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Examining the succession process in family businesses: A case study of a catering business

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ABSTRACT

This study explores succession planning to ensure the long-term sustainability of family businesses, a critical issue given the high failure rate linked to ineffective leadership transitions. Focusing on Sedap Catering, a family business established in 1987 in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia, the research aims to analyze the stages and dynamics of succession, specifically how the founding generation applies strategies to potential successors. Family businesses are crucial to the Indonesian economy, but they often face challenges in maintaining leadership continuity. Theoretical frameworks include family business theory, succession planning, and stewardship theory, offering insights into the motivations of family leaders during the succession process. A qualitative approach is used with a single case study, involving in-depth interviews, observations, and document studies. Five key respondents were selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis, triangulation, and member checking to ensure reliability. The results show that Sedap Catering's succession process is informal yet structured, reflecting the family's values of trust, continuity, and service quality. Successors are selected based on character, competence, and commitment, with gradual integration into the business and continuous evaluation. This method ensures smooth leadership transfer, strong employee loyalty, and family harmony. The study provides practical insights for family businesses in Indonesia and contributes to academic understanding of succession planning.

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1. Introduction

The succession process in family businesses is a strategic challenge for maintaining business continuity across generations, as leadership transitions from the founding generation to successors can become critical. Without careful planning and clear succession strategies, internal conflicts, performance decline, or even failure may arise (Chrisman et al., 2005). Succession in family businesses is a complex process that often leads to generational

failures. Rahadi (2017) adds that another issue is the lack of innovation in family businesses, which is often hindered by limited knowledge and high costs. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the succession process in family businesses that have successfully carried out regeneration is needed. Succession planning itself is a systematic process carried out by business owners to prepare the next generation to continue the family business, including candidate selection, training, and the gradual transfer of responsibilities. Several studies, such as by Remery et al. (2014), Ramadani et al. (2017), and Anggadwita et al. (2020), identify four key dimensions in succession planning: Succession antecedents (initial factors such as family culture and successor readiness), succession process (phases of leadership transition), succession activities (mentoring and training), and desired outcomes (business continuity and competitiveness). This study is important because, according to Porfírio et al. (2020), 88% of family businesses fail to survive to the third generation due to weak succession planning.

A family business is an enterprise owned and managed by family members connected by blood, marriage, or adoption. Factors such as assets, business age, personnel management, owner's working hours, family involvement as employees, and the recruitment of temporary workers are positively related to both business and family achievements (Olson et al., 2003). Family businesses contribute significantly to the economy, in Indonesia, around 95% of businesses are family-owned, accounting for 82% of the national gross domestic product. These businesses span various sectors with differing levels of sustainability. According to a 2014 survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), family businesses in Indonesia account for 95% of all businesses in the country (Prayogo et al., 2019). The regeneration process varies: 37% to 40% are managed by two generations, 33% by the third, and around 11% by the fourth. The sectors are diverse, with approximately 50% operating in manufacturing, mirroring the global trend.

In Bandung, West Java, Indonesia, 17 creative economy sectors contribute to the city's economy. The culinary sector has the highest number of businesses, with 1.500 units accounting for 41% of the city's gross domestic product (Hermawanti, 2023). This data shows that the culinary sector plays a strategic role in regional economic growth and has significant potential for continued development. Therefore, this research focuses on family businesses in the culinary sector (Charisma et al., 2025). Sedap Catering, a family business operating for 31 years, has successfully regenerated, with a smooth succession process that has avoided significant internal conflicts. Each generation has a clear role, with trust gradually being given to manage the business. The success of succession at Sedap Catering makes it an ideal case for research, particularly in the catering services subsector. The success of Sedap Catering shows that succession in family businesses does not always end in conflict or failure, as often highlighted in previous studies. This concrete example provides a deeper understanding of the key factors that enable a smooth, sustainable leadership transition.

The selection of Sedap Catering as the case study is justified because it offers a rare example of successful, harmonious succession in a small-scale family culinary business, filling the research gap in this sector. The study will explore the dynamics of this process, the roles of family values, and informal succession systems, which have not been adequately covered in existing research. The argument for the research gap is strengthened by the lack of studies on succession planning in small family culinary businesses, particularly in the catering subsector. Studies such as Ramadani et al. (2017) and Anggadwita et al. (2020) have focused on specific ethnic groups and structural dimensions, such as gender and cultural values. However, there has been no research on the catering subsector, which is highly vulnerable to business sustainability. This study will fill that gap by providing valuable insights into succession processes in this unique context.

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2. Literature Review

2.1. Stewardship Theory

Stewardship theory explains managerial behavior by emphasizing intrinsic motivation, trust, and collective responsibility, where leaders act as stewards who prioritize organizational sustainability over personal interests (Davis et al., 1997). Recent studies extend this perspective in the context of family businesses, highlighting that stewardship behavior is reinforced by emotional attachment, family values, and long-term orientation (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2018; Astrachan et al., 2021). In succession contexts, stewardship manifests through the founder's willingness to transfer authority gradually, the successor's commitment to preserving the family legacy, and mutual trust that reduces opportunistic behavior (Alves et al., 2021).

These studies collectively suggest that stewardship is not merely an individual attitude, but a relational process embedded in family culture and intergenerational interactions. Recent literature further links stewardship theory to family governance mechanisms that shape succession processes. Both formal arrangements (e.g., family constitutions) and informal practices (e.g., family meetings, mentoring, and value transmission) are shown to strengthen stewardship behavior by fostering shared understanding, legitimacy, and continuity across generations (Subramanian, 2018; Ulrich, 2025).

2.2. Family Business

A family business is an enterprise in which ownership, control, and strategic decision-making are significantly influenced by family members, with a firm intention to preserve the business across generations. Recent literature emphasizes that family businesses are characterized by long-term orientation, emotional attachment, and a commitment to continuity and legacy, reflecting the strategic approaches adopted by family firms in succession processes (Baltazar et al., 2025). Recent studies on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) highlight that family businesses' deep social roots and strong identity enhance resilience, especially during periods of crisis. Anggadwita et al. (2021) demonstrate that technology and innovation capabilities play a critical role in strengthening business resilience among MSMEs, enabling firms to adapt, innovate, and sustain performance under environmental turbulence.

2.3. Succession

Succession in family businesses refers to the transfer of leadership, control, and responsibility from one generation to the next and represents a critical phase that determines business continuity. Contemporary literature emphasizes that succession is a multidimensional and long-term process involving strategic, relational, and emotional components rather than a single administrative event (De Massis et al., 2021). Two key conditions influencing succession effectiveness are the successor's ability and willingness to assume leadership roles. When both are present, successors are better able to adopt new management systems while preserving valuable organizational practices; conversely, deficiencies in either dimension increase the risk of succession failure and organizational instability.

Beyond structural and cognitive aspects, succession is also shaped by emotional dynamics between founders and successors. Feelings of anxiety, fear of losing control, and intergenerational tension may hinder timely leadership transfer if not correctly managed (Hernández-Perlines et al., 2020). Research suggests that early and structured succession planning, through training, gradual delegation, and cross-functional exposure, helps mitigate emotional resistance and strengthens successors' sense of ownership and

commitment (De Massis et al., 2021). Synthesizing these perspectives, succession can be understood as an integrative process driven by competence, willingness, knowledge transfer, communication, and emotional management, which together form the basis of the research framework in this study for explaining sustainable succession in family-owned catering businesses.

2.4. Leadership

Leadership is the ability to influence others to achieve shared goals. Yukl and Gardner (2019) note that it involves motivating, coordinating, and managing relationships. In family businesses, leadership also maintains harmony and family values. Northouse (2025) emphasizes that leadership builds relationships through vision, strategy, and communication. It is a dynamic process requiring integrity, adaptability, and social sensitivity. Family business leaders face unique challenges, including emotional involvement, role ambiguity, and potential conflicts. Success depends on balancing business and family relationships (Kidwell et al., 2012) Transformational leadership is effective in motivating and inspiring members to achieve excellence and foster innovation (Pranogyo & Hendro, 2022), while transactional leadership, through clear targets and rewards, strengthens accountability within the family.

In succession, effective leadership eases the transfer of responsibility from founders to successors (Nwuke & Adeola, 2023). Wise leaders involve successors in decision-making and intensive learning, building skills, ownership, and commitment. Beyond managerial competence, family business leaders need soft skills such as negotiation and empathy to manage differing values and interests, maintain harmony, and foster a supportive work climate (Boyatzis & Soler, 2012). To strengthen leadership effectiveness, leaders must pay attention to organizational culture. A leadership style aligned with family values can reinforce the business's identity among employees and customers (Cherchem, 2017). When family values and professionalism complement each other, family businesses become more adaptable to market changes while preserving their original character.

2.5. Conflict and Family Dynamics in Business

Conflict in family businesses arises from the overlap of personal and professional relationships. Seaman (2017) argue that conflict is inevitable and developed "The Conflict Equation" approach for managing it. Family dynamics play a key role in the formation and escalation of conflict. Astrachan and Binz Astrachan (2020) note that emotional tension within the family can affect business interactions. Nepotism and favoritism also contribute to conflict, with Anand et al. (2025) recommending fair, transparent policies to reduce their impact. Conflicts may arise during leadership succession in family businesses. von Schlippe et al. (2021) note that differing views between founders and successors regarding the company's direction can create tension, underscoring the need for open communication and well-planned succession. A culture that values trust, openness, and respect help prevent and manage conflicts effectively (Seaman, 2017). Establishing such a culture encourages dialogue and recognizes individual contributions. In complex cases, involving third parties like mediators or family business consultants can provide objective perspectives and facilitate constructive solutions (Alderson, 2015).

2.6. Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the succession process in family-owned organizations or enterprises, from initial factors (antecedents) to expected outcomes.

10.12928/fokus.v16i1.15002

This model is based on a process-oriented approach, meaning that the success of succession is not solely determined by the selection of successors but also by the values, organizational structure, procedures, communication activities, and participation that accompany the process. In general, the model explains that the success of leadership transition in family businesses is strongly influenced by the following components:

- Succession Antecedents → Initial factors such as cultural values, organizational structure, candidate availability, and succession strategy.
- Succession Process → Rules and procedures for selecting successors, emphasizing values, innovation, and dedication.
- Succession Activities → Practical activities including meetings, open discussions, and successor involvement in business operations.
- Desired Outcomes → Final results such as sustainable business programs, effective turnover control, and collaborative problem-solving abilities.

This model is integrative and value-oriented, emphasizing how family values are internalized into managerial processes and how communication and participation serve as crucial bridges between planning and achieving the desired outcomes. The following conceptual framework illustrates the logical flow from antecedents to expected outcomes in the family business succession process:

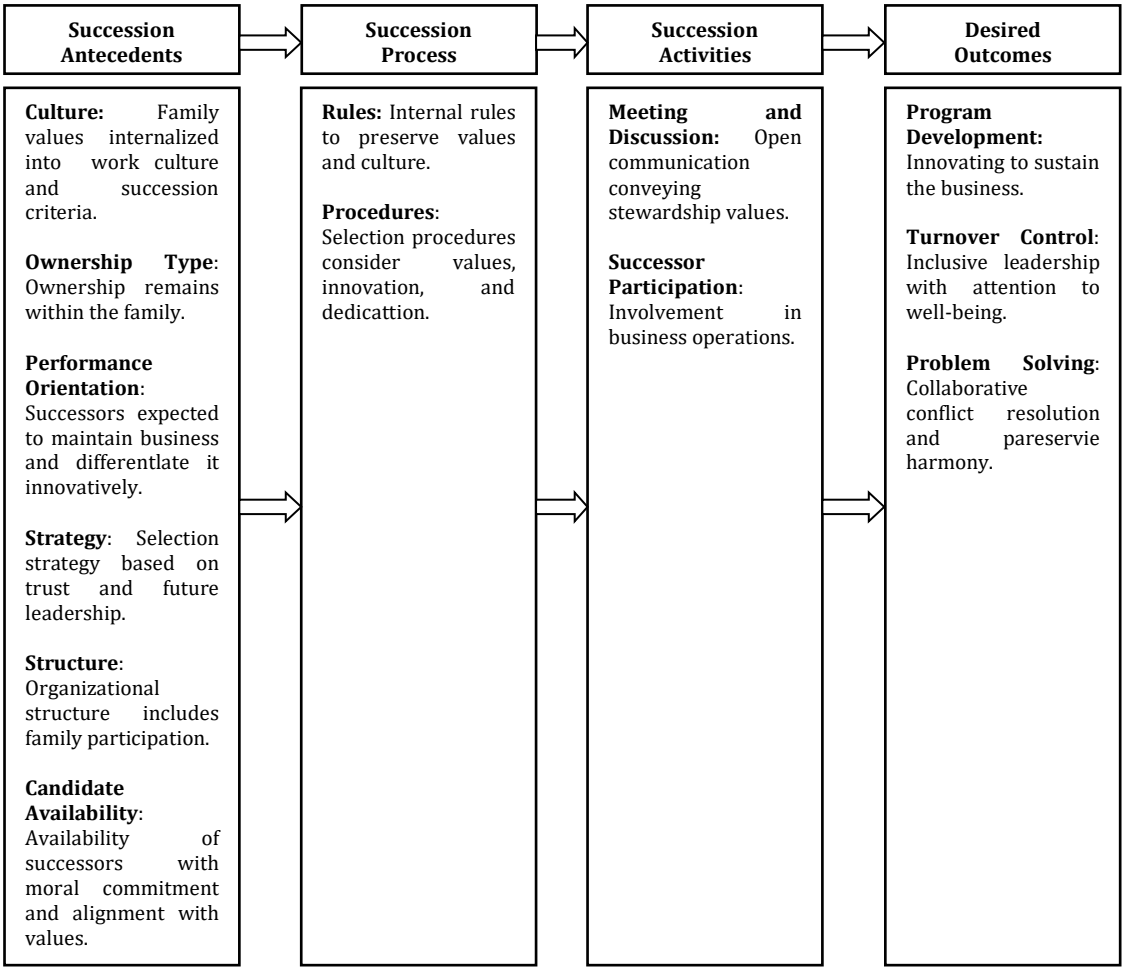

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework used in this study, developed based on the stewardship theory approach. The first stage, succession antecedents, forms the foundation of the succession process and includes six key components (Chrisman et al., 2013; Ramadani et al., 2017). First, culture, which refers to family values internalized in the company's work culture as the basis for selecting successors. Second, ownership type, ensuring ownership remains within the family to maintain continuity of vision and control across generations. Third, performance orientation, expecting successors to innovate and develop the business. Fourth, strategy, referring to the selection of successors based on trust, values, and leadership potential. Fifth, structure, the organizational structure that actively involves the family in management. Sixth, candidate availability, indicating the availability of successors committed to family values.

The second stage, succession process, involves rules and procedures that facilitate leadership transition in family businesses. In stewardship theory, this process emphasizes long-term commitment, a collective orientation, and alignment of organizational goals with successors' intrinsic motivations. Unlike formal approaches, stewardship-based succession planning emphasizes preserving family values, fostering cross-generational vision, and promoting sustainability. Alves et al. (2021) explain that stewardship behavior is influenced by individual motivations and an organizational culture that supports identification with the family business mission. The successor selection process tends to favor individuals with commitment, understanding of family values, and readiness to preserve the company's legacy, using a participatory approach that maintains harmony and business continuity.

The third stage, succession activities, consists of two main aspects. First, meeting and discussion, which involves open communication among family members to convey collective values and agree on the successor's role. Second, successor participation, which engages the successor candidates in the company's operations to build practical experience and a sense of ownership of the organization (Medina-Craven et al., 2021). The final stage, desired outcomes, refers to the expected results of the succession process, according to Monticelli et al. (2019). Three main components in this stage include program development, which involves the successor's ability to develop programs or innovations to support the family business's continuity. Turnover control, which is the new leadership's ability to maintain organizational stability by focusing on team well-being and loyalty. Problem solving, which emphasizes collaborative conflict resolution to sustain internal harmony and business continuity.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study uses a descriptive, qualitative case study design to provide an in-depth understanding of the succession process in family businesses, focusing on Sedap Catering in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), research based on strategy can be classified into several types, including experiments, surveys, case studies, ethnography, grounded theory, and action research. One of the strategies commonly used in qualitative research is the case study, which investigates phenomena in depth within real-life contexts and allows researchers to explore the complex dynamics of a case using multiple data sources. In this study, the case study strategy was chosen to explore the succession process in the family business Sedap Catering, a complex phenomenon involving social interactions, family values, and organizational dynamics, making the case study an appropriate method for deep exploration of the experiences and processes involved.

10.12928/fokus.v16i1.15002

The descriptive approach systematically portrays the phenomenon without testing causal relationships, while the qualitative method enables the researcher to explore meanings, processes, and social contexts through interviews, observations, and documentation. The informants in this study were selected for their direct involvement in the succession process, ensuring their perspectives provide comprehensive insights into leadership transitions. The main informants include the primary owner from the first generation, two owners from the second generation, and two owners from the third generation. This selection was made to ensure that all stages of succession are represented, from the initiation of the process by the first generation to the leadership experiences of the second and third generations. The researcher believes that interviewing these five respondents is sufficient to answer the research questions and achieve the research aim, as they provide firsthand, diverse, and multi-generational insights into the succession process. The unit of analysis is the organization, focusing on how structure, culture, and values influence leadership transitions.

This research is conducted with minimal researcher involvement, acting as a passive observer, and carried out in the natural environment of Sedap Catering without manipulation. The cross-sectional time frame captures the current state of succession within a specific period. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative description emphasizes collecting in-depth data to understand subjects' experiences or perspectives in their natural context, without seeking causal relationships. This approach is well-suited for exploring real-life phenomena that cannot be understood through numbers or statistics and is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the succession process in family businesses.

3.2. Case Selection and Sampling Strategy

The research adopts purposive sampling, selecting Sedap Catering as the case due to its relevance and uniqueness as a family business in the culinary sector facing succession challenges. In qualitative research, the goal is not generalization but deep understanding, so participants are chosen based on their direct involvement and knowledge. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants who possess specific characteristics or experiences that are critical to understanding the phenomenon being studied (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In this study, the criteria for purposive sampling include selecting Sedap Catering because it is a family business that has successfully navigated succession across three generations. This unique characteristic of having undergone multiple leadership transitions without significant internal conflicts makes it an ideal case for studying family business succession. Additionally, the participants, including the business owner and family members from different generations, were selected for their direct involvement in the leadership transition, providing valuable insights into the succession process.

The key informant is the business owner, who has comprehensive insights into all stages of the succession process. This approach ensures that the selected participants have valuable information that can provide an in-depth understanding of the research topic. The sampling strategy aligns with Spradley's social situation framework, which comprises place (Bandung City), actor (owner and family members), and activity (interviews, observations, and document analysis), thereby ensuring a contextual understanding of the phenomenon under study. Additionally, selecting Sedap Catering as a single case study enables an in-depth exploration of the complexities and dynamics of family business succession. This focused approach provides a holistic understanding of how leadership transitions, family values, and business continuity interact in real-world contexts. By narrowing the scope to one well-defined case, the research gains the

advantage of contextual richness and depth, enabling the identification of nuanced factors that might be overlooked in multi-case or quantitative studies.

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection follows naturalistic methods, including in-depth interviews, observations, and document studies. This study uses primary data obtained from interviews. The research instrument for the interviews included a set of interview guidelines, focusing on four main variables: succession antecedents, succession process, succession activities, and desired outcomes. The interview questions were designed to explore the informant's experiences and perspectives on each of these variables, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the succession process. Interviews were conducted with the business owner and family members involved in the succession process, focusing on these key areas. Observations captured fundamental interactions and business operations, while documents such as organizational structures, ownership records, and internal reports provided contextual support. Both primary data (from interviews and observations) and secondary data (from internal documents and archives) were used to ensure a comprehensive and triangulated understanding.

The number of informants in this study is the owner of Sedap Catering, who serves as the primary source of information on the entire succession process. In qualitative research, the primary focus is on deep, contextual understanding rather than statistical generalization, and a smaller number of informants can provide rich, in-depth insights into the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). This is particularly relevant in family businesses, where succession processes are often highly personal and unique. The researcher ensured that one informant was enough by selecting the business owner, who had comprehensive insights into all stages of the succession process, and by triangulating data from other sources, such as observations and documents. Additionally, a family business is considered to have reached the second generation when it starts to face succession challenges, thus meeting the criteria for this study. Table 1 show the informants involved in data collection.

Table 1. Informants Involved in Data Collection

No	Informants' Initial	Position	Role and Responsibility
1	N	Business Owner	Primary informant, responsible for decision-making and overseeing the succession process at Sedap Catering.
2	ASH (N2)	Branch 2 Owner – Sedap Catering (2 generations)	Manages daily operations and supervises staff performance at Branch 2.
3	AY (N3)	Branch 3 Owner – Sedap Catering (2 generations)	Responsible for customer relations and ensuring consistent service quality at Branch 3.
4	NS (N4)	Branch 5 Owner – Sedap Catering (3 generations)	Focuses on innovation, marketing strategy, and digital promotion at Branch 5.
5	RF (N5)	Branch 7 Owner – Sedap Catering (3 generations)	Handles business development and expansion planning for Branch 7.

The data collection process emphasized credibility and authenticity through prolonged engagement and repeated validation with the informant. Field notes and reflective memos were also used to record nonverbal cues, contextual nuances, and the

10.12928/fokus.v16i1.15002

researcher's interpretations during interviews and observations. To ensure the data's credibility and reliability, the study used member checking, in which the informant verified the accuracy of the collected information. Triangulation was also used by incorporating multiple data sources (interviews, observations, and documents) to cross-verify findings and enhance validity. This approach ensured that the collected data not only reflected factual information but also captured the underlying values, emotions, and family dynamics that influenced the succession process at Sedap Catering.

3.4. Data Collection

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman (1984) interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved coding and theming key findings related to the succession process. Data display was organized through descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to identify patterns and relationships. Conclusions were drawn iteratively and verified through triangulation and member checking to ensure validity. The study employed NVivo 15 software to manage coding, categorize themes, and visualize relationships, enhancing analytical transparency and systematic interpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

4. Results and Discussion

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman (1984) interactive analysis model. The analysis yielded several key themes regarding the succession process at Sedap Catering. These themes include family values, successor readiness, mentoring practices, leadership criteria, family meetings, innovation initiatives, and employee loyalty. The identified themes were then organized and aligned with the four variables of the research framework: succession antecedents, succession process, succession activities, and desired outcomes. This categorization enables a clearer understanding of how each empirical finding contributes to explaining the company's overall succession dynamics.

Under the variable of succession antecedents, the findings highlight the strong influence of family cultural values, concentrated ownership, performance orientation, and the availability of prepared successors. In the succession process variable, the findings reveal gradual delegation, mentoring through direct involvement, and continuous evaluation as central mechanisms of leadership transition. Regarding the succession activities variable, family meetings, informal discussions, and operational engagement function as platforms for knowledge transfer and leadership legitimization. Meanwhile, in the desired outcomes variable, the analysis indicates business continuity, service quality maintenance, employee loyalty, innovation development, and family harmony as key indicators of successful succession at Sedap Catering. The structured presentation of these findings ensures coherence between the empirical evidence and the conceptual framework, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how succession is implemented and sustained in the family business context.

4.1. Succession Attendents

Succession antecedents are the foundational factors that shape and influence the succession process in family businesses. These include family values, ownership structure, performance orientation, selection strategy, organizational structure, and successor availability. The antecedent factors in Sedap Catering's succession were analyzed using thematic coding and triangulated across interviews, observations, and documents. Family values emphasizing obedience align with stewardship theory by Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2018), which holds that loyalty and trust sustain continuity.

Ownership remains centralized, but operational roles are fairly shared, showing informal family governance (Chirico & Salvato, 2016). Performance is assessed through discipline, responsibility, and service quality (Chrisman et al., 2013). Successor selection focuses on integrity and commitment over formal criteria (Ramadani et al., 2017). The simple family-based structure aligns with family business governance (Anderson & Reeb, 2003), ensuring clarity of roles. Limited yet promising candidates, especially the youngest child and in-law, confirm that early involvement fosters tacit knowledge transfer (Widodo et al., 2024).

The succession antecedent's variable at Sedap Catering consists of five key factors influencing succession readiness: Successor preparation, trust, business ownership, family values, and work culture. Successor preparation is the dominant factor, emphasizing the importance of involving the younger generation in business activities from an early stage. Trust strengthens the relationship between the founding and succeeding generations, while business ownership ensures that the enterprise's control remains within the family. Family values and work culture serve as moral foundations that preserve the company's identity and professionalism. Overall, these five factors interact to create a harmonious and sustainable succession process.

4.1.1. Culture

Family businesses often consider culture to be their core identity. Culture is not merely a set of traditions or routines, but rather a shared system of values, beliefs, and practices that shape how members think, act, and make decisions. It functions as a powerful social glue, binding generations together and guiding the behavior of both family and non-family members within the business.

Family culture serves as the foundation of Sedap Catering's work system. The founder applies fairness and responsibility by distributing tasks evenly among the children. The informant stated,

"We divide the work... for every order, I assign tasks to each of them... it is shared fairly". (N1)

Although each child has a different character, they still follow the established rules,

"...we already have my standards, so all the children must follow what I say". (N1)

This reflects respect and obedience to the founder as the central figure. In line with stewardship theory (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2018), family values and loyalty are key assets for ensuring business continuity. By instilling these values early, the founder has built strong intergenerational cohesion that sustains the business.

4.1.2. Ownership Type

Ownership type refers to the structure and distribution of legal and decision-making authority within a business. In the context of family businesses, ownership can take various forms, ranging from individual or sole ownership, where control is centralized in one person, to collective ownership, where family members or multiple stakeholders share ownership rights. The ownership of Sedap Catering is entirely under the control of the founder, who emphasized her exclusive authority, stating,

"The name, no, it is for me, just me, only me." (N1)

"Yes, I am the sole owner. Everything belongs to me since I was the one who started the business, although all of us are involved in its management." (N2)

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Despite this personal ownership structure, operational responsibilities are distributed proportionally among the kitchens according to their capacity and available facilities. As expressed by the informants,

"Ten orders I give two to this kitchen, depending on their ability and equipment." (N1)

"Every kitchen cannot receive the same number of tasks; we divide them based on each kitchen's capacity." (N4)

Fairness serves as the fundamental principle of this distribution system. The founder highlighted the importance of equity and moral responsibility, explaining,

"That way it is fair we try to be fair, also because we fear God." (N1)

This mechanism aligns with the concept of family governance proposed by Chirico and Salvato (2016), where governance in family businesses is not always formally codified but still ensures fairness, reduces jealousy, and strengthens the sense of collective ownership among family members. Thus, even with sole ownership, a fair and transparent operational distribution system fosters family involvement, mutual trust, and commitment in sustaining the business.

4.1.3. Performance

Performance in the context of succession planning refers to the measurement of an individual's effectiveness, contribution, and potential within an organization. In family businesses, performance encompasses not only current operational achievements but also the future potential to lead and sustain the business. Performance evaluation in this context includes assessing productivity, task management, and the ability to mentor others, set an example, and preserve the family's core values.

Performance has become a key focus in preparing successors at Sedap Catering. The informant expressed satisfaction with the company's current achievements, stating,

"Alhamdulillah, the performance of Sedap Catering is quite good now. All kitchens are running smoothly, orders are increasing, and we continue to maintain the quality well." (N5)

This statement refers to the successors' ability to maintain order volume and effectively manage each kitchen. The founder further emphasized the importance of leadership continuity, explaining,

"As I get older, I cannot do it anymore, so one of my children must take the lead, but they must be able to guide everyone." (N1)

This performance is measured not only by current accomplishments but also by the successor's vision for the future. This aligns with Chrisman et al. (2013), who emphasize the importance of maintaining high performance expectations and consistent evaluation to ensure that successors are adequately prepared to sustain competitiveness. The founder's focus on discipline, responsibility, and loyalty reflects her efforts to instill long-term sustainability standards and preserve the family's legacy for future generations of Sedap Catering.

4.1.4. Strategy

Strategy, in the context of selecting successors, refers to the approach or plan used to identify, assess, and choose the next leaders in an organization. In family businesses, this strategy is often shaped by values, morals, and a commitment to the family legacy, rather than solely by technical skills or formal qualifications. The

strategy for selecting successors emphasizes integrity, commitment, and alignment with family values. The informant stated,

"...if you do not follow what I say... you can start your own, but it will not be called Sedap Catering" (N1)

This shows that maintaining the family's good name and following the founder's guidance are essential. The selection relies on continuous evaluation of sincerity, honesty, and willingness to uphold established values rather than formal criteria. This supports Ramadani et al. (2017), who note that in family businesses, value alignment and morality often outweigh technical skills or formal positions. Thus, Sedap Catering's strategy focuses on preserving values and integrity to sustain the founder's vision.

4.1.5. Structure

In the context of family businesses, structure refers to the organizational framework that defines roles, responsibilities, and relationships among members within the company. It determines how decisions are made, how tasks are divided, and how authority is distributed. In family enterprises, the organizational structure often blends formal and informal elements, with family values and interpersonal relationships central to shaping the company's operational dynamics.

Sedap Catering operates with a simple, family-based organizational structure led by the founder as the principal leader. The informant described this arrangement as follows:

"The structure is quite simple. The mother is the main leader, and we, her children, manage several kitchens and handle different operational parts." (N2)

All family members, including the younger generations, actively participate in business activities, as another informant stated:

"We all work here, yes, everyone in the family is involved, even my grandchildren." (N1)

This informal yet clearly defined structure reflects the typical characteristics of family businesses, combining flexibility with clarity in roles and responsibilities. Such an approach allows decision-making to remain efficient and adaptive while fostering strong emotional and professional engagement across generations. According to Anderson and Reeb (2003), organizational structures of this kind enhance operational efficiency and strengthen family members' involvement, particularly among younger generations, thereby promoting the natural and harmonious continuity of the business.

4.1.6. Candidate Availability

Candidate availability refers to the identification and readiness of potential successors who are prepared to take over leadership roles in a business. In family businesses, this involves evaluating family members or in-laws who are willing, capable, and aligned with the organization's values. The process often includes early involvement and grooming, allowing potential successors to gradually acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and leadership qualities to sustain the business. Successor availability at Sedap Catering is limited but includes well-prepared potential candidates. The informant stated,

"When I get old, someone will continue... yes, already prepared". (N1)

She identified the youngest child and the in-law as strong candidates,

"...my son-in-law is humble... gets along with his siblings, he is willing and capable". (N1)

The candidate has long contributed,

10.12928/fokus.v16i1.15002

"…he helped grow Sedap Catering; he runs the second kitchen after me". (N1)

This shows early grooming through direct involvement, supporting Widodo et al. (2024), who note that early participation accelerates tacit knowledge transfer and successor readiness.

4.2. Succession Process

The succession process refers to the steps and procedures followed to identify, prepare, and transition leadership from one generation to the next in a family business. This process often combines formal and informal elements, including mentorship, gradual assignments, and evaluations based on family values and competencies. The goal is to ensure that successors are not only technically capable but also aligned with the business's core values and culture.

The succession process at Sedap Catering follows unwritten family rules understood by all members. This aligns with Astrachan and Binz Astrachan (2020), who note that Indonesian family businesses often rely on informal, value-based systems. Successors are evaluated on discipline, honesty, cleanliness, and loyalty, with emphasis on character and competence. Selection occurs through gradual assignments and direct mentoring, consistent with Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2003), who highlight the importance of early involvement in building managerial, technical, and psychological readiness. Thus, Sedap Catering's value-driven mentoring approach effectively prepares its successors.

The Succession Process variable at Sedap Catering consists of three main components: successor appointment procedures, evaluation, and successor criteria. The successor appointment procedure is the dominant factor, indicating that leadership transition is carried out in a structured yet informal manner through family discussions and mutual agreements. The evaluation component focuses on assessing the successor candidates' abilities, sense of responsibility, and commitment to family values. Meanwhile, the successor criteria reflect the standards for selecting the ideal heir, emphasizing loyalty, managerial capability, and alignment with the founder's vision. Overall, the succession process at Sedap Catering is systematic and rooted in strong family values, ensuring the business's sustainability across generations.

4.2.1. Rules

In the context of family businesses, rules refer to the guidelines, expectations, and standards that govern behavior and decision-making within the organization. These rules are often shaped by family values and culture rather than formalized written policies. In such settings, informal rules are typically understood and followed by members without written documentation. However, they play a vital role in ensuring that leadership transitions align with the family's values and long-term vision.

The findings of this study indicate that Sedap Catering has established clear and consistent rules for succession, supported by a well-defined Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). As one informant stated,

"We already have clear SOPs." (N4)

This reflects the governance pattern commonly found in Indonesian family businesses, where rules tend to be value-based rather than strictly formal. Another informant elaborated on the leadership criteria, emphasizing the importance of character and interpersonal qualities:

"The criteria are being humble, meticulous, maintaining cleanliness, taste, serving guests, and cooperating with all wedding organizers in Bandung." (N1)

These statements reveal that leadership in Sedap Catering prioritizes moral integrity, humility, and social harmony over purely technical competencies. In alignment with stewardship theory, such informal, value-driven rules nurture moral responsibility, loyalty, and a shared sense of duty among family members, factors that ultimately ensure the business's sustainability and preserve the family's reputation across generations.

4.2.2. Procedures

Procedures in the succession process refer to the specific steps and actions undertaken to identify, nurture, and transition leadership within a family business. These procedures are typically gradual and continuous, where potential successors are prepared over time through hands-on learning, mentoring, and regular performance evaluations. This systematic approach ensures that successors are not only equipped with the technical and managerial competencies required for leadership but also internalize the family business's core values, ethics, and cultural standards before assuming formal authority.

At Sedap Catering, the succession process follows a structured, long-term developmental approach. As one informant stated,

"Yes, the main criteria are being able to cook, having leadership ability, and being fully committed to this business." (N2)

This indicates that the selection of successors is not an abrupt decision but rather a carefully constructed process built on experiential learning and continuous guidance. The founder actively monitors the successors' progress, explaining,

"Every Saturday, I check and give feedback, saying, 'This is good, continue." (N1)

These statements reflect a deliberate mentoring and evaluation cycle designed to maintain quality standards and readiness for leadership transition. Consistent with Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2003), this process integrates gradual delegation of responsibility, ongoing mentoring, and periodic review, ensuring that leadership succession at Sedap Catering proceeds smoothly, strategically, and in alignment with the company's long-term sustainability goals.

4.3. Succession Activities

Succession activities refer to the practical steps and interactions involved in preparing potential successors for leadership roles within a family business. These activities often include hands-on learning, family discussions, and direct involvement in business operations, allowing successors to gain valuable experience while also internalizing the family's values and culture. Succession activities are designed to ensure that successors are trained not only in technical skills but also in leadership responsibilities and family business dynamics necessary for the organization's long-term success.

Succession activities at Sedap Catering include family discussions and direct involvement of successors in daily operations. Though informal, these discussions serve as a forum to assess candidates, aligning with Lansberg and Gersick (2015), who emphasize family communication in decision legitimacy. Active participation in kitchen management provides practical experience, as noted by Kesner and Sebora (1994), who argue that hands-on learning best prepares successors. These activities facilitate knowledge transfer and instill values, work culture, and a sense of leadership responsibility.

10.12928/fokus.v16i1.15002

The succession activities variable at Sedap Catering consists of three main components: Major tasks, skill development, and training. Major tasks indicate the active involvement of the next generation in handling strategic and operational responsibilities as a test of readiness. Skill development reflects a continuous learning process through hands-on experience to strengthen technical and leadership competencies. Meanwhile, training equips successors with knowledge and family business values. Overall, the succession activities at Sedap Catering emphasize practical experience and gradual mentoring, ensuring that the regeneration process runs effectively and adaptively.

4.3.1. Meeting and Discussion

Meetings and discussions in the succession process are formal and informal gatherings where family members communicate, share information, and make collective decisions about the future of the family business. These discussions are essential for legitimizing decisions, building consensus, and preventing conflicts, ensuring that all members are aligned and that the transition of leadership is smooth and accepted. Family meetings and discussions are key mechanisms in Sedap Catering's succession process. Communication occurs both formally and informally within the family. The informant stated,

"…every month we have a meeting… a family meeting, we share input… future programs to develop Sedap Catering…". (N1)

Regarding successor selection, decisions are made through simple deliberations,

"… it has been agreed, God willing, the family agrees… there were small talks… back when my husband was here… 'I will trust this person later'…". (N1)

These meetings serve not only to share information but also to legitimize decisions and prevent conflicts. In line with Chrisman et al. (2005) and Ramadani et al. (2017), family communication ensures smooth, accepted leadership transitions in informal succession processes.

4.2.2. Successor Participant in the Company

Successor participation in the company refers to the active involvement of potential successors in the day-to-day operations of the family business. Such participation provides them with direct experience, real responsibilities, and opportunities to learn from the founder or current leadership. It is a vital component of the succession process, enabling successors to acquire not only practical knowledge and managerial competence but also the leadership qualities necessary to sustain and grow the business. Through hands-on engagement, successors internalize the company's culture, ethics, and values, key elements that ensure long-term continuity and family legacy.

At Sedap Catering, the direct involvement of successors in daily operations is a core activity of the succession process. As one informant explained,

"All the interested children are involved in running the business. My other children and I help whenever needed. Sometimes I also help wash and wipe the dishes so the work gets done faster and neater." (N5)

Interview data confirm that successors have long been actively engaged in operational tasks. This early involvement provides them with invaluable practical experience. It facilitates the transfer of tacit knowledge, a crucial form of implicit learning that cannot be easily documented but is fundamental to building leadership readiness (Widodo et al., 2024). In line with stewardship theory, this active participation cultivates psychological ownership and loyalty among successors,

thereby reinforcing their commitment to the family business's continuity and sustainability.

4.4. Desired Outcomes

Desired outcomes in the succession process are the goals and results a family business aims to achieve through leadership transition. These outcomes go beyond simple business continuity and often include maintaining or improving service quality, product innovation, employee loyalty, and family harmony. Achieving these outcomes ensures that the business remains successful, competitive, and aligned with the family's core values and vision for the future.

The desired outcomes of Sedap Catering's succession include business continuity, service quality, employee loyalty, and family harmony. Successors are expected to enhance service, product quality, and innovation through continuous improvement (Ward, 2016). Family involvement strengthens employee loyalty, keeping turnover low, while internal conflicts are resolved through family discussions (Astrachan & Binz Astrachan, 2020). Thus, succession aims not only for sustainability but also to preserve the family values that define the business.

The desired outcomes variable at Sedap Catering includes four main themes: maintaining quality, business sustainability, innovation, and employee welfare. Maintaining quality is the dominant factor, reflecting the family's commitment to preserving taste, service standards, and customer trust across generations. Business sustainability highlights the company's ability to endure through the third generation, while innovation represents adaptation to market and technological changes. Employee welfare demonstrates the company's social orientation and balance within the family business. Overall, these findings indicate that the succession process at Sedap Catering focuses not only on leadership transfer but also on achieving comprehensive sustainability values for the business and all stakeholders.

4.4.1. Program Development

Program development in the context of succession refers to the creation, improvement, and implementation of new initiatives or strategies by the next generation of leadership. Successful program development not only ensures the continuity of the family business but also stimulates innovation and sustainable growth. This process typically involves regular evaluations, constructive feedback, and the continuous introduction of relevant programs that respond to evolving business needs and market dynamics. One anticipated outcome of the succession process at Sedap Catering is the next generation's enhancement of program development. As one informant expressed,

"From my side, I plan to develop our services, try new recipes, and also expand the market." (N2)

This statement indicates that the success of succession is not merely reflected in maintaining business continuity but also in the ability to innovate and expand. Routine evaluations are conducted to monitor progress and maintain quality standards, as the founder explained,

"Every Saturday, I check and provide feedback, saying, 'This is good, continue." (N1)

These practices highlight the family business's ongoing commitment to growth and improvement. Consistent with Ramadani et al. (2017) and Anggadwita et al. (2020), successful succession in family enterprises is characterized by the

10.12928/fokus.v16i1.15002

emergence of new, relevant, and sustainable programs that support business development and ensure long-term competitiveness.

4.4.2. Successor Participant in the Company

Turnover refers to the rate at which employees leave and are replaced within an organization. In family businesses, turnover is often influenced by factors such as employee satisfaction, loyalty, and the relationship between employees and the family. A low turnover rate is typically seen as a positive indicator of business stability and employee engagement, often due to strong emotional bonds and a sense of belonging fostered by family involvement in the business. Another key aspect is employee turnover. The informant stated,

"…rarely any employees leave… only if they are sick or pass away". (N1)

This stability is driven by strong emotional bonds from family involvement, supporting Chrisman et al. (2005), who note higher loyalty in family businesses due to relational ties beyond transactions. In line with stewardship theory, such loyalty reflects a collective orientation prioritizing organizational over individual interests, making low turnover a positive outcome of Sedap Catering's family-based succession.

4.4.3. Successor Participant in the Company

Problem-solving in the context of succession refers to successors' ability to address and resolve operational and internal challenges that arise during the leadership transition. Practical problem-solving in family businesses often involves collaborative decision-making and consensus-based discussions, ensuring that all family members are involved in finding solutions. This approach fosters harmony and maintains the business's continuity by addressing issues in a manner that reflects the family's values and commitment to the business. Another expected outcome of succession is the successor's ability to solve operational and internal conflicts. The informant stated,

"…if there is a problem, we solve it through discussion… there are internal conflicts too, but we resolve them together…". (N1)

This shows that issues are handled collectively through family deliberation, aligning with Astrachan and Binz Astrachan (2020), who note that Indonesian family businesses often use consensus-based problem-solving. As Widodo et al. (2024) suggest, successful succession also depends on managing disagreements and maintaining harmony, making collaborative problem-solving vital for Sedap Catering's stability and continuity.

4.5. Discussion

This study aims to understand how the succession process in a family business can be effectively implemented by integrating family values, governance mechanisms, and intergenerational learning activities. Based on the proposed research framework, the discussion is structured around four main dimensions: Succession antecedents, succession process, succession activities, and desired outcomes. This structure clarifies the connection between the research problem, the conceptual framework, the empirical findings, and the theoretical interpretation.

In the dimension of succession antecedents, the findings indicate that family cultural values, concentrated ownership structure, performance orientation, and successor availability serve as the primary foundations for successful succession at Sedap Catering. These elements reflect stewardship principles emphasizing loyalty, collective orientation, and long-term sustainability. The findings are consistent with

Baltazar et al. (2025), who highlight that value-based governance contributes to stability during leadership transitions. Furthermore, recent research by Sasminto et al. (2024) emphasizes that in the Indonesian context, succession planning is not solely determined by structural factors but also by strong internalization of family values.

Regarding the succession process, the findings reveal that leadership transition at Sedap Catering is conducted informally yet systematically through gradual delegation, unwritten rules, and continuous evaluation. This finding aligns with Madison et al. (2016), who explain that in family firms governed by stewardship principles, succession effectiveness is often supported by trust-based relationships, mentoring, and gradual empowerment rather than purely formalized mechanisms. The implementation of a learning-by-doing approach strengthens the argument of Salvato et al. (2020), who emphasize iterative involvement as a key factor in developing leadership readiness. Furthermore, stewardship-oriented governance requires balancing the preservation of family values with adaptive managerial practices to ensure continuity across generations (Madison et al., 2016). The findings of this study demonstrate that even without highly formalized governance structures, succession can remain effective when supported by active founder involvement and long-term commitment.

In the dimension of succession activities, family meetings, informal discussions, and direct operational involvement serve as mechanisms for knowledge transfer and leadership legitimization. These findings reinforce Ramadani et al. (2017) and Anggadwita et al. (2021), who identify communication and collaboration as central factors in maintaining harmony and stability in family business succession. In addition, recent literature by Schweiger et al. (2024) suggests that family ownership significantly influences strategic decisions and firms' resilience to change, indicating that strong family ownership can contribute to continuity and direction during transitional periods. Thus, succession activities at Sedap Catering not only serve as learning mechanisms but also preserve value continuity and strengthen leadership legitimacy.

In terms of desired outcomes, the findings show that business continuity, service quality, employee loyalty, program innovation, and family harmony are indicators of the successful succession achieved by Sedap Catering. The development of new programs by successors supports recent evidence that entrepreneurial orientation and family involvement significantly enhance long-term family business sustainability (Djakasaputra et al., 2025). The low employee turnover and conflict resolution through family deliberation align with Astrachan and Binz Astrachan (2020), who demonstrate that emotional and relational bonds enhance organizational stability. Furthermore, research by Li et al. (2023) highlights that the identity dynamics between incumbents and successors, including emotional attachment and role perception, significantly influence succession behavior and long-term organizational continuity. In today's uncertain and competitive business climate, integrating family values with adaptive management practices is crucial to ensuring a successful intergenerational transition.

Overall, this study demonstrates that successful succession is not solely determined by formal planning mechanisms but by the consistent integration of family values, gradual mentoring, and effective family communication. The findings reinforce previous literature while also confirming their relevance in the context of contemporary family businesses facing generational change and environmental uncertainty. By structuring the discussion according to the four dimensions of the research framework, the linkage between the research problem, conceptual model, empirical findings, and theoretical implications becomes clearer, providing a comprehensive understanding of sustainable succession in family businesses.

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5. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how the succession process is implemented in a family-owned culinary business and how it ensures leadership continuity and organizational sustainability. The findings demonstrate that family cultural values, informal governance mechanisms, and gradual mentoring strongly drive the succession process at Sedap Catering. These elements directly address the research objectives by showing that succession continuity is not solely dependent on formal structures, but on the integration of values, character-based successor selection, and continuous involvement in daily operations.

Specifically, the study reveals that succession antecedents, such as family values, ownership concentration, and successor availability, provide a strong foundation for leadership transition. The succession process, although informal, operates systematically through unwritten rules, evaluation, and progressive delegation of responsibility. Succession activities, including family deliberation and hands-on operational involvement, facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge across generations. As a result, the desired outcomes of business continuity, service quality, employee loyalty, innovation development, and family harmony are successfully maintained. These findings clearly demonstrate how the succession model implemented at Sedap Catering fulfils the research objective of understanding sustainable leadership transition in family businesses.

Theoretical Aspect

This study contributes to the literature on family business succession by demonstrating that informal governance structures can effectively support sustainable succession when embedded within strong family values. The findings extend succession theory by showing that structured processes do not necessarily require formal documentation to function effectively, particularly in small and medium-sized culinary businesses. Furthermore, this study strengthens the relevance of stewardship-based perspectives by illustrating how collective orientation, loyalty, and long-term commitment influence succession success. By situating the findings within the Indonesian MSMEs context, this research adds contextual insight to the broader succession literature, which is often dominated by studies from Western economies. The study, therefore, contributes to a more context-sensitive understanding of succession planning in emerging markets and industries.

Practical Aspect

The findings of this study offer practical guidance for family-owned MSMEs, particularly in the culinary sector. Since the results show that informal succession mechanisms can be effective when supported by strong values and mentoring, business owners are encouraged to maintain active founder involvement and gradually delegate. However, because the sustainability of such systems may depend heavily on personal relationships, it is recommended that businesses begin to document core rules, successor roles, and governance procedures more systematically to strengthen long-term stability. For Sedap Catering specifically, continuing family deliberation forums and enhancing successor involvement through structured managerial training and innovation initiatives will help maintain competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic market. Family businesses may use this case as a reference for designing succession processes that balance flexibility and structure while preserving family harmony.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited to a single case, Sedap Catering, so the findings may not fully represent all family businesses, even within the same sector. The use of qualitative methods with one key informant provides deep insights but may limit generalizability. However, this

limitation also presents an opportunity to deepen the understanding of succession planning in small family businesses. Additionally, the focus is primarily on internal family dynamics, without extensive exploration of external factors such as market competition or regulatory influences.

Future research should consider comparative case studies involving multiple family businesses across sectors to identify broader patterns of successful succession. Employing mixed-methods approaches could strengthen findings by combining qualitative depth with quantitative validation. Further studies may also examine how formal governance tools (e.g., family constitutions, succession plans) complement informal mechanisms in maintaining harmony and continuity. This will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how family businesses can balance informal and formal succession strategies to ensure long-term success and adaptability.

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