and meanings, as well as a shared history and identity (Uhlaner , et al., 2007). When organizational ownership represents the harmony between family members, ownership may develop more than a financial meaning to owners (Memili, et al., 2013). Owner commitment has been frequently cited as a strength of the family-owned businesses, besides incentives to act in the long-term interests of the family, effective monitoring of work activities, and selfless rationalities inherent in family grouping and loyalty to the family (Uhlaner , et al., 2007). Most studies have assumed that high levels of commitment are good although some have revealed that high level of commitment may pose possible dangers. In this regard, some of the findings suggest that high commitment may be linked to a lack of creativity and ineffective use of resources which result in resistance to change (Chirico, et al., 2018). Owner-entrepreneur leader's sense of immortality and indispensability contributes to problematic successions (Handler, 1994). Particularly at later stages of psychosocial development, time and retirement pressures can be felt. For the entrepreneur or the CEO, barriers to retirement and succession include the loss of heroic stature and mission (Sonnenfeld, 1988) (Handler, 1994). Many founders never move beyond the monarch stage, insisting on maintaining the control. Correspondingly, many heirs never progress beyond the senior manager or manager stage because of the inability of their parent(s) to authorize their increased power (Handler, 1994).

The founder-owner is the one who has mostly developed the business by devoting their financial and emotional investment. They have taken immense risks to establish and build up the business to its existing level (De Alwis, 2016). In the case of family business incumbents, the target of their action is the family business. In other words, their course of action is determined by the fact that these people felt compelled to engage in their family businesses. However, the mind-set that helped to shape this "stepping up for the business" behavior of each member of a family business may be quite distinct and varied (Sharma & Irving, 2005). To understand these behavioral differences hereafter, it is crucially important to analyze the 3 mind-sets of commitment as mentioned by Meyer and Allen (1990), namely "affective commitment", "continuance commitment" and "normative commitment" as mentioned below:

3.1.1 Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is based on an individual's "emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment is expected to occur when individuals identify themselves with the organization and/or when they experience an alignment between their career aspirations and job opportunities within the business (Sharma & Irving, 2005). For a second generation, family member ownership often comes from a parent or a loved and respected member of the company. Affective attachment to the firm results from the symbolic representations or reminders of interpersonal ties incorporated by the ownership stake. Therefore, affective organizational commitment may also form because of ownership attachment and perceived emotional value (Memili, et al., 2013).

3.1.2 Continuance Commitment

Continuance commitment is based on an individual's awareness of the costs associated with leaving an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This type of commitment is based on the "cost-avoidance" mind-set. There is some disagreement concerning whether continuance commitment is stemming from a multidimensional construct. Sharma and Irving (2005) discuss that in this type of commitment while one dimension is perceived as cost and sacrifices associated with leaving, the second one is the recognition of lack of alternative paths to follow.

Indeed, continuance commitment of founder or incumbent to the family business who worked for a long time in family business, might be associated with the cost and labor invested throughout the years. Some family members participate in the family enterprise throughout their childhood and adolescence (Lambrecht, 2005). Growing up in such close environment people may consider alternatives outside the known carry uncertainty and risk (Dawson, et al., 2015). Whilst next generations grow into a business that aligns with their personal wishes and compensate standards it will become harder to leave.

Furthermore, a successful family business provides significant accumulated wealth and potential non-pecuniary benefits (Hewitt, et al., 2012). There may be economic and social benefits that incumbent may lose by leaving the management position. Also, there are small business owners dealing with financial issues does not want to transfer the business to next generation. Another generation joining to the company means another family to support on family business.

3.1.3 Normative Commitment

Normative commitment is based on individual's feeling of obligation to pursue a course of action (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). In case of an organizational commitment, an individual with high levels of normative commitment would feel obligated to remain with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991) , although they may not perceive this negatively. Rather, they may accept the influencing force and wish to establish and maintain satisfying relationships (Sharma & Irving, 2005). This mind-set develops because of the internalization of norms through socialization. In the context of family business, socialization processes are guided by the prevailing family norms regarding the expected roles of family members (Sharma & Irving, 2005).

Normative commitment may also come from the obligation to compensate the family expectations. Family business members who have the dual identity and role of being a family member and a family business owner-manager with complicated responsibilities of fulfilling both family and business expectations may hold family business objectives higher than their individual objectives (Davis, et al., 2010). Hence, family business roles, serving the greater collective, are likely to be more salient or central than the serving the self (Memili, et al., 2013). If the business has been in the family for multiple generations, and the practice of who takes over in each generational transition is well established and institutionalized, it becomes even more difficult to go against the established traditions and accepted roles (Sharma & Irving, 2005).

3.2. Incumbent's Commitment in Succession Planning

Succession is a multidimensional process influenced from many factors. The factors that are the studied in the family business literature are incumbent related factors which refer mostly to the founder's reluctance to plan for succession due to several issues, including the founder's strong sense of attachment to the business, fear of retirement, death, and lack of other interests (Filser, et al., 2013). However, it is commonly believed that succession process is largely under the control of the founder or incumbent leader of the family business (Sharma, et al., 2003). Successor's commitment is also one of the critical factors for the motivation and perseverance to take over (Sharma & Irving, 2005) but not enough for a successful succession. Incumbent's commitment is another factor to shape a successful transition process. In some case the leader does not willing to transfer the financial and social power.

Succession planning appears to be left to chance by many family-owned businesses (Motwani, et al., 2006). It forces leaders to face their mortality and makes other family members confront the need for change (Le Breton-Miller, et al., 2004). Succession process has emotional burden on family business leaders and the successors. Succession is a process which should take even several years in ideal condition while successor’s responsibility, realm and competency increases as the leader transfers the authority (Handler, 1994).

Typically, succession planning does not begin until the leader enters the last stage in the life cycle which is often in their sixties. Denial is a typical response to facing succession, especially when a person is already having to cope with children leaving home, the empty nest, and the death or illness of parents. Coinciding with an altering stage in the life of the family makes it harder to discuss the succession (Handler, 1994). Business owners are more likely to plan for succession when they perceive the process as being important. Therefore, understanding importance of succession planning will result in formal succession procedure (Sharma & Irving, 2005).

A recent study held in Flanders 30.4% of the CEOs do not have an idea until when they want to retain their shares (Umans, et al., 2018). Kertesz and Atalaya (1999) found that around 70% of founders of family businesses resisted preparing for succession. Another study revealed that only 28% of all family-owned companies surveyed had a succession plan (Marshalll, et al., 2006). In addition, a recent survey of senior generation business owners shows that 25% have not completed an estate plan beyond a will; however, 81% of these owners want their business to stay in the family. Thus, regarding succession, there is a discrepancy between business owners’ desires and their actions. Business owners need to understand the facts that move them toward and away from developing a formal succession plan (Marshalll, et al., 2006).

Rosenblatt et al. (1985) argue that a prerequisite for a smooth succession is the ability and willingness of family members to criticize each other tactfully and accept this criticism without becoming extensively defensive (Motwani, et al., 2006). In some culture offspring as the successor to criticize incumbent is seen as inappropriate and unacceptable. The decision of succession planning is only up to incumbent in such culture if there is no management board or if it is a small company. Sharma et al. (2003) found a significant relationship between a desire to keep the business in the family, a variety of succession activities including defining post-succession strategies and roles and selecting and training a successor. Research has shown that family harmony and positive relationships are positively associated with succession planning

(Marshalll, et al., 2006). Sorenson (2000) reported evidence that relational leaders promote both informal discussions and formal planning toward succession. Therefore, it is expected that there is a positive relationship between relational leadership and the importance of succession planning as well as the creation of formal succession plans (Marshalll, et al., 2006).

One of the reasons why incumbents postpone the succession planning is financial reasons. Incumbent's continuance commitment may occur because of personal financial independency. This is also related with the financial performance of the company or unfavorable market conditions (Umans, et al., 2018). Exiting a calculated cost that alters the lifestyle of the incumbent will also postpone the succession planning. There is also social presence that leadership of a business comes with the social relationship with the customers, partners, or suppliers. Most of the incumbents who are basically high prestigious family business leaders have prestigious places in the society. Another reason is not having an alternative path or a retirement plan after working for long years in the business. Especially founder incumbents devote their lives to build up an establishment from scratch means working day and night not having time to live a life besides the family business.

Especially later generation incumbents might be under the effect of normative commitment. In some communities especially collectivist communities are tied with normative bond to each other. Big families with certain expectations lead the next generation incumbents feel obligated to continue family business and family wealth. Also, family business second or later generation might have formal processes for ownership and management transfer because they experienced the process before and might want to plan a smoother and more efficient succession process. In a collectivist culture paternalistic leadership has positive effects on normative commitment (Cabrera-Suarez, et al., 2001).

4. Conclusion

Family businesses are the biggest part of the macro economies all over the World. However, they have a short lifespan limited with the founder leader's management timeline. As it is known that 2 out of 3 family businesses are unable to pass to the second generation and only one of those who manage to survive in the second generation succeed to pass the heritage to the third generation. Despite a plethora of research in this area, succession rates among family businesses remain so low (Campell, et al., 2007), although several studies in family business literature emphasize the importance of succession planning. Researchers wonder how family and business can live together under the roof of family businesses and build a wealth in this complex environment. It is also interesting that despite all the research, knowledge and experience of the past fifty years, the ratio of survival did not alter. Incumbent's high affective commitment improves family business performance, but it does not contribute to succession to take place. Moreover, continuance commitment of leader might influence the succession process negatively due to financial or social dependency. On the other hand, normative commitment of the leader is influenced from community and family before him and around him might lead to a better a management of succession process. Therefore, understanding the commitment determinants of members of family in every level in the business is a growing topic in family business literature. Therefore, the target of this research is to contribute the literature by indicating that there is a strong relationship between incumbents' commitment and succession planning. For further studies, it is recommended that these findings should be tested empirically regarding family business incumbents in Turkey.

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