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Multigenerational Family Firm Succession Planning for Transgenerational Sustainability

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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MBA, Walden University 2015

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Family firm businesses represent 90% of the global economy and have a 70% first-generation failure rate; business sustainability could have a tremendous impact on the U.S. economy. Grounded in the sustainable family business theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by four California-based, multigenerational family firm leaders who successfully implemented succession planning processes to transfer leadership of their family firm. Data were collected by reviewing firm documents, public information, and semistructured interviews. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and methodological triangulation, and five themes emerged: leader strategies to implement succession planning, strategies for early career development, family engagement in the firm, implementing family engagement in the firm community, and strategies for impactful leadership style. A key recommendation is for family firm leaders to implement a mentorship program consisting of transition activities, including leadership progression responsibilities, career path development, leadership transition inclusion with family member engagement in the firm community, and leadership style development. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase family firm sustainability and employment growth in the community, which will increase tax revenue to support increased community social and economic enhancements.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Multigenerational family firm leaders who have been able to sustain their firm over generations have a common link. These leaders use a strategy of succession planning to transfer leadership from the incumbent leaders to the successor leaders. Most family firms have fewer than 500 employees and account for 8.7 million net new private-sector jobs since 2005, or 62% of the total U.S. firms (U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2018). The implementation of succession planning is a vital aspect of an organization's long-term health and prosperity, and therefore an essential responsibility of senior leadership (DuBrin, 2013). Considering that 70% of family firm leaders fail to successfully transfer the firm leadership and operations from the incumbent leader to the successor leader, it emphasizes a considerable business problem in family firm leadership succession (Giarmarco, 2012). More specifically, some multigenerational family firm leaders lack strategies to implement a succession planning process from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader to ensure business sustainability.

Background of the Problem

Family firms are an enduring business entity in the United States, and the leaders of firms contribute financially to the economy. When over 90% of global businesses are family firms, the sustainability of the family firm over time is vital for the global economy (Prencipe et al., 2014). The business problem that family firm leaders have is successfully transferring their family firm to their heirs through multiple generations. The sustainability of family businesses is a crucial business topic to individual family firm leaders and society more broadly (Glover, 2015). One strategy that could assist family firm leaders in transferring the firm leadership to the next generational leader is implementing a succession plan for transgenerational sustainability.

Over 70% of family firm leaders fail to successfully transfer the firm leadership to the next generation. Subsequently, the business terminates when the incumbent leader leaves the firm. Firm leaders use succession plans to assess potential leaders in their talent pools against leadership competencies or other key attributes that will enable leaders to excel in firm leadership positions (Nissan & Eder, 2017). Theory and evidence suggest that business leaders fail to transfer the business leadership to future leaders because many poorly planned family firm leadership successions are implemented late and plagued by conflicts (De Massis et al., 2016). While conducting this study, I explored the successful strategies that family firm leaders used to implement a succession planning process for transgenerational sustainability.

Problem Statement

In the United States, 90% of businesses operate as family firms with earnings critical to the economy; however, fewer than one-third of family firms survive the transition from the first generation to the second-generation businesses (Campbell, 2017, p. 20). Over the last 25 years, about 7%–9% of firms close every year, and despite attributing succession planning to business sustainability, only 15% of leaders have a succession plan in place to transfer leadership of the family firm (Headd, 2018, para 1; Saymaz & Lambert, 2019, para 2). The general business problem was that some incumbent family firm leaders failed to plan the succession of leadership of the multigenerational family firm, which attributes to a higher failure rate in family firm sustainability. The specific business problem was that some incumbent family firm leaders lack strategies to implement a succession planning process from the incumbent leader to the successor generational leader to ensure business sustainability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader to ensure business sustainability. The population will be multigenerational family firm leaders in the western United States. In California, 95.5% of businesses were small firms; they generated 43.0% of California's $151.1 billion in total exports (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2018). Participants include family firm leaders in California who implemented succession planning strategy processes to transfer leadership from the incumbent leader to the successor leader for transgenerational firm sustainability. In California, private-sector employment increased by 1.7% during the 12 months ending in February 2019 (U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2018). When leaders of family firms encounter stressful circumstances, tensions between family members can create conflicts and increase the likelihood of firm failure (Jaskiewicz et al., 2016). The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve stability in family firms and local economies. When business leaders instill a succession plan for business sustainability, the business has a better possibility for business continuation, contributing to communities' economic stability.

Nature of the Study

The three research methods that I considered for this study to explore succession planning strategies that family firm leaders use to help achieve business sustainability are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method. Qualitative research requires the researcher's interpretation of the data collected to apply to a research study (Parada & Dawson, 2017). In contrast, quantitative researchers examine social phenomena through quantifiable evidence and rely on statistical analysis to create validity and reliability in the data to explain the causes of changes in social factors (Saunders et al., 2016). Finally, it is appropriate for a researcher to use a mixed-method research approach when combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Saunders et al., 2016). The quantitative research method does not apply to this study because these measurements are difficult to quantify to understand the implementation of succession planning in family firm business. As the quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study, neither was the mixed method approach. Therefore, the research method I have chosen to explore strategies that multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader is the qualitative research method.

Several qualitative designs to consider when conducting research: narrative inquiry, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenological analysis (Yin, 2018). Of these, I specifically considered the narrative, ethnographic, and case study designs. A narrative design consists of an analytical approach to analyze different aspects of a narrative (Saunders et al., 2016). A narrative analysis does not focus on a selected boundary set of questions to explore a theoretical element, as in a case study. Another research design is ethnography, in which researchers study a cultural or ethnic group (Saunders et al., 2016). The research for this study was not limited to a specific culture or ethnic group; therefore, ethnography was not appropriate for this study. A case study design is selected when researchers want to explore cases bound by time and place; to generate insights from in-depth research conducted in real-life settings (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2018). Therefore, a case study design is most appropriate for exploring family firm leaders who successfully implemented successful succession planning strategies from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader

Research Question

The following research question was the basis of this study: What are the strategies that successful multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning for business sustainability?

Interview Questions

1. Who are the family members who held a leadership role in your family firm, and how long did they stay in the position?
2. Who chose you for succession in this role, and what were the key factors behind the decision?
3. What were the strategies in the succession planning process you found useful for the transference of leadership of this family firm?
4. What were the critical issues in the planning process affecting your decision to stay in the family business and take over the current leadership role?

5. What are the strategies you, as the leader, implemented in your succession planning process for the future leadership succession transition?
6. How has utilizing a succession planning strategy benefited the sustainability of your family firm?
7. How does your leadership style help you develop strategies for succession planning for your family firm for transgenerational sustainability?
8. What else would you like to add about succession planning strategies that I have not covered in the interview questions?

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning from the incumbent generational leader to the successor-generational leader for business sustainability. The conceptual framework of this qualitative multiple case study will be the sustainable family business theory (SFBT). Initially drafted by Stafford et al. (1999), SFBT emphasized the sustainability of the family firm system rather than the firm revenue and proposed that family firm sustainability is a function of both business success and family functionality. SFBT is a model that incorporates attributes of both the family and the firm to allow business outcomes viewed as a function of family and business; it can serve as the basis for examining a comprehensive range of essential research questions (Stafford et al., 1999). Ideally, SFBT as a conceptual framework in conducting my study may lead to applying strategies to improve the succession planning process for leaders to implement in family firm businesses.

Family firm succession involves a leadership transition from one family member to transcending generational leaders (Saxena, 2016). When a family firm leader neglects to plan efficiently for a smooth transition to the next generation, it will lead to instability and even possible closure of the family firm. SFBT was the lens for my research to understand how the behaviors and decisions amongst family firm leaders successfully identify and implement a future successor for the family firm. Since succession is mainly under the control of the incumbent leader of the family firm, this lack of attention from researchers leaves a gap in our understanding of family firms (De Massis et al., 2013). In executing my research in a conceptual framework approach that applies the SFBT, I hoped to establish information from this study that may provide implementation strategies that family firm leaders could apply to their business to improve their family firm's succession plans.

Operational Definitions

Family firm: A family firm is a business owned, controlled, and led by one or more family members who are actively involved in the operations of the company activities (El-Chaarani, 2013).

Incumbent leader: An incumbent leader is a current leader that equally focuses on business economic goals such as firm growth, size, and market share (Ganter et al., 2014).

Successor leader: The successor leader fulfills the company goals, irrespective of familial ties, to continue to lead the business forward from the leader to the next generation (Ganter et al., 2014).

Succession planning: The succession planning process describes the procedures of transferring leadership of the firm from incumbent leader to successor leader. This planning process attributes that characterize the successful transfer of ownership and control from one leader to the next (Crittenden et al., 2015)

Transgenerational entrepreneurial family: A transgenerational entrepreneurial family successfully imprints its entrepreneurial legacy on the next generation. The entrepreneurial legacy motivates both generations to engage in strategic activities that nurture next-generation entrepreneurship (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Researchers should acknowledge underlying assumptions and the limitations imposed by the approach adopted to interpret findings appropriately (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). In addressing assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, which are critical components of a viable research proposal, validity, and credibility, will be achieved in a study (Ellis & Levy, 2009). As the researcher, I address any biases or preconceived notions of the research outcome by exploring assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

Assumptions

Assumptions are interpretations of ideas believed to be accurate but have not been proven by fact for validity (Ellis & Levy, 2009). I identified several assumptions when researching this study. The first assumption was that the participants were available and accessible to give accurate responses and were transparent with their succession planning process information. Secondly, I assumed that the participants' data would contribute to the existing knowledge of the research topic. The third assumption was that a qualitative multiple case study would have been appropriate for exploring the succession planning process in family firms. The final assumption was that the information in this study would generate strategies that benefit family firm leaders who are exploring succession planning processes for business sustainability.

Limitations

Limitations of the study were the imposed restrictions concerned with potential weaknesses that may be out of the researcher’s control and are closely associated with the chosen research design, statistical model constraints, funding constraints, or other factors (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The first limitation of this study may have been the accessibility to family firm leaders. Also, their firm documents to conduct research could be limited to generate a sufficient amount of data. The second limitation may have been that the information that family firm leaders gave could contain a bias presented by the individuals and their willingness to convey information to the interviewer. A third potential limitation was the possibility of restricting the sample size to family firm leaders who implemented successful strategies for succession planning for business sustainability in this multiple case study.

Delimitations

Delimitations concern the scope of the study, such as theoretical background, objectives, and research questions, and pertains to the definitions that the researcher decides to set as the boundaries or limits of their work (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The first delimitation was the target population of incumbent family firm leaders that applied successful succession planning for the leadership transition to the successive leaders. The second delimitation was that the leaders would be limited to family firms within the demographic confines of small family firms in California. A final potential delimitation was the sample size of three family firm leaders who successfully used succession planning processes to transfer leadership from an incumbent family member to the next generational leader.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is of value to the practice of business in family firms because of the financial implications for family firm leaders who lack strategies to implement a succession planning process from the incumbent generational leader to the successor-generational leader to ensure business sustainability. The lack of succession strategies can occur at the planning level and later in the realization itself, which concerns the incumbent leaders, the successor leaders, the remaining members of the family, and additional firm stakeholders (Więcek-Janka et al., 2016). When considering that approximately 90% of businesses globally are owned and operated as a family firm, a succession plan must be implemented in the family firms to enable a smooth transition of leadership for business sustainability (Prencipe et al., 2014). The succession of leadership in family firms significantly impacts family firm sustainability and can impact local communities financially.

Contribution to Business Practice

This study's contributions to business practice may help family firm leaders develop strategies to implement a succession planning process to ensure business sustainability for future generations. According to De Massis et al. (2016), family involvement is necessary for the sustainability of family firms. When family firm leaders create a succession plan before the current business leader's retirement or demise occurs, it can establish acceptance of the next multigenerational leader in the line of succession. In family firms, succession is an issue that constitutes the main success element of the company for business continuation (El-Chaarani, 2013). A lack of strategic succession planning in family businesses contributes to their high failure rate (Motwani, 2015). This study's contributions to the practitioner application might establish succession planning strategies that can then be applied and become a functional business tool for business sustainability before the current leader retires or is no longer the leader of the family firm.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include creating succession planning strategies that family firm leaders can implement with the process for multiple generations. Succession planning may stabilize leadership and operations in family firms to enable sustainability within local communities. The family firm's importance has many social change implications; families are the most important sources of human capital, social capital, financial capital, and physical capital (Zachary, 2011). When family firms are profitable, their leaders are more likely to contribute financially to the communities in which they conduct business. Changes in the economy and technology have educated stakeholders of their power and business leaders' responsibilities toward the community (Bendickson et al., 2016). Therefore, ensuring a successful business model of succession planning in a family firm could contribute to the business sustainability of the multigenerational family firm. The use of succession planning strategies can contribute to economic stability for the family firm leaders, employees, stakeholders, and communities in which they conduct business.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the succession planning strategies that family firm leaders used for business sustainability to transcend multigenerational leaders. Epstein et al. (2014) defined business sustainability as an economic development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising future generations' ability to meet their requirements for business sustainability. The research question for this study was, "what are the strategies that successful multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning for business sustainability?"

To achieve an exhaustive literature review of this study's professional and academic literature, I conducted critical analysis and synthesis of peer-reviewed articles, journals, reports, and seminal scholarly books. The peer-reviewed system continues to deliberate the roles and responsibilities of editors, reviewers, and authors in scholarly business journals (Greenwood, 2016). Peer-reviewed articles use a rigorous systematic process for approval. The review of literature for this study included articles with the following search terms: *business hierarchy structures, family firm, succession planning models, leadership concepts, SFBT, social implications of a family business, socioemotional wealth, multiple generation family firms, legacy firms, case studies, qualitative research, interview processes, family dynamics in business, data saturation, reliability, validity, transferability, and methodological triangulation.*

The foundation for this review of the professional and academic literature was the problem statement, purpose statement, research question, interview questions, nature of the study, and conceptual framework. In conducting a literature review, I retrieved peer-reviewed articles from the Walden University Library database, Google Scholar database, and web-based sources, specifically the Small Business Administration (SBA), U.S. Census Bureau, and Gov.org for statistical resources. These included but were not limited to databases from SAGE journals, business journals, ProQuest, and EBSCOhost. I have used peer-reviewed academic journal articles to conduct research and support the information for this qualitative multiple case study. To achieve an exhaustive literature review, most of the resources I selected for the literature review were current, published within five years of completing this doctoral study. Of the 105 peer-reviewed academic journal articles selected, 74 are current within the last five years, representing 70%. Total current literature resources are 84, representing 72% of all resources within five years (see Table 1).

Table 1

Literature Review Source Content

Literature reviewed	Current sources (< = 5 years)	Older sources (> 5 years)	Total sources	Current source percent
Peer-reviewed journals	74	31	105	70%
Non-peer reviewed journals	0	0	0	0%
Books	3	1	4	75%
Government resources	2	0	2	100%
Other resources	5	0	5	100%
Total resources	84	34	116	72%

Development of Literature Review

The literature review consisted of research on the current literature on family firms, business sustainability, multigenerational family firms, succession planning, and the transference of leadership and SFBT. Most family firm leaders do not create succession plans for business continuation; only 15% of family leaders used succession planning to transition to the successive generational leaders (Cater & Young, 2016). In the United States, family firms represent over 90% of businesses, and they employ 62% of the workforce, making the U.S. economy dependent on family firm stability (Prencipe et al., 2014). Western countries tend to use general management and property ownership or the ownership of shares of the business to define family firms. Family firms are defined by the property that is owned in the firm by a family member; family members actively involved in the management of the company, and there exists the desire for continuity by transferring the business to the next generation is the definition of a family firm (Alayo et al., 2016). The categorization of a family firm for this study is on the dispersion of equity; the definition of family firms emphasizes family members as managers or significant shareholders.

While conducting this case study, I explored leadership in family firms that have multigenerational business sustainability. The strategy I used to explore multigenerational family firm leaders who accomplished business sustainability was the firm leadership succession planning processes beyond the first generation. The main concepts that I focused the literature review on were family firm theories, SFBT, family business characteristics, business sustainability, succession planning, change management, leadership transition, leadership strategies in succession planning, socioemotional wealth effects on succession planning. Family firm succession planning is the process of transitioning leadership of the family business from the incumbent leader to the successive generational leader of family members (Sharma & Dave, 2013). I conducted a multiple case study on the use of succession planning strategies for transgenerational leadership in family firms that achieved business sustainability.

I chose to use the conceptual framework SFBT to get an in-depth understanding of the development of family firm leadership and succession planning strategies. The SFBT perspective offers a comprehensive analysis by categorizing and organizing the research and family firm literature by the core theoretical tenets of theory, behavior, and governance to clarify the understanding of the impact of these theories as they relate to family firms and the leadership in the firms (Madison et al., 2016). The criteria for succession in family firms involve a blend of economic prosperity with the attainment of nonmonetary goals for the family unit and the family firm (Glover, 2014). The SFBT was the most helpful theory to analyze data information to understand how succession planning strategies by family firm leaders can ensure multigenerational business sustainability.

Family firm leaders face many stressful situations daily, such as generating revenue and ensuring business continuation. A stressful event in a family firm is the succession transition of the leader; prior studies acknowledge the importance of family relationships during the succession planning process to manage the stress (Tebbe et al., 2018). The incumbent leaving or being displaced from the family business unexpectedly, such as death, can create a turbulent time for all stakeholders involved with the family firm. According to Tebbe et al. (2018), in the event of an unplanned transition in leadership, the lack of a preplanned transition strategy for unexpected leadership changes can cause turmoil, up to the discontinuation of the family firm. SFBT allows for contingencies to recognize that disruptions created by the change in leadership are typical and occur at the interface of family and business (Danes et al., 2008). Often, unexpected events of leadership change can present opportunities for conflict within the firm and with family members.

One process suggested in the literature is that a business leader may develop guidelines in their succession plan for their business that outlines all policies and procedures on the business's operations. Business leaders that express a heightened sense of transparency in policy and procedure formulation are better capable of absorbing the state of uncertainty and are more likely to be sustainable at times of turbulence in the firm

(Abdelzaher et al. et al., 2018). When applying SFBT, I analyzed how family firm members choose their successors and how the transference of leadership of the business is executed and affects the family firm dynamics. By applying the SFBT framework to explore family firms, I better understand how to duplicate strategies for successful succession planning processes in family firms for business sustainability.

Family Firm Theories

The theories that I considered in the literature review research for family firm leaders who implement succession planning to achieve business sustainability were SFBT and the theory of family firm. SFBT draws from family systems theory, giving equal recognition to family and business and the interplay between them to achieve mutual sustainability (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). The theory of the family firm must explain how family firm leaders go about fulfilling the primary purpose of optimizing the family's utility function, such as economic and meeting family-centric non-economic goals (Chrisman & Holt, 2016). An issue with considering the theory of family firms is that it was underdeveloped, and there was not extensive research on the use of this theory. Therefore, SFBT appeared to be more applicable to my case study.

SFBT was the conceptual framework to research multigenerational family firm succession planning for transgenerational business sustainability. Estimations were that 40% of family business leaders (ranging from 60% to 80% of all businesses worldwide) retired by 2017. However, only 41% of those leaders planned to transfer the firm leadership and operation to the next generational leader (DeTienne et al., 2015). The incumbent may not have a viable or willing successor to transfer the family firm leadership for business sustainability. When applying SFBT, there was the consideration that each family firm leader's ability, willingness, and capability were manifested in the governance systems enacted, the nature of the goals followed, and the resources available through family involvement.

SFBT

The SFBT encompasses family socioemotional wealth and firm policy and procedures together. A unique feature of family firms is that family members work in the business system (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). Fitzgerald et al. (2010) further elaborated that SFBT draws from family systems theory, giving equal recognition to family and business and the interplay between them to achieve mutual sustainability. This theory was initially developed by Stafford et al. (1999) as a research model. The model is the first generation of the SFBT and was used to review how family businesses functioned.

Stafford et al. (1999) stated that SFBT incorporates attributes of both the family and the business in a manner that allows business outcomes viewed as a function of family and business characteristics and vice versa can serve as the basis for examining a wide range of valuable research questions. SFBT distinguishes between short-term viability and long-term sustainability (Stafford et al., 2013). SFBT addressed the research question of what strategies some multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning for business sustainability. The SFBT was later expanded by Danes et al. (2008) to include cultural aspects as an additional aspect in family firm businesses. The revised SFBT by Danes et al. recognizes that the business is part of a more extensive system by placing it within its community context (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). Danes et al.'s model of SFBT is the most current revision of the theory and was the model I used as my conceptual framework.

SFBT applied to the study of family firm leadership, included diversity in firm size, family stages, business cycles, a mix of family and nonfamily employees, industries, legal structures, and cultural contexts (Danes et al., 2008). A dominant factor of the decision-making of family firm business leaders is that their actions affect their firm and family financial sustainability. SFBT emphasizes the sustainability of the family firm system rather than firm revenue and posits that family firm sustainability is a function of both business success and family functionality (Stafford et al., 1999). In conducting the review of the literature, I used Danes et al.'s (2008) SFBT models for understanding how creating succession planning in family firms can aid in business sustainability. Danes et al. expanded the concepts to suggest that cultural background has an additional effect on how firm leaders conduct business succession plans.

In a family firm, the family and firm both have equal value of importance to the leadership, and the individual family members strive for the success of the firm in unity for sustainability. SFBT puts equal importance on family and business processes for the sustainability of the family business (Danes et al., 2008). The importance of family and business processes is a factor in the SFBT model by both Stafford et al. (1999) and Danes et al. (2008). SFBT gives equal recognition to family and firm and to the family/firm interplay in achieving mutual sustainability (Stafford et al., 2013). SFBT, as a theoretical framework, clarifies that family firms are systems with multiple interactions and mutually reinforcing effects among the types of resources, leading to potentially multiple combinations producing equivalently positive family firm outcomes (Mallon et al., 2018). Through the conceptual framework, SFBT confirms the complexity of family and firm and the interaction between the family unit members and the firm members.

Stafford et al. (1999) initially developed SFBT with Danes as a contributing author, which was later expanded by Danes et al. (2008, 2009), and Stafford was a contributor to Dane's research. When choosing a conceptual framework, both conceptual and operational considerations of the SFBT provide the means to examine the vital contributions of the family system concerning a family business (Danes et al., 2008; Stafford et al., 1999). SFBT is a comprehensive and flexible theory that can enhance our understanding of the dynamic role of the family in the family business and demonstrate the integration of the family, business, and community (Zachary, 2011). SFBT theory was derived from general systems theory and holds that family firms are systems of resources and processes that produce outcomes affecting the long-term viability of family businesses (Mallon et al., 2018). SFBT will be a comprehensive conceptual framework for this multiple case study on family firms that use succession planning for business sustainability.

A model for SFBT pairs family business success with a model of family functionality to yield a model of family business sustainability (Stafford et al., 1999). For a family firm to have sustainability, stakeholders must work together at the common goal for the firm to thrive. Danes et al. (2008) further noted that common factors that may facilitate or inhibit family firm sustainability are resource transactions (use or transformation of resources) and interpersonal transactions (communication, personal relationships, conflict management) in either the business or family. My case study included but was not primarily focused on the SFBT cultural aspects of family firms. Instead, I focused on the strategies of succession planning for sustainability by family firm leaders.

Family Business Characteristics

Parada and Dawson (2017) defined family businesses as firms where family members can influence the strategic decision-making process to transition the business to the next generational family member. A family firm is when more than 50% of its business property ownership is by family members, where family members are currently actively involved in the daily management of the company, and there exists the desire for sustainability by transferring the business to the next generational family member (Alayo et al., 2016). For this study, I explored family firm leaders who were leaders in multigenerational firms that have used a successful succession planning process to transfer leadership for business sustainability.

One of the challenges that family firm leaders experience is not having family members who want to continue the operations of the family business after the leaders' departure. Some family members try to avoid family conflicts by not engaging in the family firm at all or at least not in a leadership role (Garcia et al., 2019). Another challenge is that there may be no feasible family member who has the ability to continue the multigenerational family business. In a family business, achieving competent family leadership through the generations is one of the most significant challenges to business continuity (Oudah et al., 2018). The socioemotional as well as economic growth, should be met by each successive generation to have a desire to continue the family firm and create business sustainability.

DeTienne et al. (2015) estimated that 40% of family business owners (ranging up to 90% of all businesses worldwide) would retire by 2017; only 41% of those leaders planned to pass the firm on to the next generation. A challenge may be that the incumbent may not have a viable or willing successor to hand the business down to for business sustainability. An essential consideration is that approximately 90% of businesses globally are owned and operated as family firms. Presumably, to enable a smooth transition of leadership for business sustainability, there must be a succession plan in place in the family firms.

When defining what a family firm structure is, most authors agreed on the management to ownership ratio status. Chiang and Yu (2018) agreed, but Bennedsen et al. (2015) found that family firms are enterprises in which family members hold more than 10% of equity, and more than two family members are serving as directors, supervisors, or first-level directors. Most business leaders struggle to keep their business open and profitable for more than 5 years. On average, 70% of new start-ups collapse within this time frame. Giarmarco (2012) estimated that more than 70% of family firms would not survive the transition from founder to second-generation business. This global business problem can have dramatic economic effects on the members of a family firm as well as stakeholders in their communities.

In this multiple case study, I explored the strategies that successful multigenerational family firm leaders use in succession planning to transfer the family firm to future generational leaders for business sustainability. Resilience is crucial to a family firm's operation because most leaders intend to transfer their business to future family generations (Abdelzaher et al. et al., 2018). Family firms represent life projects, vigorous centers that combine entrepreneurial skills and activities with typical family traits as a community of values and healthy relationships (Schillaci et al., 2013). When family dynamics become incorporated with business structures, it can exacerbate the challenge of multigenerational business sustainability. When the next-generation family members perceive that their parents show concern about their career development and well-being, one way to reciprocate is to work in the family firm to carry forward the legacy of their parents (Garcia et al., 2019). Implementing a succession plan can assist all family members in accepting a successful transference of leadership.

The necessity for excellent communication between family members in the family firm and family unit is a reoccurring theme throughout the literature review in succession planning in family firms for business sustainability. Interpersonal relationships within family firms become strengthened by honest, intensive, and open communication, and each family member should have a clearly defined role in the business (Lušňáková et al., 2019). Communication is especially crucial during coaching, mentoring, or follow-up training, and performance needs to critically assess and provide feedback so that the successors have the chance to improve themselves (Lušňáková et al., 2019). This open and honest communication between all family members will assist in the selection of a successor when the incumbent decides to transition out of the leadership role in the family firm.

When there is not a succession plan implemented, there may not be a successful transition in placing the next leader in position as the family firm leader. To ensure the longevity of a family firm, the incumbent must select the best and brightest of his heirs to take up the reins of the business (Bunkanwanicha et al., 2013). Researchers believe in avoiding complications; the family members should agree to simplify ownership, governance, and management structures by selecting family members at the appropriate time to achieve family harmony and longevity of business performance (Oudah et al., 2018). A transparent system of leadership succession may help reduce family conflicts that arise over time amongst family members and stakeholders.

One issue that may arise in the transference of leadership is that multiple siblings may want the new leadership role. This issue can often be a source of tension and a limit to career growth and advancement. Furthermore, gender roles within the family can also complicate the relationships in family firms (Danes et al., 2008). Hytti et al. (2017) found that female firm members understood that gender made a difference. Although to varying extents, females need to manage the shadow negotiations within the family to position themselves as family firm successors. In recognizing this business problem in family firms, I discovered strategies used when participants addressed my interview question of the critical factors behind the transition and chose the successor for the new leadership role.

There is a prevalent lack of implementation of succession planning by entrepreneurs, especially the first generation. It can be a detriment for firm sustainability when family firm leadership expects the firm to transcend to future generations. Ferrari

(2019) found that business transference is seldom adequately planned by the incumbent generation, thus indicating at least a lack of attention to the process of succession planning. The extent to which parental behaviors influence next-generation engagement depends on whether these individuals perceive it as beneficial or constraining rather than merely present (Garcia et al., 2019). When this transition occurs unexpectedly, it causes firm and family tensions that can be destructive to both entities. Communication is vital to the transition following the occurrence of turbulence due to a change in leadership. It is critical for an organizational response simply because the load or burden lies on their employees' ability or willingness to perform as expected under new leadership (Abdelzaher et al. et al., 2018). In a family firm environment, these apprehensions may be more prevalent due to the emotional attachments to the firm and family unit by all stakeholders.

The transition process under new leadership may have operational challenges in a family firm. Nekhili et al. (2018) found that to achieve this transition successfully, the leader must be a motivator. This leader must inspire followers to accomplish the organization's goals and, as an analyzer, to focus on efficient management practices. An essential strategy in the succession transition is the centrality of the incumbent and successor relationship. It reveals mentoring, frequently by the incumbent, as the primary vehicle for successfully transferring business leadership (Ferrari, 2019). Ferrari (2019) furthermore found that if the successor decides to join the family firm, it should be made early in the successors' career decision. Otherwise, it will seem as if firm leadership is only something the successor uses as a backup career choice. When there is a new and ongoing mentoring process between the incumbent and successor, it can assist in better engagements and transition of leadership in the family firm.

There is moderate pressure for family firm leaders to create a dynasty firm that they can pass on to their heirs to extend their legacy. The common goal of family firm leaders is to solidify the business for the future and, ultimately, transfer the company on to the next generation; this ensures the family as well as the firm's sustainability (Moss et al., 2014). One challenge in a succession transference of leadership in family firms is the willingness of a family member to succeed in leadership. Chrisman et al. (2016) defined willingness as the favorable disposition of the involved family to engage in characteristic behavior; to transgenerational succession intentions. Therefore, a succession plan for business continuation can become a strategy to guide the family firm leaders through successive generations of leadership and prosperity.

The leaders of family firms can face many problems involving the perseverance of business sustainability. A few business sustainability problems that family firm leaders encounter include family conflicts over money, management, and succession of power from one generation to the next generation (Motwani, 2015). The entrepreneur has the task of not only managing the family firm but also inspiring family members to continue the multigenerational family firm to ensure business sustainability. When there are shared family leadership transitions and goals, it represents the most substantial positive influence among the significant factors for business sustainability (Neff, 2015). Ghee et al. (2015) found that in a family firm, at least 50% of ownership and management responsibilities fall within one family unit, whether related by blood or marriage. The singular family dynamic leads to the importance of choosing the right family members to continue the multigenerational family business to ensure sustainability.

In family firms, the firm leaders have many different leadership styles to direct the family firm, from agency leadership, situational leadership to transformational leadership practices. Chrisman et al. (2016) found without understanding the processes by which family firm leaders execute their strategies; it will be difficult to determine to what family firm leadership behavior and performance are functions of personal goals, idiosyncratic governance structures, peculiar sources, distinctive strategies, or unique processes. The entrepreneur leads family members through the transition of the family firm to future generational leaders. Leadership transition development is essential to develop these next generational leaders for business sustainability.

The continuation of business sustainability over successive generations can strengthen the family firm's market share and socioemotional family wealth (SEW). A strategic and well-designed succession process to plan for leadership transition and critical employee turnover can support the culture and strategic direction of the organization (Nissan & Eder, 2017). A family firm leader could drastically change the firm's business sustainability if there is no succession plan in place when a transition is imminent. When the implementation of a succession plan that all stakeholders agree on the choice of the family firm's transitional leadership, the transition may be less likely to be met with conflict or demise of the firm.

Family firm leaders who have effectively implemented firm succession plans over multiple generations often adapt effectively to the challenges in the family firm. Family firm leaders will have a better chance of achieving the desired results from the business developments if they engage employees closest to the affected situation and get their input early in the planning process (Jasper, 2015). When establishing a succession plan early in the leadership structure, these changes may become better accepted by all stakeholders involved in the family firm transition. Nekhili et al. (2018) found that in the dynamics of a family firm, the leaders may more effectively disseminate the values and other elements of the family culture and stimulate stakeholders' commitment to the firm's mission and objectives. By establishing a succession plan within the family firm, the planned transparency may assist in all family firm stakeholder's acceptance of the new leadership direction for the family firm.

An additional challenge in a family firm leadership succession is there may be more than one viable candidate within the family firm to transfer the leadership responsibilities in a succession process. In the research, Hytti et al. (2017) found that daughters reflected the meaning of being a woman in the succession process and actively challenging the gender-accepted norms but balancing this through normative alignment. An example of a female family member's normative alignment would be to accept subordinate positions or disguise their preeminent leadership role. Traditionally, leadership roles are masculine roles, and women need to become assertive in achieving the successor position (Hytti et al., 2017). In this study, I hoped to find that this was the exception to the rule, not the norm for business succession in the family firm.

When creating a succession plan for the transference of leadership in a family firm, the incumbent may choose a family member based on their leadership strategies.

Leadership as a shared construct has multiple shareholders, both internal and external, of the agent (Turner et al., 2018). The incumbent may favor a successor with a leadership strategy adaptive to succession planning that will enable business continuation for the firm across multiple generations. When there is excellent communication between family firm members, the incumbent and successor may establish a working relationship so that the training of the successive generations may proceed (Cater & Young, 2016)). Effective communication is an essential process in succession planning in family firms. A successor with a standard leadership skill set may ease the transference of leadership from the incumbent to the successor for all stakeholders.

Business Sustainability

When family dynamics and business operations combine to create a firm, some issues can dramatically affect both the family and the firm's sustainability. Sustainability occurs when economic development meets the needs of the present generation without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs (Epstein et al., 2014). When family firm leaders intermingle family planning (via succession planning) and business acumen (via strategic planning), it can lead to long-term success for the family firm, which can lead to business sustainability (Crittenden et al., 2015). Mokhber et al. (2017) stated a need to make family firm leaders aware of the importance of succession planning on their business performance, efficiency, and sustainability. The family members often rely on firm sustainability for their family wealth sustainability.

Business sustainability generally relates to the firm leader's ability to create and sustain the business's value over a long period, which is achieved by dynamic equilibrium. Dynamic equilibrium enables sustainability through three mechanisms: (a) enabling learning and creativity, (b) fostering flexibility and resilience, and (c) unleashing human potential in a family firm; business sustainability embodies the wealth creation and longevity of the business over multiple generations (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The trust the incumbent shows to his successor can be an essential emotional precondition for the company's success and further development of business sustainability (Lušňáková et al., 2019). Therefore, communication within the family firm could be an essential factor in obtaining business sustainability.

When the family firm leaders create succession plans for the future leadership and operation of their enterprise, they intend to extend the firm beyond their retirement and their involvement within the firm. The term family firm legacy gets misconstrued as facts of family history. In actuality, it is a multigenerational dynamic encompassing the past and the present aspects of the family firm (Hanson et al., 2019). Succession planning helps preserve a legacy for family firm leaders, and early planning is critical for business leaders to implement their plans (Lee et al., 2015; Sundaramurthy, 2008). Legacy firms extend across multiple generations of the family firm. These legacy leaders conduct business from the entrepreneur's original vision and transfer that vision to future leaders in the family, becoming the next generational successors leading the family firm.

The family firm is not necessarily a business that each family member has a passion for and a desire to be involved with the firm as an occupation. Family firm leaders can achieve successful organizational outcomes when motivated and qualified family members ascend to the leadership role, and unmotivated and unqualified family members opt out of the business (DeNoble et al., 2007). When incumbent family leaders build resistance to operating the family business, it is likely because they may consider closing the business is less socially accepted and often associated with higher sensitivity and the possibility of family conflict (Abdelzaher et al. et al., 2018). When the family firm leaders establish a strategic succession plan, it can aid in a successful strategic succession transition from the incumbent leader to the next generation.

Succession Planning

The leadership philosophy in a firm can give a deeper meaning to executives' and leadership's role and their activities in the firm for all stakeholders. Chiang and Yu (2018) asserted that family firm entrepreneurs believe that succession is the most significant long-term challenge for business sustainability. However, only 15% of family firm leaders create a succession plan for business leadership transference. Family firm succession planning is the planning process of transferring leadership responsibilities of decision-making operations to the next generational leader (Alayo et al., 2016). The succession process is complicated in an instance where there is not a succession planned implementation for the sustainable transition of the family firm.

Family firms are prominent in local communities and are the backbone of local economies. Family firms have a solid historical presence and significant predominance, as well as provide vital economic and social contributions in communities (Zachary, 2011). A family firm's planned succession of leadership can help impede conflicts and secure the relationships within the family and the firm, especially considering that the succession process usually involves resistance. The succession resistance can occur first at the planning level and later in the implementation itself, which concerns the incumbents, the successor, the remaining members of the family, and additional firm stakeholders (Więcek-Janka et al., 2016). When a succession plan lacks effective implementation, it can lead to business termination at the transition of leadership, which impacts local economies.

One issue that a family firm leader may encounter is the family leadership's impression of the complexity of developing a succession plan. In creating a succession plan, the incumbent must develop an initial vision of how the business should operate in the future and make it available to the future candidate (Michel & Kammerlander, 2015). If a family firm leader's strategy is too complicated in developing a succession plan for the transition of leadership, it can represent an obstacle in the leaders developing a plan. El-Chaarani (2013) found that succession planning contributes to the success of family firms. When family firm leaders perceive the succession planning strategies and leadership transition implementation as too complicated and beyond the grasp of the firm leadership capabilities, it may create challenges for the successors' succession to leadership (Tebbe et al., 2017). These succession obstacles can be an interruption that impedes the long-term goals for the family firm to gain business sustainability.

Some family firm leaders lack strategies for implementing succession planning processes for business transference to the successor leader. According to Tebbe et al. (2017), there was a link between leadership implementation and succession planning strategies, increasing organizational sustainability. Furthermore, Tebbe et al. (2017) stated that leadership succession planning implementation seems to improve executive retention and management stability, as measured by post-transition leadership retention rates. A family firm leader's succession plan strategy can be simplistic or complicated based on the firm's size or the family member's involvement. If family firm leaders implement succession planning strategies, it is more likely that the firm can sustain business even in an unexpected transition of leadership.

There have been many approaches used to study leadership succession in family firms. Researchers seem to agree to treat the conceptualization of a leadership transition as an ongoing process rather than a singular event (Marler et al., 2017). Succession planning is a structured approach to plan proactively for future leadership positions in the family firm; it can improve a potential leader's skills through experience and the assignment of appropriate tasks to individuals who will one day lead the family business (Oudah et al., 2018). When leaders fail to recognize the significant impact of organizational changes that naturally accompany an incumbent transition, they often miss the opportunities afforded the firm due to a succession plan before the transference of leadership (Tebbe et al., 2017). The transition activities can enable clear succession planning strategies to crystalize succession implementation strategies for future family firm leaders.

An incumbent family firm leader should not conceive a succession plan in a family firm in a bubble with limited input from all family members. Mathews and Blumentritt (2015) conducted studies on the ramifications of leadership succession in a family firm and choosing the right family member for the leadership. Incumbents of family firms should objectively assess the genuine abilities, education, and experience, as well as the successor's assumptions for the leadership of the family business (Lušňáková et al., 2019). Alayo et al. (2016) identified three relevant factors that contribute to a successful succession process, which are (a) the succession planning strategies, (b) the selection of the successor, and (c) the successor's training and development experience. A productive way to understand the complexities of transitional leadership and some of the firm's politics is to map out the human capital needs of each of the main stakeholders (Creelman & Filipe, 2017). When constructing a succession plan, firm leaders design a road map to transfer leadership and entrepreneurship capacity to the new successor for the family firm.

The handling of the transition from the incumbent to the next successor has profound implications for firm sustainability (Tebbe et al., 2017). To circumvent any internal family firm member grievances or the possibility of firm failure under new leadership, family members should establish a family governance mechanism. These are voluntary mechanisms established by the family firm leaders whose primary aim is to govern and strengthen relations between the family members and the firm stakeholders, as well as the individual relationships between the family (Alayo et al., 2016). The family firm governing bylaws could circumvent any problems that may arise during the succession transition.

Planned succession implementation is not an isolated event that occurs at a particular time. It is a multistage strategy that occurs over a long period, which can be before the successor enters the business (Alayo et al., 2016). Firms continue to see the leadership transition as a *vacancy-filling* problem rather than a hiring decision that an extensive organizational change process (Tebbe et al., 2017). The succession planning strategy conversations take time, and succession should not be a fixed, one-time event process when a vacancy occurs. Helin and Jabri (2016) stated the importance of making succession a long-term commitment as a way for succession to evolve, allowing all family members to become participants in the process. Having succession planning processes as a living tool that evolves will enable the appropriate next-generational leader to emerge naturally.

When entrepreneurs work on their business plans, it is never too early to start the succession plan for business sustainability. Motwani (2015) stated that, in general, there is a lack of strategic planning in family firms contributing to their high failure rate. When choosing the correct successor, it is vital to choose the right new leader for the family firm even when there is no viable candidate or two viable candidates to succeed in the successive leader role. The basis for the success of family firms is on several integrated factors, from the entrepreneur’s business leadership skills, including the formation of strategies that are the foundation for successors, to the implementation of the leadership transition into the leadership role (Ghee et al., 2015). When the successor is satisfied with the transition of leadership, they tend to become actively invested, more enthusiastic, and more apt to feel they have adequate responsibilities (Le Breton-Miller et al., 2004). After the incumbent chooses a firm successor, the succession planning strategies enter the training phase, the successor training occurs, and the incumbent introduces the new leadership role in the firm (Michel & Kammerlander, 2015). Therefore, by implementing strategies of a succession plan that the incumbent and successor agree upon, the family firm can transition from one leader to the next seamlessly with minimal impact on all stakeholders based on the prior training and development of the new leader.

When assessing a successful succession process, it is necessary to ensure the viability of the business, maintain the integrity of the family, and satisfy the interests of the individual stakeholders (Alayo et al., 2016). If there is no planning process or an ineffective succession plan implemented, it can have profound implications not only on family members and business partners but also on the economic development of the community. Sharma et al. (2003) reinforced theoretical developments suggest that satisfaction with the succession process in family firms is evident due to several key factors. These factors are the incumbent’s propensity to step aside, the successor’s willingness to take over, an agreement among family members to maintain family involvement in the firm, acceptance of individual roles, and the succession planning implementation (Sharma et al., 2003). When the incumbent and the successor are not aligned, the transference of leadership can cause conflict within the family and the firm.

Family firms may have a higher rate of business continuation that transcends over multiple generations when they implement a succession plan, and all leaders are involved in the planning process. One benefit of a succession plan would be to guarantee successful longevity; the family firm will invest in an expertly planned succession process to the next generation of leadership (Tebbe et al., 2018). To support business sustainability, family firm leaders could develop strategies for succession plans for leadership structure early in the business development plans. By establishing a firm succession plan, it could alleviate family conflicts as well as ensure a higher firm continuation rate than the traditional 30% transference from the first generation to the second generation business.

Family firms are dynamic contributors to the U.S. economy, representing more than 90% of all firms in the United States, more than 70% of all new employment creation, more than 50% of United States Gross National Product, and more than 50% of the nation’s employment (Campbell, 2017). These family firm statistics validate the importance of long-term planning strategies that family firm leaders should implement to ensure economic stability in the family firm and within their communities. When comparing traditional family firms and non-family firms, the founders of family firms mainly prefer internal leadership succession (Chiang & Yu, 2018). Family firm leaders can develop business strategies and philosophies while balancing the relationship between family and business to succeed across multiple generations.

In a family firm business, there comes a time when the incumbent leader must make decisions based on the consideration of sustainability expectations for the family firm. A change in leadership can be challenging not only for the incumbent leader leaving the firm but also for the incoming successor and the stakeholders (Ritchie, 2020). When business sustainability is vital to a family firm’s incumbent leader, it is beneficial to groom the successor of the family firm before the leadership transition. When the incumbent unexpectedly leaves the firm without having planned anything, this may create various problems within the firm and family. A comprehensive succession plan allows for the smooth transfer of firm leadership from one person to another while maintaining the stability of the firm (Ritchie, 2020). The process of preparing all stakeholders for the transition of leadership to the next generational leader becomes a strategy in the succession plan.

One challenge that can occur without a succession plan established may be that it prevents any transfer of accumulated knowledge. These conflicts may originate in power struggles and family conflicts to determine who will be the successor, and it impacts meaningful, vital relationships to be destabilized, such as with minority shareholders, suppliers, or customers (Alayo et al., 2016). Therefore, strategies are necessary to help ensure success in a family firm’s leadership transition. Strategies of succession implementation, such as the preparation of heirs and the relationships between family members and firm stakeholders, need to be addressed before the leadership transition (Mokhber et al., 2017). There may be more than one heir willing or capable of taking the leadership role of the firm, and it is beneficial to make this determination before the succession transition.

If the incumbent executes a succession plan, the grooming process can help the incumbent determine which heir is better suited for the firm’s leadership. Buang, Ganefri, and Sidek (2013) also concluded that the refusal of the incumbent to relinquish complete control of the family firm is considered a failure in the preparation of leadership transference to the heirs. If the incumbent recognizes the importance of a succession plan for business continuation, they will begin the grooming process of family members early in the firm activities. This grooming strategy will enable the successor to have the capabilities to take on the new leadership role, primarily if it occurs unexpectedly, such as in a family death or disability to lead the business.

When a family firm leader creates a succession plan for future leaders, they are focusing on business sustainability. Drury (2016) outlined that there are several strategies instrumental in achieving a smooth succession planning process. These strategies included the election of the successor for a 5-year term. The creation of a Family Constitution setting out critical elements of governance. Finally, the incumbent must make a conscious decision to create physical and emotional distance from the business when the incumbent retires (Drury, 2016). The family firm leader can implement plans for the exit of the family firm’s leadership by ensuring that the firm will continue to thrive under new leadership through the use of a succession plan.

The research conducted by Chiang and Yu (2018) concluded that family firms with ineffective succession plans reduced corporate performance and struggled to attain business sustainability. The benefits of intentional management of succession planning strategies during the transition of leadership and the rewards of effective implementation during the post-transition stage support enabled business sustainability (Tebbe et al., 2017). Implementation of a succession plan before the firm leadership transition can enable sustainability for the multigenerational family firm.

Change Management

An issue in family firms is in succession planning for the event of leadership change, and specifically family firm succession planning for business sustainability. During the leadership succession in a family firm, the process of leadership transfer requires incumbents and successors to engage in change-oriented behaviors and negotiate the changing conditions of their relationships and roles (Marler et al., 2017). One of the challenges of change management that family firm leaders face is the issues of transference of leadership among family members during leadership change in the family firm. Transgenerational leadership succession is significant for the leadership strategy of the family firms (Saxena, 2016). The unique characteristics of change management in a family firm are that members must trust and respect the values of tradition as well as recognize the need for innovation for the prosperity of the business.

In family firms, 30% of family firms transfer the firm from the founding (incumbent) leader to the second-generational leader (Cater & Young, 2016). When family firms have a mortality rate of 30% for the transference of the family firm, establishing a succession plan may be the most reliable strategy for the transference of leadership and continuity of the business. Family firms differ from non-family businesses in that successors typically enter the family firm's leadership with a rich history of experience with their leaders. Family firm leadership has had a front-row seat to see all the changes and growth of the business (Cater & Young, 2016). The historical bonds connecting family members to the family firm make family businesses thrive as the most common business format at 90% nationally.

When family goals align with family firm goals, then business transference of power and leadership through succession planning could become the catalyst that propels the family firm through multiple generations of prosperity. Most family firm leaders would prefer to leave their business to their children who are active in the business but would still like to treat them fairly and equally (Giarmarco, 2012). It becomes a daunting task for the incumbent to pass leadership responsibilities to the next family leaders without a great deal of planning and preparation for the succession of the new leader of the family firm.

When family firm members resist change in the firm's leadership, it can cause a rapid deterioration of the firm, leading to business failure. In general, there is a lack of strategic planning in family businesses, which may contribute to their high failure rate (Motwani, 2015). Of all family firms that entrepreneurs establish, 70% will fail in the first five years; only 30% of all family firms use succession planning to transition from the first-generation leader to the second-generation leader (Cater & Young, 2016). When family firms face unexpected successor transitions, it jeopardizes the continuity of the family firm. The leadership transition can lead to business failure; succession planning is pivotal to business continuity but is often fraught with tension and indefinitely postponed (Gilding et al., 2015). The business failure rate can have a more significant impact on the overall local economy if strategies are not developed for family firm leaders to make smooth transitions of leadership from the incumbents to the successors.

Leadership Transition

Occasionally, the change of leadership can occur when the leader chooses to leave suddenly, or it may be an unexpected quick transition, such as in the case of a death. If children decide not to help or cannot engage in helping their parents, it can have significant consequences for family relations and family business continuity (Murphy & Lambrechts, 2015). An assumption that can occur when a leadership succession is unexpected is the assumption that a family member is willing to take over as the firm leader. Another is that incumbents vary in the extent to which they are ready to succumb to the leadership succession (Marler et al., 2017). An effective leadership transition strategy of the incumbent leader is to execute a succession plan. A plan gives all stakeholders involved in the family firm time to manage the transition process.

If the family firm leader creates a succession planning strategy that dictates what the transition will look like, this may elevate some of the conflicts that can affect business sustainability. When this shift of power transitions to the new leader, it creates a definitive moment of power and process transition re-established by the new leader (Ahrens et al., 2018). Unfortunately, a conflict may occur when family firm leaders occasionally have difficulty giving up the firm they have shaped and grown (Ahrens et al., 2018). The incumbent leader can use knowledge transfer between individuals, then knowledge for new leaders occurs at a higher level because it involves the two individuals working together at any time (Tangaraja et al., 2016). In this study, I explored what strategies family firm leaders had used in their succession plan to transfer knowledge of leadership functions in a more transparent and effective process for long-term business sustainability.

In nonfamily firms, the transition is usually clear-cut when leadership changes from one leader to the next. There is an apparent definitive change that occurs between leaders. Marler et al. (2017) found that an effective role transition is likely to affect firm performance in post-succession. In family firms, succession transition is often not as definite and clear; the incumbent may stay on an active role as an advisor or keep majority ownership and make decisions on a board of directors. In the family firm leaders' egress, some options include switching to a board chair, keeping substantial ownership, or even becoming a *shadow emperor* by retaining the duality of CEO and board chair (Ahrens et al., 2018). This remaining involvement by the incumbent may lessen the ability of leadership effectiveness for the successor to take over full leadership of the firm. The successor may struggle to enforce his new vision for the firm. Unfortunately, ultimately making the firm unproductive and unable to achieve sustainability beyond the incumbent for the successor.

One of the critical issues for family firm leaders is the ability to ensure competency and accepted family leadership transitions across multiple generations. The challenging aspect for family firm leaders is only one-third of family businesses survive into the second generation, and only about 10%–15% make it into the third generation; the source of the problem is often due to poor succession planning (Le Breton-Miller et al., 2004). A successful leadership transition has been dependent on how leaders spend time with their actual team members by trying to be having personal connections and spending face-to-face time with people in critical positions (Reimer & Meighan, 2017). This succession planning strategy can set the leadership transition in motion long before the actual change of leadership occurs. Therefore, making the transition more achievable for business sustainability beyond the firm leadership transition.

The process of succession planning often necessitates activities requiring both a willingness to teach on the part of the incumbent and a willingness to learn on the part of the successor (Marler et al., 2017). Family firm leaders should adopt a succession process that encompasses the actions, events, and organizational mechanisms by which leadership at the top of the firm, and often ownership, are transferred to the successor (Le Breton-

Miller et al., 2004). When the leadership transition process is transparent and all stakeholders are aware of the transition, it can ensure the multigenerational family firm leadership stability transcending the leadership change event. Although transparency does not involve total openness, it entails presenting information accurately (Sundaramurthy, 2008). One effective strategy in the succession planning process may be the incumbent and successor's creation of a succession plan for the transference of leadership in the family firm together. The succession planning process may include conducting leadership actives that they perform together before the actual transfer of leadership. These activities may have a positive effect on all family firm stakeholders and assist in a higher chance of ensuring business sustainability.

One key factor in a succession planning process is that there is mutual respect and understanding between the incumbent and the successor. A successful succession process can establish a relationship of mutual respect and understanding between leaders and make individuals feel supported and recognized. When this happens, it creates a virtuous circle of trust and feedback for all stakeholders (Le Breton-Miller et al., 2004). When trust factors in leadership capabilities occur between the incumbent and the successor, all stakeholders may benefit from a smooth transition of leadership. Trust is central within family firms where a group of individuals affiliated with the enterprise is connected through common ancestry or marriage because their existence goes well beyond economic rationale (Sundaramurthy, 2008). When the next generation of family firm members trust that the incumbent will transfer the leadership of the family firm to one of the family members as the next successor, family members may feel more engaged in the family firm.

Family firm leaders face statistically challenging success rates across multiple generations of leadership. Incompetent new leaders are responsible for 45% of all business failures in the United States, and this statistic becomes compounded when a firm is a small business (Le Breton-Miller et al., 2004). A successive leader faces many challenges when taking on the new leadership role in a family firm. The sustainability of the business is paramount to the transition of the new leader into the role of the new incumbent leader.

The previous view of leadership coaching and development was seen as a remedial activity of *sink or swim* as per Darwinian evolution (Creelman & Filipe, 2017). If a new leader generally manages one type of business challenge and transitioned to another type, they must learn to flex or could fail, and getting clarity about the role responsibilities can allow new leaders to flex (Creelman & Filipe, 2017). The old onboarding adage of *sink or swim* will not benefit a leader in a family firm, as his failure may indeed fail the whole firm under that leadership dictum.

Leadership Strategies in Succession Planning

A family firm leader may have one of several leadership strategies that they use to lead their organization. This diversity may add to the effectiveness of their strategy in succession planning for business sustainability. One essential strategy in succession planning is in the interactions among leadership and individuals in a family firm that allows one to know what to expect from the other by transparency, which contributes to trust (Sundaramurthy, 2008). In this case study, I explored leadership strategies that leaders used to contribute to the success of their succession plan for the transference of leadership of their multigenerational family firm.

There are complex dynamic differences in a family firm from a traditional firm; the leadership in a family firm has concerns that are economically important for the firm as well as the family unit sustainability. Family business sustainability is the ability to ensure the persistence of the family unit and the family firm over time and to continue combining the continuity of the family structure with social responsibility and creating a community of values and proactive intentions (Schillaci et al., 2013). Being an effective leader means learning to adapt a personal leadership strategy to the business environment, stakeholders, and the business goals encountered, such as by being a situational leader (Jasper, 2018). According to Jasper (2018), the types of leadership strategies that are most often effective in family firms are adaptive, situational, and transformational. When a family firm leader adopts one of these three leadership strategies, the leader is considering the stakeholders' interests for the betterment of the family firm. This flexibility may be helpful for family firm leaders when choosing a successor in a complicated family business dynamic.

The importance of effective leadership correlates to the success of a business, and in family firms, it is a necessity for business continuation. A culture of empowerment unleashes the talent of people in a family firm. Effective leadership is not about being talented; it is about freeing the skills of others around to succeed (Benson, 2015). The difference between leadership and management is a leader guides their people to success, and a manager manages processes. When family firm leaders have an effective succession plan in place, the transference of the new leadership could be better facilitated and endorsed by all stakeholders.

Business sustainability is more likely to occur when concepts of business continuity are applied. When the family firm members accept the evolution of new firm leadership, business sustainability becomes achievable. Transparency and lead-time are two essential attributes in the succession planning process, which entail extensive access before jumping into the new leader (Reimer & Meighan, 2017). A current succession plan and ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of the succession before the leadership transition could make the leadership change more efficient.

Socioemotional Wealth Effects on Succession Planning

The family is the SEW in multiple generational family firms and local communities; the family firm's sustainability benefits and stabilizes most local economies. The overall dimensions of SEW are the renewal of family bonds through dynastic succession planning. The family firm leader's transgenerational succession intention is handing down the family business to future family generations (Tebbe et al., 2018). An effective way to find the best succession strategy for a particular family business is by working closely with a lawyer, accountant, and financial advisor experienced in business succession planning (Giarmarco, 2012). In seeking out business professionals to work with leaders and help create succession plans for the family firm, it alleviates any risk to the family dynamics by keeping the process on a business level versus personal bias.

Sustainability goals revolutionized family business; there is a movement of individuals, organizations, and societies toward developing the capacity for environmental and long-term quality of life. The sustainability movement is relevant in the United States economy because 80% to 90% of all enterprises in North America are family firms, contributing 64% of the Gross Domestic Product (GNP) and employing 62% of the United States workforce (Prencipe et al., 2014). This statistic emphasizes the importance of better succession planning strategies to buttress business continuation planning for family firm sustainability, strengthening SEW. Family members emotionally committed to their firms are willing to do the best for both the family and the collective organizational unit (Déniz-Déniz et al., 2018). Family members that come together as a mutual consensus of the firm's succession plan can better ensure family unity as well as the firm's sustainability.

If only 30% of all family firms successfully transfer business to a second generation, that can dramatically affect the global economy due to 90% of all businesses are established as family firms (Prencipe et al., 2014). More recent research suggests that SEW may encompass the broad goals of family firms in communities rather than specific financial results such as firm profit maximization (Neff, 2015). The concept of family firm loss aversion about the family's stock of SEW predicts various family firm decisions (Gomez–Mejia et al., 2017). When family firms follow a succession planning process to transfer the business to the next generation, the firm leaders are helping to ensure their family SEW and contribute to the local economy.

In a family firm, the leaders may make decisions that impact SEW, which can lead to conflicts between family members. Family firm leaders will make decisions oriented to the needs of the different non-family stakeholders only when they perceive that this does not jeopardize two of the socioemotional endowments of the family; family control family image and reputation (Déniz-Déniz et al., 2018). Furthermore, leadership decisions to terminate the business are often complicated by emotions rather than being solely based on hard objective facts (Abdelzaher et al. et al., 2018). These emotional decisions can bankrupt the family firm as well as individual family members and leave entire families unemployed.

The SEW factor's effect on the family's succession intentions of succession planning will depend on the relationships' quality as relationships permeate throughout the organization (Tebbe et al., 2018). According to Chrisman et al. (2016), it is crucial moving forward for family business scholars to extend the SEW-based explanation of family firm decision-making. Unfortunately, there is limited data and very few details on private family-owned companies' performance because researchers tend to gravitate toward public family-run companies, which are required to release financial data (Neff, 2015). The SFBT might give a more significant explanation of the determining factors that define family firms as unique from regular businesses.

Transition

In Section 1, I provided a brief introduction to explain the background of the study and the business problem, problem statement, purpose statement, rationalization for my choice of qualitative method, and multiple case study design for this study. Section 1 contains the study's significance, the contribution of the study to business practice, and a review of the professional and academic literature. The literature review includes an exhaustive review of the literature on family firms' dimensions, leadership models, succession planning process, and the socioemotional wealth impact on family firm members. The SFBT forms the conceptual framework to research the practices of multiple generational family firm succession planning for business sustainability. Section 1 also contained detail of information on the significance of family firm succession planning for business sustainability. I will expand on the impact of leadership in succession planning for family firm sustainability and the potential strategies that incumbents of family firms could adopt to enhance the success of their leadership transitions to successive generations.

In Section 2, I began with a restatement of my study purpose and the research method and design. I have clarified a framework of the process for my multiple case study, such as who the participants will be, the researcher's role, and the collection of data processes. I have provided an analysis of the multiple case study process, which includes the role of the researcher, the participants in the study, the research method and research design, the population and sampling, the requirements for ethical research, data collection instruments and technique, data organization techniques, organization analysis, and finally the reliability and validity of the research study. The purpose of Section 2 is to convey concepts and analysis of the methodology and design used to evaluate successful strategies used by family firm leaders that create succession plans for business sustainability.

In Section 3, I provided a conclusion and the presentation of findings of the study and recommendations for business application in family firms for business sustainability.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 1, I made brief statements about the foundation of this qualitative multiple case study that explores the strategies that multiple generational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader. Section 1 included an in-depth academic literature review of family firms, leadership, and family firms using a succession planning process for business sustainability. In Section 2, I expand on the project to conduct a qualitative case study exploring the business problem in family firms that face issues when transferring the firm's leadership and the importance of using a succession planning process to help achieve firm sustainability. I also explore in greater depth my role as the researcher, the participants in the study, the study design and methodology, the collection of analysis, and the security of the data collected. Finally, I elaborate on how I ensured validity and reliability in my multiple case study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader to ensure business sustainability. The population was multigenerational family firm leaders in the western United States. In California, 95.5% of businesses were small firms; they generated 43.0% of California's $151.1 billion in total exports (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2018). Participants included family firm leaders in California who implemented succession planning strategy processes to transfer leadership from the incumbent leader to the successor leader for transgenerational firm sustainability. In California, private-sector employment increased by 1.7% during the 12 months ending in February 2019 (U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2018). When leaders of family firms encounter stressful circumstances, tensions between family members can create conflicts in the firm and increase the likelihood of firm failure (Jaskiewicz et al., 2016). The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve stability in family firms and local economies. When business leaders instill a succession plan for business sustainability, the business has a better possibility for business continuation, contributing to communities' economic stability.

Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher was to ensure data saturation by collecting data and conducting data analysis while remaining unbiased and ethical in my execution of this multiple case study. Researchers who conduct qualitative studies should engage in reflective and interpretive thinking so they can assess the topic accurately (Clark & Vealé, 2018). As the researcher, I mitigated my personal bias and conducted the research ethically by ensuring that the interpretation of the phenomena represents that of the participants and not of the researcher (Walden University, 2017). The research question proposed guided my case study and aligned with the interview questions, and there is alignment throughout the study. In a multiple case study, the research question is essential, leading to favoring one unit of analysis over another (Yin, 2018). Therefore, the scholarly researcher's role is to collect data that accounts for or reports how people experience and interpret their life and work situations (Fletcher et al., 2016). As the researcher, I designed the case study by selecting a conceptual framework, the research and interview questions, population, participants, sample size, and a process for collecting, organizing, and analyzing the data. Collecting, organizing, and analyzing data must be done systematically; if the researcher conducts the study without a clear purpose, it is not credible research (Saunders et al., 2016). The principal objective of conducting qualitative research is to attempt to understand aspects from the viewpoint of the subject (Fletcher et al., 2016). The explicit purpose of this study was to explore how some multigenerational family firm leaders use strategies to implement a succession planning process from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader to ensure business sustainability.

As a past small business owner (SBO) and from conversations with SBOs that I have known, I have observed that very few leaders of family firms implemented succession planning strategies to transfer leadership of the firm to the next generational leader. For family firm members, succession planning can incite conflict and destroy the harmony in the family; however, for the business, such planning is essential to preserving stability and stakeholder confidence over time (Crittenden et al., 2015). I mitigated bias and avoided viewing data through a personal lens or perspective by the guidelines set by Walden University Rubric, an Interview Protocol guideline (see Appendix A), and by obtaining institutional review board (IRB) approval before I began researching to protect the interest of human subjects (Walden University, 2017). Additional ways to mitigate bias, according to Yin (2018), are to be sensitive to contrary evidence, assess personal capabilities to being bias in any given situation, and eliminate any preconceived positions. Although it was not my experience to use succession planning as an SBO, I did use succession planning strategies in the corporate businesses where I was employed. I explored how some multigenerational family firm leaders used strategies to implement a succession planning process from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader to ensure business sustainability.

I followed the guidelines of Walden University code of conduct, DBA Rubric, Walden University IRB, and the ethical guidelines outlined in the *Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979; Walden University, 2017) while executing research for my study. The *Belmont Report* (NCPHSBBR, 1979) is a statement written on ethical practices in research studies. I followed the three ethical principles outlined in the *Belmont Report* (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence is beneficent actions, and (c) justice represents just ways to distribute burdens and benefits to individuals. Above all, I executed my qualitative case study adhering to the ethical principles set forth by Walden University, the IRB, and the *Belmont Report* to do no harm standards for research.

I had identified several successful family firm leaders who were involved in the transference of the family firm across multiple generations. These leaders were involved in succession planning strategies as a tool to transfer the family firm's leadership. The firms that I researched were in the retail sector, the farming sector, and the petroleum sector. I mitigated my personal bias toward the participants by demonstrating the use of an interview protocol, member checking, methodological triangulation for data saturation, and additional strategies during the data collection and analyzing the process of my study. By using an interview protocol, I ensured all interviews were consistent and justified to render reliability and validity.

Participants

The family firm leader participants in this study own multigenerational firms in California and have implemented succession planning strategies to transfer leadership from one generation to the next generational leader to achieve business sustainability. Family firm leaders are essential contributors to the economic strength in local communities in California. Family firm leaders add jobs in the community and usually give back to the communities through funding and volunteerism. Small family firms proceed $151.1 billion in total exports for California (U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2018). Approximately 70% of family firm leaders do not implement succession strategies from first-generation business owners to second-generation (Cater & Young, 2016). I selected California family firm leaders who were involved in developing strategies in a succession plan to implement the transfer of leadership from the incumbent leader to the next successive generational leader to achieve business sustainability.

I conducted a qualitative multiple case study with the family firm leaders from the farming industry, the retail industry, and the petroleum industry located in California. Family firm succession is the process of transitioning leadership and ownership of the business to the following generational leadership members of the family that are operating the firm (Sharma & Dave, 2013). California family firm leaders are essential to their state’s employment rates; private-sector employment increased by 1.7% in one year ending in February 2019 (U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2018). I developed honest communication and interactive relationships with the family firm leaders to establish trust, which generated in-depth knowledge transference of information on their family firm leadership involvement and strategies of their succession plan for the transfer of the firm. Knowledge transfer between individuals occurs at a higher level of communication because it involves at least two individuals at any time (Tangaraja et al., 2016). Family firm leaders are responsible for approximately 60% of jobs in America. The National Bureau of Economic Research's Family Business Alliance indicated that despite succession being a critical process for many family firm leaders, only 15% of them developed anything resembling strategies for succession planning implementation (Saymaz, & Lambert, 2019). I conducted the interviews with individuals who were family firm leaders in multigenerational firms and were the primary decision-makers in the succession planning process.

Research Method and Design

The research question is the starting point and the primary determinant of the research method and design (Cypress, 2018). To understand whether there is a business problem needing further research on a business topic, I first determined the research question that needed further in-depth understanding and possible resolution. Once I determined the need for further research on the business topic, I determined which research method would align best with my research question. In choosing my research method and design, I selected options that answer my research question: What are the strategies that some multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning for business sustainability? Research that is conducted by using qualitative inductive methods is used to search for patterns or themes from the facts or raw data collected (Roberts et al., 2019). I used a qualitative multiple case study to explore the strategies that multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning from the incumbent generational leader to the successor-generational leader for business sustainability.

Research Method

Saunders et al. (2016) identified three main methodological choices to conduct research. Within these research methods, studies are either quantitative (based on statistical data) or qualitative (based on interpretive data), or mixed method, which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2018). As family firms are constructed by combining family member issues and firm issues, it is difficult to quantify the data; therefore, a quantitative method would not be an effective method. Qualitative research is inductively grounded and based on philosophical and ethical grounds using data collection, organization, and analysis that are critical and essential to qualitative research studies (Cypress, 2018). A mixed method combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. Because my study did not have a statistical characteristic, a mixed method would not have been appropriate. The method I chose in order to produce the most valid and reliable information on family firm leadership and succession planning strategies for business sustainability is a qualitative study.

A qualitative method is used to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon through the lived experiences of those who have directly experienced the phenomenon. A qualitative method recognizes the value of participants' unique experiences and perspectives that become inferred within their experience and viewpoint (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2018). A qualitative method study may be an effective method to explore family firm leaders that have utilized a succession plan for business sustainability. Furthermore, a qualitative method addresses sensitive issues, which cannot be quantified and searches for the meanings that may resonate with actions, which could be exposed by interview sessions (Ferrari, 2019). A primary consideration in a qualitative method study is to determine to what extent one should decide on the methods in advance, rather than developing and modifying these during the process (Cypress, 2018).

Research Design

Researchers agree that *qualitative research* is a term that applies to several research designs, which include case study, narrative, ethnography, and phenomenological (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2018). The narrative design uses statements that are collected in the sequenced dialog and has a structured analysis element applied to the dialog of the narrator to generate a collection of data (Saunders et al., 2016). The ethnography design explores the cultural or social group phenomenon. Ethnography is a written account of people or ethnic groups (Saunders et al., 2016). As this study was not limited to a particular ethnic or cultural group, an ethnography study would not have been appropriate. The phenomenological design focuses on the participants' lived experiences and their interpretation of those experiences (Saunders et al., 2016). Succession planning is a business strategy, so the phenomenological design would not have been appropriate for my study either. A case study design is not limited to a structured traditional linear narrative; it consists of a question-and-answer process in an interview format (Yin, 2018). Research designs are specific design assumptions, sampling procedures, data collection, and data analysis protocols (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). The value of a case study is that it constructs an approach to empirical research that provides a more vibrant, more in-depth understanding of the meanings that people place on actions, events, and relationships (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). The primary purpose of a case study design is to avoid the situation in which the evidence does not address the initial research questions (Yin, 2018). I chose a case study design to extract rich data that will answer my research question using interviews, documentation, and company reports, which ensured data saturation.

There are two specific case study designs: a single case or a multiple case study design. A single case study approach is a study organized around a single case for the purpose of analysis that is critical, common, unusual, revelatory, or longitudinal. A single case study is when a single organization or group is studied, and there is a need for literal or theoretical replication of a strategy (Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). A multiple case study consists of two or more cases with an implicit, if not explicit, research design to collect data in a qualitative method and may be used for exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory purposes (Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). A multiple case study design was appropriate for my study based on a need for literal or theoretical replication of a succession planning strategy. A case study determines whether the propositions are correct or whether some alternative explanations may be more relevant (Yin, 2018). In this multiple case study, I explored strategies implemented by family firm leaders in succession planning for business sustainability over multiple generations.

Case study designs can be classified into four types, according to Yin (2018): single-case (holistic) designs, single-case (embedded) designs, multiple-case (holistic) designs, and multiple-case (embedded) designs. Saunders et al. (2016) clarified that the rationale for choosing multiple cases to study focuses on whether findings could become replicated in more than one case. Yin (2018) stated this term as literal replication; he further stated that this approach strategy, therefore, commences deductively, based on theoretical propositions and theory testing. I proposed a multiple case study design for this study due to my interest in family firm leaders who implement succession planning strategies to transfer their firm from one generation to the next generation. What differentiated this study as a multiple case study from a single case because I spoke to multiple family firm leaders from different firms and different industries. Researchers select case study designs when they want to explore cases bound by time and place; to generate insights from interviews conducted in real-life settings. A multiple case study design’s primary purpose is to help avoid the situation in which the evidence does not address the initial research questions (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). In this case study, my research question addressed the strategies that some multiple generational family firm leaders used to implement succession planning for business sustainability.

One data collection process is through a research question and in-depth interviews (Yin, 2018). In-depth or semistructured interview questions are likely to be a practical approach to obtaining data when the questions are either complex or open-ended (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2018). From the research question, I had developed interview questions that were semistructured, in-depth for my data research. Saunders et al. (2016) assert that many firm leaders are more likely to agree to participate in interviews than complete a questionnaire, especially when the interview topic is relevant to their particular interest or business needs. A significant advantage of conducting interviews is that it permits the respondent to move back and forth in time to reconstruct the past, interpret the present, and predict the future (Cypress, 2018). I researched how multigenerational family firm leaders have used a succession planning process to transfer leadership from the incumbent to the successor for business sustainability.

Population and Sampling

In this qualitative case study, the population was multigenerational family firm leaders. The sampling was family firm leaders who used strategies to implement a succession planning process from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader to ensure business sustainability in the western United States. Two choices of sampling techniques are probable and non-probable. In probable sampling, the researcher answers research questions and achieves objectives that require them to statistically estimate the target population’s characteristics (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2018). Non-probable sampling uses a range of techniques to select the research sample. Some of these include an element of subjective judgment, which will ensure data saturation (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2018). To achieve data saturation, I had chosen a non-probable, purposeful sample group of family firm leaders that have used a succession planning process to transfer leadership from the incumbent to the successor leader for business sustainability. By conducting purposeful sampling, the researcher can ensure data saturation in a qualitative case study, and homogenous samples can facilitate meaningful comparisons across case studies (Suri, 2011).

Saunders et al. (2016) suggest that if sampling focuses on one particular subgroup in which all the sample members are similar such as the same hierarchy in an organization, you should choose a homogeneous sample. I had selected purposeful homogeneous sampling that the selection of family firm leaders can confirm. I selected family firm leader participants that implemented succession planning strategies to create a process to transfer the leadership of the family firm for business sustainability to the next generational leader. Purposeful sampling requires access to key participants in the field who can ensure information-rich cases that will achieve data saturation (Suri, 2011). By selecting four or more multigenerational family firm leaders from a designated region of California, I achieved a significant population and sample size to ensure data saturation. According to the Walden University *DBA Doctoral Study Rubric and Research Handbook* (2016), data saturation in qualitative research is a way to ensure that one obtained accurate and valid data. The selection of multigenerational family firm leaders that implemented succession planning strategies from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader to ensure business sustainability generated data saturation of my business problem and research question.

Ethical Research

Qualitative research is inductively grounded and based on philosophical and ethical grounds; the data collection, organization, and analysis are critical and essential to qualitative research studies (Cypress, 2018). When conducting academic research, each research inquiry comes with its own set of specific ethical requirements. Therefore, a standard rubric could not address all possible scenarios of my case study. However, I did use the Walden University *DBA Doctoral Study Rubric and Research Handbook* as a study guideline resource. Before I completed this component, I have reviewed the IRB application to ensure I had addressed any requirements not identified in the *DBA Doctoral Study Rubric and Research Handbook* and adhered to the Walden University *Code of Conduct.*

I discussed the informed consent process with the participants, so they were informed of the research study process. I informed the participants of *The Belmont Report*, a statement written by the NCPHSBBR (1979). I then asked for their consent via an "I consent" statement on the return email from the provided informed consent form via email. This consent form is not the original filled-in form provided by the consenting party. I did discuss participant procedures and the process for withdrawing from the study with participants. I did inform participants that they would not receive monetary compensation for participation in the study. I did assure participants that they may withdraw from the study at any point. The participants may withdraw from my study by informing me by phone or email at any time during the study. At which time, I will delete all their information and data. I assure the participants that all information is confidential, sensitive, and identifiable information will be confidential, such as the names of the individuals or firms.

I did ensure participants that ethical measures to protect the participants and their family firms. The participants did e-sign the informed consent form, the type of observation was determined, and care was undertaken to record and store data to protect the privacy and confidentiality of information. Observations should also be overt as not to impose on the participants (Cypress, 2018). I did include a statement that data will be maintained in a safe location for five years to protect the rights of participants and their firms. I have included in this doctoral manuscript the Walden IRB approval number for this study which is 10-21-20-0441486, and it expires on October 20, 2021, and each participant will receive a copy.

Data Collection Instruments

In developing a conceptual framework, the researcher plans how to gather the information (data collection) and what to do with this information to make sense of it by performing data analysis (Cypress, 2018). A data display and analysis will provide the researcher with a set of procedures to analyze the qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2016). As the researcher and interviewer, I was the primary data collection instrument for this multiple case study. Some forms of collecting qualitative data can include interview transcripts, newspaper articles, questionnaire responses, diaries, videos, images, or field observations (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). In conducting data collection for my study, I retrieved information from semistructured interviews and observations of the participant responses to questions and member checking. I collected information from business documents from the firm leaders on information of their succession planning processes to explore the strategies family firm leaders use to implement succession planning for business sustainability. I also collected information that has been reported publicly on the family firm operations. Achieving triangulation is how one explores different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon (Fusch & Fusch, 2015). I achieved data methodological triangulation and saturation by using these different instruments for the data collection. The data were then input into NVivo to retrieve thematic analysis from the data collected.

For this qualitative multiple case study's research process, I collected data through in-depth interviews and then organized and analyzed this data using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). One such CAQDAS program used in a qualitative research study was NVivo to analyze the semistructured interview questions and answers. CAQDAS programs, such as NVivo, combine structured and semistructured interview questions and qualitative analytical procedures (Saunders et al., 2016). The use of NVivo, specifically, stores and sorts all data in one platform, from quantifiable demographic information to qualitative open-ended questions and interviews (Cypress, 2019). The NVivo program was a valuable tool for collecting, coding, sorting, and reassembling the data for this study.

In this qualitative multiple case study, I conducted my research with interview questions that were semistructured and in-depth. The open-ended questions allowed me to probe deeper into the answers I received from the participants to collect my data. The use of data management methods is crucial for the efficiency of the study. One type of data management includes the transcription of audio-recorded interviews and the use of various qualitative data analysis software tools (Cypress, 2018). One data management process I used was I transcribed the interview sessions from recorded interviews via video conferencing. The transcription data was then made available to the participants for review; they were allowed to then give additional information as necessary. By transcribing and coding the data from interviews, researching written documents on the family firm, and firm documentation, I achieved methodological triangulation and ensured reliability and validity. I recorded the virtual interviews to confirm accurate information records in the transcribed interviews as part of the data collection protocol process.

Data Collection Technique

I conducted qualitative participant interviews with eight interview questions using an interview guide to facilitate the discussions during the interview. As an additional data source collection technique, I accessed company documents to explore the strategies family firm leaders used to implement succession planning for business sustainability. This data collection technique process ensured methodological triangulation that enhances the quality and rigor of naturalistic inquiries (Cypress, 2018). The research process must yield results that are open for scrutiny into the researchers' decision-making throughout the analysis process (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Methodological triangulation occurs when the convergence of data collection from different sources determines the consistency of the findings (Yin, 2018). The results from the data collection techniques used in this study achieved methodological triangulation for validity and reliability.

In conducting a qualitative study, the framework of the interview is structured (formal, focused, or standardized), unstructured (informal, in-depth, specialized, exploratory), or semistructured, or a combination of the two styles (Cypress, 2018). I used eight semistructured, open-ended interview questions with family firm leaders who used succession planning for business sustainability. The virtual interviews with the family firm leaders took approximately 60 minutes, and I recorded interviews for validity. Following the interviews, I transcribed the information from the interviews, which were then available to the participants for review of the transcribed questions and answers. Participant collaboration, such as member checking, is essential in qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2016). A significant advantage of interviews is that it permits the respondent to move back and forth in time to reconstruct the past, interpret the present, and predict the future (Cypress, 2018). I gave the participants a copy of their transcripts from their interviews to give feedback on their interviews and make corrections or add information based on their answers which achieved member checking. This process is known as member checking or member validation in a qualitative research study.

As a secondary data collection process, I collected data from the participants' family firm documents, including leadership briefings, websites, news information, succession plans, and reports made available for public information. The purpose of doing qualitative studies is to get the participant's perspective (Saunders et al., 2016). I researched an in-depth content of data on the business problem: multigenerational family firm leaders lack strategies to implement a succession planning process from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader to ensure business sustainability.

Data Organization Technique

The data organization technique is essential because the collected data can be drawn upon and readily available for review and replication. The use of data management methods is essential for the study's efficiency, validity, and reliability; this includes the transcription of audio-recorded interviews and various qualitative data analysis software tools such as NVivo (Cypress, 2018). I used numeric identifiers (such as P1, P2, P3); this ensures firm and personal confidentiality. I transcribed the data in Microsoft Word and then saved and managed it on an external hard drive that will be stored safely for five years after the conclusion of this study. I informed the study participants that their interview responses and information were in a confidential file and saved for five years. The participants will also have access to the transcripts and data analysis from their review of the interview sessions.

To accurately transcribed the interview process, digital recordings of the interviews were used for accuracy. As in any research design, if the data collection and organization methods lack rigor, analysis can be impeded, minimizing the value of outcomes (Williams, & Moser, 2019). I use an external hard drive to store all information organized in CAQDAS. I am storing the data results from NVivo on an external hard drive that is password-protected and placed in a secured location. After five years of completing this study, I will comply with Walden University’s IRB requirements by erasing all electronic data and shredding any paper documents. I will destroy data collected from interviews after five years from the completion and publication of this study and inform the participants of this process.

Data Analysis

I conducted a qualitative multiple case study that used methodological triangulation to achieve data saturation. Methodological triangulation affords a broader understanding of all data collected and analyzed the phenomenon under investigation (Cypress, 2018). The advantage of using a triangulation method is to have several methodological sources of evidence to develop converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2018). The data collected for methodological triangulation in a qualitative study can include interview transcripts, firm documents, newspaper articles, questionnaire responses, diaries, videos, images, or field observations (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I did achieve methodological triangulation through primary and secondary data analysis that will derive information collected from participant interviews, member checking, succession plans established by firm leaders, public documents, and firms’ business documents. The development of convergent evidence, methodological triangulation will strengthen the construct validity of case studies (Yin, 2018). Therefore, the data analysis in this case study will contribute to validity as a research study.

As a qualitative researcher, it is essential to minimize and disclose assumptions and biases while collecting, coding, and sorting qualitative data to accurately represent the phenomenon or topic (Clark & Vealé, 2018). The use of software enables the management of data collection and analysis. NVivo is a rigorous enabler of qualitative research; it increases the ability to extract insights from data by ordering it in more searchable and manageable forms and formats (Cypress, 2019). I was able to accomplish this by using NVivo. NVivo quickly exchanges data with SPSS for further statistical analysis (Cypress, 2019). One choice of software is NVivo automatically sorts sentiment, themes, and attributes in seconds.

I imputed the data into NVivo, to conduct a thematic analysis to categorize reoccurring thematic information that the participant revealed during their interviews. Qualitative data analysis software provides content searching and coding tools, linking ability, mapping or networking, query, writing, and annotation (Cypress, 2019). One crucial feature of NVivo is that it enables an analysis of all data related to a topic instead of the human tendency of privileging parts that fit with researchers' assumptions and worldviews (Cypress, 2019). When dissecting the data from the participants' responses, I analyzed the thematic responses by creating color-coded responses from data input into NVivo

Coding involves identifying compelling data features systematically across the entire data set and occurs at multiple levels; then, codes attach data units that could vary in size (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Reassembling the codes or categories to which each concept will become mapped is then put into context to create themes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The reason for using Thematic Analysis relates to its development as a standalone analytical technique or process rather than a theoretically mounted methodological approach (Saunders et al., 2016).). Thematic Analysis can analyze sizeable qualitative data sets and smaller ones, leading to detailed descriptions and explanations for theorizing (Saunders et al., 2016).). The use of thematic analysis is flexible because it does not conform to a particular philosophical position (Saunders et al., 2016).). Themes capture the essence of the phenomenon under investigation that may connect to the research question or purpose of the study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). While conducting these interviews, I found essential concepts and themes that derived from the interview participants. A necessary aspect of compiling the data into a useable form is the first step to finding meaningful answers to research questions (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The coding of the participant answers by thematic concepts of family influences and family firm leaders within the selected participants did generate patterns in family firms and the leaders' decision process.

The participants' responses were color-coded into thematic codes establishing the data is non-biased and analytical. This critical stage in the research process involves the researcher making analytical conclusions from the data presented as codes and themes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). NVivo automatically sorts sentiment, themes, and attributes in seconds, and it quickly exchanges data with SPSS for further statistical analysis (Cypress, 2019). Thematic codes will show the occurrences or non-occurrences of a phenomenon and the strength of opinion in some instances (Saunders et al., 2016).). From the thematic information that the participant has shared, I established critical factors for making a succession planning process for transgenerational family firm sustainability.

Reliability and Validity

I achieved reliability and validity in my case study by the process of member checking of data interpretation, transcript review, and comprehensive research on all firm documentation. This process will ensure methodological triangulation and will demonstrate dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. The impact of using reliable and valid measurements on qualitative findings is that the research questions are purposeful, concise, and unambiguous (Saunders et al., 2016).) My research question is concise and adheres to the *DBA Doctoral Study Rubric and Research Handbook.* Another factor for reliability and validity is that the research data methods can also be duplicated by another researcher to confirm the validity or conduct further research. Reliability and validity are central to judgments which lead to credibility and dependability of the quality of research in the natural sciences and qualitative research in the social sciences (Saunders et al., 2016). The negative impact of inaccurate measurements is that it is inappropriate to report accurate, credible, valid, and reliable information. Due to what these threats imply, it is crucial to be methodologically rigorous in devising and carrying out research to seek to avoid threatening the reliability of research findings and conclusions (Saunders et al., 2016). I supported every decision with a minimum of three scholarly peer-reviewed journals for my research in this multiple case study.

Reliability

An investigator will achieve reliability if the same construct of the case study reaches the same findings and conclusions. Reliability achievement is by minimizing errors and biases in the study (Yin, 2018). Through the conceptual framework of SFBT, I researched multiple generational family firm leaders that use succession planning strategies to implement succession planning for business sustainability. I will be using a multiple case study protocol, member checking of the data interpretation, participant transcript review, interview questions, interview protocol, direct or participant observation protocol. This construct will ensure triangulation and data saturation to assure the dependability and reliability of this case study.

Validity

The choice of methods and design of this study, participants selection, sampling choices, role as the researcher, and research data saturation will assure validity. The importance of knowledge of qualitative techniques to establish the ethical outcomes of qualitative research is that research achieves credibility, ensuring validity through methodological triangulation (Morse, 2012). Critical components of validity are credibility, confirmability, and transferability in qualitative research. I achieved validity by member checking of the data interpretation, methodological triangulation, participant transcript review, and data saturation. Achieving triangulation is one method by which the validity of the study results will be ensured (Fusch & Fusch, 2015). To establish validity, a researcher will investigate three main aspects. These aspects are content (sampling frame and instrument development description), criterion-related (comparison and testing of the instrument and analysis tools between researchers) and, construct validity (appropriateness of data-led inferences to the research question using reflexive techniques) (Roberts et al., 2019). The participants' interview transcripts will be made available to authenticate the transcribed sessions for accuracy, ensuring credibility and confirmability.

Reaching data saturation is considered a construct of validity and transferability for further research; this is when the results of data collected have been exhausted can be duplicated in other studies based on their conclusions. Methodological triangulation of the evidence is achieved by the convergence of multiple sources of evidence which strengthens the construct validity (Yin, 2018). There is a direct link between data triangulation and data saturation; the one, data triangulation ensures the other, data saturation (Fusch, & Fusch, 2015). Esurance of transferability must maintain adherence to the data collection and analysis techniques for the research design, interview protocols, direct or participant observation protocols, and data saturation. Transferability will occur when readers of this study can extrapolate meaning and connect their experiences to the findings of this study. Despite the imperative to address urgent ethical concerns in management research, there has been a minimal debate about this impending intervention, specifically or ethical treatment of research the subject more generally (Greenwood, 2016). Students at Walden University in the DBA study program must conduct their research ethically per the code of conduct, IRB, and *The Belmont Report* (1974).

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I developed in-depth information on the intent and structure of my qualitative multiple case study. I explored strategies that family firm leaders use to implement succession planning processes to transfer leadership for business sustainability. The basis for undertaking qualitative research is to explore thick, rich data for meanings, conceptual understanding, and discourses (Cypress, 2019). The role of the researcher is to collect information and data to analyze in an unbiased study. The researcher's role is to complete their study ethically and to protect the information that the interviews share with the researcher. I did research this study with the intent not to harm.

In Section 3, I include my study finding and the results of the succession planning strategies established. Section 3 consists of concepts for the application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and further study. This section includes a discussion of personal reflections, a summary, and research conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies multigenerational family firm leaders used to implement succession planning from the incumbent leader to the successor to ensure business sustainability. The study participants consisted of family firm leaders operating multigenerational family firms in the Central Coast of California. The conceptual framework was SFBT, which emphasizes the family firm system's sustainability by emphasizing both business success and family functionality in a balanced unity (Stafford et al., 1999). After completing all the participant interviews, transcription, and member checking, I conducted data analysis using NVivo.

Several common themes evolved from my data collection process that correlated with SFBT. After transcribing the video conference interview sessions, I conducted member checking of the transcriptions with the participants. I did not receive any further information that the participants wished to add to their interview sessions. All transcribed participant interview data was input into NVivo; the information was then coded and grouped into nodes. I then used NVivo data analysis of the interviews to triangulate all data from participant transcripts, publicly accessible company documents, and media findings. This analysis produced common themes which correlated with SFBT. The findings revealed strategies that family firm leaders used in implementing their succession planning process to achieve business sustainability over multiple generations.

Presentation of the Findings

During the interviews, the five most frequent themes expressed by the participants were multigeneration succession, career leadership development, family engagement in the firm, family engagement in their community, and leadership style impact. All of the family firm leaders stated that they felt solid and loving connections amongst their family members. Each family member had personal emotional connections throughout their lives to their family firm. These personal connections were what each participant perceived as the conduit that bound them together as a family firm unit.

The participants stated in their interviews that all family members had a substantial personal commitment to impart a positive work ethic in the family firm environment and a deep desire to develop their careers within the family firm. P1 stated that his family firm had business sustainability for over 75 years and four generations of family members working in the firm in some capacity. With four generations' experience in farming California's Central Coast, P1 leads the produce industry with teamwork, respect for its loyal workforce and customers, and a family atmosphere, according to P1's firm website. P1 further stated that each family member cared deeply about each other and the family business; they all had a passion for the farming business and a loving passion as members of a healthy family. P1 described the mutual connections that family members had between the family business of farming and each other that sustained their farm successfully as a business since 1946. Furthermore, the participants stated that their attachment to their family members and their family firm's sustainability led to their decision to accept a succession leadership role in the family firm.

I chose SFBT to explore family firm leadership because it is a comprehensive and flexible theory developed to enhance understanding of the family members' dynamic role in family business entrepreneurship and demonstrate the integration of the family members, business, and community (Danes & Brewton, 2012). The connection between family members and business sustainability was evident in participants' statements during the interview process for my data collection. The data I collected led to strategies to improve family firm leaders' succession planning process that may ensure firm sustainability.

My study's overreaching research question was: What strategies do successful multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning for business sustainability? I conducted data collection using semistructured interview questions with family firm leaders in California's Central Coast Region. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, I could not conduct interviews face-to-face; therefore, my study's primary data collection method was via video web conferencing interviews and one teleconference interview. My data analysis results derived from participant transcripts input into NVivo contained themes that evolved based on family engagement in family leaders firms.

After I completed the transcription of participants' interviews, I emailed a copy of the written transcripts to the participants to ensure the accuracy of the information. I conducted member checking with the participants who were family firm leaders to confirm accurate transcription, allowing for any further input by the participants. After member checking with all of the participants,' the interview sessions were then input into NVivo for conducting data analysis. Additional data collection sources were obtained by researching the family firms' leadership and operations from publicly accessible company documents and media information. This research methodological triangulation process developed lines of convergent evidence that strengthened the construct of validity.

While using NVivo for my data analysis, some of the words most frequently occurring were business, family, father, people, leadership, community. I then extrapolated keywords to create coding to analyze the data collected.

Table 2

Consolidated P1-P5 Interview Word Frequency

Word	Count	Weighted percentage (%)
business	183	4.78
family	67	1.75
father	34	0.89
people	31	0.81
work	30	0.78
leadership	25	0.65
community	23	0.60
grandfather	23	0.60
generation	22	0.58
working	22	0.58

Finally, data themes were generated from the participants' coded transcriptions. These code words were pivotal to the response to my research problem statement. Each family firm leader participant made statements that centered around the previously stated thematic parameters.

Table 3

Theme Response Frequency

	Leader response frequency				
	P1	P2	P3	P4	Total
Thematic response	BT	KD	TI	BM	s
Multigeneration succession	6	8	13	6	33
Career leadership development	5	3	13	3	24
Family member engagement in the firm	6	7	9	0	22
Family member engagement in their community	0	7	2	6	15
Leadership style impact	4	2	5	3	14

The thematic responses developed from the participant interviews correlated with SFBT, the conceptual framework for my study. SFBT incorporates attributes of both the family and the business that allows business outcomes viewed as a function of family and business characteristics and vice versa can serve as the basis for the examination (Stafford et al., 1999). To be considered for the leadership team in the participants' family firms, the leaders set qualification expectations for family members who would participate in the succession planning process for future leadership roles. The framework to explore family firm leaders' succession planning process to ensure business sustainability was SFBT which views family and business as a concept together.

Theme 1: Multigenerational Leader Strategies to Implement Succession Planning

The importance of multigenerational succession planning was the most common thematic response, with 33 total responses stated in participant interviews. It is essential to understanding the complexity of a family firm by acknowledging the importance of family members' involvement in the succession planning process. Strategies to implement succession planning entail all the preparations made to ensure harmony amongst family members and the business's continuity at the time of the leadership changeover (Meier, & Schier, 2016). Some family firm leaders strategically leverage rich interpersonal ties among family members and strive for entrepreneurial outcomes that transcend multiple generations of family firm leaders. Internal family member conflicts and conservatism plague firm leaders and cause firm stagnation, leading to the failure of the family firm (Chirico & Salvato, 2016). Additionally, successful family firm leaders strategically learned the family firms' daily operations while working throughout childhood and adulthood.

Family firm leader participants expressed the importance of working in the family firm at a young age with multiple generations of family members. P3 stated that his family history in farming in his local community goes back to the turn of the century when his great grandfather came from abroad to earn money for the family who had incurred a debt. P3, a third-generation Japanese American farmer in California, was interviewed in a historical document prepared by the city where his business is located. In this article, he stated his Japanese native grandfather moved to Hawaii around 1910 to earn money for the family by harvesting sugar cane. P3’s grandfather then migrated to California in the early 1920s, searching for employment in the sugar beet farming industry. P3’s grandfather ultimately settled in central California in a prominent agricultural community and established his farm. All leader participants expressed that being involved in their family firm at a young age developed their connection to their community and their family firm throughout their lifetime.

Additionally, the participants also disclosed that they took on more responsibilities in their family firm as they became older and more capable of doing business tasks. All participants stated that throughout high school, college, and working for other firms outside their family firm, that they would choose to return to work in their family firms eventually in their lives. P1 stated that when he was in high school and started to learn more about the business, he had advanced in leadership positions in terms of his responsibilities in the firm. P1 stated he knew when he went away to college, he would come back to his hometown and be in the family business. P1 knew he wanted to be in the family firm from a young age and stated that he loved going to work with his father, working by his side, and learning the family business. SFBT further emphasizes resource and interpersonal family processes that utilize human capital at the intersection of family and business systems to secure short-term achievements and long-term sustainability (Danes & Brewton, 2012). Multigenerational family members are the human capital of family firms, and mentoring and encouraging successive family members’ development creates sustainability for the family firms.

The lack of balance between work life and family life may create added stress in both the firm and family unit. Business owners have reported that lack of work-family balance is the most significant tension producer and remains so over time (Yang & Danes, 2015). Most family firm leaders have a passion for their business; that passion manifests itself in a strong work ethic as a business leader. The substantial work ethic can transfer across generations to secure business sustainability. Relational ethics represent a family’s interpersonal transactions that become the family’s standard operational procedures passed across generations (Hanson et al., 2019). If an incumbent leader mentors the multigenerational successors, they can instill proactive work ethics that may create business sustainability across multiple generations.

An additional family firm failure catalyst is when an underqualified or inappropriate family leader is injected into the business, especially if the leadership change is unexpected. Poor performance by a family firm leader occurs when a successor has reluctantly accepted a position in the firm due to obligation or disagreement with the family members (Mokhber et al., 2017). The typical family firm structure was prevalent with each of the participant leaders and established between family members. The family firm structures were developed by participants' grandfathers along with their grandfathers’ brothers or other family members to create the family firms. Mzid et al. (2019) found that children’s early involvement in the family firm can produce more profound levels of firm-specific tacit knowledge. In early childhood, the family firm leader participants learned the behaviors of their family member's commitment to the family firm's success.

The participants continued this level of commitment to participating in the family firm forward and had conveyed it to their future generational leaders. These family firm leaders taught the potential next generational leaders that they were part of the greater good of the family firm at an early age of their development. The participant leaders also coached their successors in what the prerequisites for leadership in the family firm would entail in order to become future leaders in their family firms. P1 stated that before being considered for a leadership role in the family firm, they needed to have a bachelor's degree. In addition, potential successors needed to do something outside the family firm for at least two years before considering a leadership role. The responsibilities and expectations for leadership roles for future generations in the multigenerational family firms were evident in all the participant's succession planning processes.

In each case, the participants started their careers at other companies when they were in college or were in a different career at a young age. Developing succession and career planning structures that encourage dialogue between incumbents and next-generation family members assists next-generation family members in managing their family business involvement (Murphy & Lambrechts, 2015). The participants all had the same realization and determined they were happiest in the family firm and returned to work in the family business. P3 expressed his decision to leave an engineering career path in which he felt personally unfulfilled to go back to the family farm:

> We were never told we had to come back to the farm, and it was pretty much our choice. I started out as an engineering major at Cal and realized that that is not really how I envision the rest of my life or my career path. I realized the things that I enjoyed and were satisfying to me; I can gain from farming and being in the family business; it gave me a certain amount of independence.

Garcia et al. (2019) found that individuals gravitate towards activities and careers that they saw themselves as efficacious due to their belief in a higher likelihood of achieving the desired results and their ability to persevere amidst difficulties. The participant family firm leaders were encouraged to choose their own career choices, and all chose to return to working in the family firm, which helps the business achieve sustainability.

Theme 2: Strategies for Early Career Leadership Development.

All participants stated that they had strong family bonds with their families' patriarchs and that bond helped them learn the business at an early age. The participants each had thematic responses reflecting career leadership development, for a total of 24 responses. The participants expressed that their fathers had mentored them through developing their careers, either within the family firm in a leadership role or an outside occupation. P4 elaborated on how he and his bother are developing their future leaders and transition their roles in consideration of his entire staff:

> My brother and my sons are the next generations if they choose to stay with the business, and it is important that they learn everything before they are just thrown in there to run it. I work with our sons and employees, alongside them, teaching

> them the business. My employees are like my family, and you become devoted to their growth. Some of my employees have been here for 25 years or more.

The participants each stated that they were encouraged on their personal choice of the direction to take their careers. The extent to which parental behaviors influence next-generation engagement depends on whether these individuals perceive it as beneficial or constraining rather than merely present (Garcia et al., 2019). P1 stated the importance of learning the family business from his father; he had this wonderful personal relationship, family relationship, but that relationship was also such a great way to learn about his leadership style and understand the business's culture. P1 conveyed a close relationship between him and his father, having his first official job at the business when he was 12, working alongside his father, learning all about the business. In the interview data, the family firm leader's father was discussed 34 times by the 4 participants. Furthermore, the discussion of the participants' grandfathers had a word frequency total of 23 times in the succession planning leadership interviews.

In all cases, these family firm leaders were young boys when they started being mentored by their fathers about the family business that had transpired over the generations. They all went to work with their fathers when they were elementary school age, held their first legitimate positions in middle school age and high school, taking on significant roles in the business alongside their fathers. P4 stated, "My brother and I came to work as kids in the store with my dad. I would help out wherever I could; as young as the first grade, I remember making bows for the gift boxes." Both P4 and his brother worked in the business each day after school from a very young age. Garcia et al. (2019)

found that individuals gravitate towards activities and careers in which they see themselves as efficacious due to their belief in a higher likelihood of achieving the desired results and their ability to persevere amidst difficulties. P4 and his brother are now fourth generational leaders at their family firm, which is over 112 years old and owned by the same family. All participant interviews were multigenerational family firm leaders of family firms in business for at least 50 years; P4's firm is the oldest, established in 1909.

In all the family firm leader participant interviews, each leader stated that they had started working in the family business at a very young age alongside their fathers. When the next-generation family members perceived their parents showed concern about their career development and well-being, they were more likely to feel indebted to their family and the firm. One way family members reciprocate family commitment is to work in the family firm in order to carry forward the legacy of their parents (Garcia et al., 2019). The participants all conceded that they never felt forced to work in or continue the family firm activities; they all made independent choices to follow in their leadership roles.

An essential strategy in the succession planning process of the leadership transition is the centrality of the successor-incumbent relationship; incumbent career leadership development was an essential factor in choosing to stay a member in the family firm by all participants. Mentoring successors frequently by the incumbent is the principal vehicle for business leadership transference in a family firm (Ferrari, 2019). All leader participants in this study spoke very kindly of their fathers, working with them to develop their careers in the family business. In all cases, the transference of power and succession mentoring had occurred before the incumbent exited their role in the business. In two participant interviews, the leaders had stated their incumbent, who was their father, had unexpectantly died of heart attacks, consequently transferring leadership to these participants'. However, the transference of leadership power had already been an ongoing succession planning process between the incumbent and successor. Inadvertently, the pretransition succession planning process established the groundwork for the transference of leadership and contributed to the family firm's sustainability.

Theme 3: Strategies for Family Engagement in the Firm

Kumar and Swami (2017) showed that approximately 70% of family firms in small businesses collapse because of a lack of succession planning. The research question, what are the strategies that successful multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning for business sustainability, was presented to each participant to expound upon their family firm strategies for succession planning. All participant leaders stated that most family members were involved in some capacity of the family firm. P3 stated that his family engagement was part of his cultural heritage and family history, which he is continuing to his fourth generational family firm members. Scholars agree that succession is not a singular event but a series of change management processes in the relationship between the incumbent, the individual successor, the family members, and the firm members, extending over time (Björnberg & Nicholson, 2012). There were 22 total thematic responses on family succession planning strategies, and responses were common in overall content by each leader participant.

A common theme from the data collected on all the firm leaders was that they participated in the family firm at a young age. In addition, their incumbents mentored them, and the leaders chose to make family firm leadership their career choice rather than forced upon them an obligation. The data corresponded with SFBT, distinguishing between short-term leadership viability and long-term firm leadership sustainability (Stafford et al., 2013). In the short term, a leader could force family members into working in the family firm. It would fill a current need, but this approach would most likely build animosities among family members and not create firm sustainability. A contributing factor to a successful succession plan occurs if the vetting process occurs many years before the incumbent's transition of power to the next successor.

For a family firm leader to create long-term sustainability, they may have a strategy to choose a successor that has a deep aspiration to become a leader in the family business. Family businesses need to adopt proper and effective succession planning to ensure that they can continue to sustain and survive in the global arena (Mokhber et al., 2017). P4 stated that his family was able to adapt to the ongoing changes in the dynamics of the business world. The family member's ability to adapt to changing business needs helped the leaders develop business sustainability over decades. P3 stated that one of the strategies of his succession planning was figuring out where the voids in firm leadership were and which family member could successfully execute that role in his firm. P3 also stated that the second part of his strategy for succession planning to enable firm sustainability would be implementing family members' backfill for that person's position. Family firms' leaders use strategies to manage resources in prosperous times; also, those strategies are likely to be needed during difficult times, such as creating a succession plan for human capital resources (Mzid et al., 2019). A family firm's sustainability over multiple generations may be attainable when a viable succession plan is in place, and the family firm leader continuously implements the plan.

Another common strategy the participants stated for choosing a family member to be the next successor is to choose a member who has a passion for the family business. P1 stated that an essential prerequisite strategy to being in his business was passion. If you were passionate about the family firm and what the leaders were doing and wanted to learn more, they would figure out how to make that happen. P3 reverberated that concept by stating, "Successful families know how to leverage the next generation's strengths by placing them in different places that they are more adept to as opposed to the families that struggle." The most effective strategy between these participants is that if a family member had an allegiance to the family business, the leaders would construct strategies in their succession planning for successors to achieve a growth position of leadership. P4 simplified this sentiment as there is no pressure for the next generation of the family to work here or continue the family firm; if they choose to stay in the family business, they can learn what they need to take over the business someday!

Theme 4: Strategies for Implementing Family Engagement in the Firm Community

All participants believed that for a family firm to have sustainability over generations, new generations must desire to work and learn the family business and continue the business into future generations. One course to take to ensure family firm sustainability is to have a long-lasting social impact footprint in the family firm leaders' community. The firm website of P1 states their commitment to the family firm's community: "Our community involvement focuses on improving the lives of our employees, their families, and our local neighborhoods … You will also find us volunteering with local educational, athletic, health-related, art, and faith-based organizations." The participants' thematic response totals from their interviews had 15 total responses involving the community.

The participant leaders expressed that it is helpful if the family firm leaders and family members have connective ties to their community to fulfill their social impact footprint across generations. P3 stated that at the onset of World War II, the success of the family farmers that created the co-op packing station for produce in his community stopped short when the U.S. government ordered people of Japanese ancestry to evacuate the West Coast to internment camps. P3's family and the other four families who comprise the co-op today were able to continue farming after their return from the camps because friends agreed to lease their land while they were away. In the participant interviews, the word frequency of the word community occurred on 23 occasions. P3 stated that his family was one of the Japanese American families forced into internment camps during WWII. P3 and his family had felt forever indebted to their community for aiding his family in keeping ownership, working their farms, and returning their farm to them when they returned from the Japanese internment. Each participant referred to the importance of family firm leaders committing to their community as a factor they considered when choosing to become the future family firm leader.

Each of the participant family firm leaders in my study specifically stated that they were interested in meeting with me because they envisioned it as an opportunity to help in their community. P2 made statements on his company website that his goal is the same one his father and grandfather once established; providing something beyond petroleum products to the California Central Coast; to provide exceptional service to customers and the community. From the beginning, his family founded the company on values rooted in family and hard work, dating back to the man who started it all. The family firm leaders' community involvement was a common theme throughout all participant interviews. P3 emphasized commitment to the local community, "We have always been encouraged and encourage our kids to participate in the community." In my interview with P4, he expressed the importance of engagement with groups in his community to his family, which he believed had enabled his business to have sustainability, impacting social change in their Central California community. P4 summed up the family firm success best by the following statement during his participant interview:

> I feel that is what makes our business successful is being part of the community. The next generation can take advantage of our customers, treat them well, and have a sound reputation generation after generation. We enjoy having a good record in the community. We support the community in their events and being part of the schools by offering scholarships at the high school.

Each participant echoed the same sentiments of the family firm leaders' engagement in their community and desire to contribute a positive social impact. The family firm leaders had all personally contributed significantly to the communities where their firms were located. All participant leaders' engagement in their communities has been a pledge transgenerational for family firm leaders. Limiting one's vantage point from only an economic perspective will not unearth the socially embedded issues that may drive decisions for the family firm leaders (Bendickson et al., 2016). Each of the multigenerational family firm leaders had developed strong ties of engagement to their communities, as did their family firm predecessors. All participants declared that the families they conduct business with today are the same families that have done so with their family firm transgenerational, some dating to the early 1900s.

In the participant interview with P2, he emphasized how important and connected he felt to the community he lives in and conducts business. P2 stated in his answer to interview question 4, what were the critical issues in the planning process affecting your decision to stay in the family business and take over the current leadership role as follows:

> One of the critical decisions was the reputation that we had and a good reputation in the community, and you are always working on your reputation. You have to have a good reputation in the community for service, community involvement, an excellent place to work.

Interestingly, P2 further stated that many of his client's grandfathers had done business with his grandfather. Their fathers had done business with his father, and he felt significantly linked to the community. P2 then embellished that the transition from working for somebody else, working for an appreciated company, and working for people who were well respected in the community made the decision very easy. SFBT includes family, firm, family/firm interconnection, and the family firm's community remains deeply embedded in the family nucleus (Stafford et al., 2013). All of the family firm leaders' interviews conveyed a genuine, sincere connection and service leadership responsibility to the communities they lived in where they had a well-established firm.

Theme 5: Strategies for an Impactful Leadership Style

In family firm businesses, 30% of family firm leaders transfer the firm responsibilities from the founding (first-generation) leader to the second-generational leader. Only 30% of all family firm leaders used succession planning to transition the firm leadership from the first-generation SBO to the second generation SBO (Cater & Young, 2016). When leaders of family firm businesses have such a low mortality rate for the transference of the firm from one generation to the next, a succession plan should be used as the most reliable platform for the transference of leadership to ensure continuity of the business.

Planned leadership change can help impede conflicts within the firm and family and secure relationships amongst family members. The succession process usually involves some resistance, first at the planning level and later in the realization itself, which concerns the founders themselves (the seniors), the successor, the remaining members of the family, and finally, non-family employees (Więcek-Janka et al., 2016). The direction of the firm continuation relies on the actions of the leadership of the business. A critical dilemma in change management is how the leaders of change management make the transition of leadership seamless and endorsed by all stakeholders.

Successful leadership transitions occur when the implementation of a succession plan for leadership changes before the leadership change.

When choosing a family member to succeed as the firms' next leader, their leadership qualities and vision for the family firm must consider placement in the succession plan. For instance, a charismatic leader may be necessary for the hospitality business, and an Innovative leader may be more effective in a technology business. In the interview with P1, he disclosed his leadership style as collaborative and how he felt his style benefited the leadership in his family firm as follows:

> My leadership style is one that really emphasizes collaboration. I am more extroverted, especially than my cousin XXX and to a certain extent more so than my cousin XXXX. I really like to build consensus and collaborate with others. So, I think that it has really affected my approach to how we handle this succession planning.

When considering a succession of leadership, a collaborative leader may also benefit from input from all family firm members. The family firm leader may face challenges in a multigenerational firm based on tradition. Furthermore, family involvement in the ownership and management of the business provides the ability to engage behaviors that would either be impossible or more difficult in other types of businesses (Ceptureanu, 2016). Family firm leaders often have a leadership style that is charismatic, collaborative, or transformational.

A relatively new trend in leadership succession planning is team leadership, which is when more than one member is the successor of the family firm business.

Family businesses, defined as firms where a family or families can influence strategic decision-making to pass the business to the next generation, are a setting where collective identities are developed (Parada & Dawson, 2017). Team leadership may be acceptable in family firms with more than one viable candidate. Team leadership may be effective when the incumbent leader cannot choose between potential family member successors to pass their firm legacy to ensure business continuity. P4 does share leadership with his brother, and they both believe in the shared leadership team concept. P1 disclosed that his leadership style is collaborative and open style; he stated that he tries to be open and demonstrate openness with the team in his leadership style. Positive factors enhancing shared leadership included long-term orientation, close communication, shared understanding among group members, timely succession planning, and higher decision quality (Cater & Young, 2016). In the participant interviews, each family firm leader developed their leadership role by working alongside their fathers, learning the processes in the family firm.

In family firms, the leadership style may transcend across generations for business continuity. P4 elaborated, as most of his long-term staff worked in the firm under his dad and now for them; they have continuity in the team. P4 states, “I show my sons, who will hopefully succeed in the business, that it is important to the employees to have the accessibility of their leaders. I show the guys that working with their boss has value to the employee’s The access to the guys and working with them every day is what makes each generation in this business successful.” In each of the participants’ interviews, they expressed the importance of a collaborative team effort. Considering all participant leaders' family firms have been successful multigenerational businesses' transcending to fourth generations, and in P4's case since 1909, this may be a viable approach to leadership style in a family firm. P1 state that the collaborative team concept is also a contributing factor in the success of the leadership of his family firm since his grandfather.

While interviewing P3, he expanded on his leadership style growth; initially, he was a micro-manager. In today's COVID-19 environment, he needs to become a more empowerment-style leader. He stated that he never knows who will be affected by the current world health issues, and each of his team members may need to step into different roles unexpectantly. P3 articulated his decision for choosing an empowerment leadership style as follows:

> Various factors make what would seem like a simple decision, so explaining the decision-making process is more so for my friend of my foreman. Nevertheless, for somebody else to explain why we are doing things and what the desired result is, and why we may be adjusting learn for the next time, they can develop that knowledge pool going in the future. So that is the positive of my leadership style.

The leadership styles for each participant varied, and each justified the type of leadership style they chose to lead members in their family firm. When a leader is flexible and can learn new leadership styles, it may enable them to lead their family firm to be more sustainable for future generational leaders.

Applications to Professional Practice

Multigenerational family firm leaders can apply the findings from conducting this study in their strategies in their succession planning process for business sustainability in a business's professional practice. In conducting this study, I explored the strategies that some multigenerational family firm leaders had utilized in their succession planning for the transference of business from the incumbent to the successor leader. My study's parameters focused on family firm leaders' succession planning strategies, but their strategies may also be applied to other business structures. Mzid et al. (2019) determined that human capital is considered an essential component of family firms that positively influences firm success. Key factors for the leaders achieving firm success were career experience, established ethics, acquired education, time, and energy devoted by each family member working in the firm. One of the most critical family firm assets is the leadership team and employees, considered their human capital.

Implementing a human capital strategy is helpful in many firm structures: family firms, small businesses, or large corporations. Family firm leaders' most significant business asset is their employees and their skill sets, ethics, and passion for their workplace. All the participants interviewed for this study implemented the human capital strategy and considered it a business asset of the family firm. The participants expressed their strategies for family members to excel in the family firm to exhibit positive ethics, show effort to learn the family business, and achieve advanced education and development beyond activities in the family firm.

Fortunately, these participants were involved in succession plans with their incumbent leaders to transform the family firm leadership before the incumbent's emergency health issues. Applying the strategies that the family firm leaders used in this study for firm leadership succession planning may enable future business leaders to achieve sustainability in their firms. In this study, a common strategy that these family firm leaders applied was mentoring the business's possible future leaders as soon as they show passion and motivation to have an active role.

In family firms, a limited number of family members are willing, capable, and passionate about the business to become the next generational leader. Their human capital must be recognized and developed to establish firm sustainability. Family firm leaders use strategies to manage resources that are likely to be needed during difficult times, such as human capital resources (Mzid et al., 2019). It is an unproductive strategy to delay mentoring and developing the next generational leader for a business transition. There is no guarantee of when that inevitable transition may occur in the firm, and an unprepared successor has a greater chance of leadership transition failure.

A family firm leader that aggressively micro-manages employees may achieve their short-term processes and goals, but this may risk the leader's desirable long-term goals. A strategic leader develops people as human capital assets, establishing stronger relationships that create long-term firm sustainability. A significant tenet of SFBT is that short-term firm achievements and long-term sustainability depend on functional healthy families' support (Hanson et al., 2019). P3 stated, "I do think that human nature is, if you think you are forced to do something, you resent it, and you resist." All participants were multigenerational leaders who were encouraged to choose their level of involvement in their family firms. The participants conveyed that they felt more valued by their incumbent by choosing their career path and developing in the family firm. Each family firm leader said they had a great deal of passion for their firm and love going to work each day; they feel a great sense of pride in their family, firm, and community. Approximately 70% of small family firm leaders do not complete the succession from first-generation SBO to second-generation SBO (Cater & Young, 2016). A family firm leader that uses strategies to implement a succession plan for the family firm has a greater opportunity to achieve business sustainability.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change are that when family firm leaders create succession planning strategies and implement multigenerational leaders, they establish family business sustainability. Campbell (2017) found, family firms are vital contributors to the United States economy; they represent more than 90% of all companies in the United States, more than 70% of all new job creation, more than 50% of the United States gross national product (GNP). Succession planning may stabilize leadership and operations in family firms to enable sustainability within local communities.

Many multigenerational family firm leaders contribute financially and physically and are active participants in their communities. SFBT considers processes in times of change and disruption and processes during a time of stability (Stafford et al., 2013). P4’s family firm leaders contributed to their community for over 112 years; they established school scholarships and built many buildings in their community over generations. P4 explained that city leaders wanted to develop a major freeway extension that would split right down the middle of their land. P4 family leaders fought the eminent domain action in court because they did not want the historical Spanish Oak's natural landscape in their community forever diminished. The Family Firm Institute estimates that family firms account for two-thirds of all businesses globally and 70-90 percent of global gross domestic product (Mallon et al., 2018). The shared responsibility of family firm leaders to continuously adapt, implement, and stabilize social change and the effect these leaders have on our society is significant.

Recommendations for Action

I recommend that incumbent family firm leaders establish strategies to implement a succession planning process from the incumbent leader to the future generational leaders to ensure business sustainability. It is viable that family firm leaders create a succession plan for the transference of leadership of their family firm transgenerational, contributing to a higher success rate in family firms' sustainability.

Based on my study's thematic results, I recommend four strategies that family firm leaders consider when developing a succession plan for business sustainability. First, the recommendation is to leverage a family's human capital for the sustainability of the family firm. The core of functionally healthy families and family firms have family leaders that demonstrate a family resilience process. A conjoined symbiotic family manages both family and firm resources to meet overlapping needs; out of the overlap evolves a relational culture that assumes (intentionally or unintentionally) some family values, attitudes, and beliefs (Hanson et al., 2019). Within a family with strong personal connections, there is compassion and bonds for each other that can inevitably transfer to the family business's communal bond and passion.

Secondly, develop and mentor successor family members with a strong work ethic and passion for the family firm. Family members would be more engaged in the family business if their participation were by personal choice. A common theme in multigenerational family firm leaders' behaviors is that the successor leaders assimilated their family firm's incumbent leader at a young age. Multigenerational family leaders often reminisce on their family firm experiences; they worked in the family firm with their patriarch, who mentored them.

Third, make a succession plan with the individuals interested in developing their leadership future in the family firm. The transference of business acumen, processes, and ethics between mentor and mentee will strengthen the family firm's leadership transference. Thus constructive relational ethics create resiliency in stable times to buffer against stressors during times of change (Yang & Danes, 2015). Relational ethics represent a family's interpersonal transactions that become the family's standard operational procedures passed across generations (Hanson et al., 2019). When individuals are active participants with their incumbent leader in developing the succession planning process, they are more likely to embrace their transitional leadership role.

Finally, have strategies and activities in your succession plan that develop the successor's community awareness; that attributes to business sustainability and helps implement social change. Family firms are the backbone financially to communities.

When there is a failure to transfer a family firm from one generation to the next, it can be a factor that contributes to the closure of the family firm. The closure of a firm will result in the rise of unemployment in the community, which is disruptive and detrimental to the community’s financial stability (Silva, 2016). Implementing a succession plan with community awareness and community support may cement a successful transference of leadership.

The participants exhibit a succession plan as simple or complicated as the family firm leader determines necessary to achieve the family firm’s uninhibited transference. All participant family firm leaders communicated and developed their succession plan with their successor and their family members. This plan can be developed over time at the families’ dinner table or in a board room with future leaders. The succession plan must be implemented and contain logical mentorship steps of transition agreed upon by the incumbent leader and the family firm’s successor. Finally, the succession plan must be an active document continuously adjusted and forged between the incumbent family firm leader and their successor. I will share the findings of my study with the participants of the study for their feedback. I will also publish excerpts of this study on business forums and blogs to broaden my information output in the business and leadership community. I plan to eventually publish further elaborations of this study for the business leadership community.

Recommendations for Further Research

I recommend further research on leadership aspects in family firms and succession planning strategies for family firm leaders. Further research recommendations would be for the transfer of power in family firms to eliminate conflicts. I would also recommend further research on the implementation of succession plans for business sustainability. One of the limitations that I experienced in this qualitative case study was the limited accessibility to the family firm leader participants. The participant data collection process occurred during the height of the COVID-19 global pandemic, and therefore direct contact with individuals was restricted and limited. My communication with participants was limited to communication via sources such as email, teleconferencing, and video conferencing. Due to the rapid global spread of COVID-19, A State of Emergency was declared in California on March 4, 2020. The government enacted a shelter-in-place order mandated on March 19, 2020, limiting my in-person interview sessions in virtual environment settings. The government restrictions limited my mobility to conduct my research in person with family firm leaders in my Central Coast region of California. The State of California officials and Walden University officials prohibited civilians from any unnecessary physical contact with other individuals. The restrictions included always keeping social distancing between people when I completed my Multigenerational Family Firm Succession Planning for Transgenerational Sustainability study.

Reflections

Upon reflection of my experience of conducting my Doctoral study and working towards completing my DBA, the venture was more challenging and more rewarding than I had ever imagined. At times, I felt overwhelmed by the setbacks of my progress to completion based on my preconceived timelines. I continually reflected on a statement made at the Residency Instructor that I attended in Dallas, TX. She said that you are now part of the elite academia that has decided to get your Doctoral degree. Only 3% of academics who received Bachelors' degrees went on to receive their Doctorate. She continued throughout the residency to call us by "Future Dr. ___" That resonated in my ears; I was going to push no matter what to completion! An additional statement that she made was that you would be an expert in your study by completing it. I kept this information in my forethought throughout my study. I did not want to corrupt my study by any preconceived biases from my personal, professional business ownership or leadership roles. I listened to my participants with a highly open mind and ears. I was happy to learn that other business leaders and authors felt many of the concepts that I found valuable in business. Inevitably, I learned a tremendous amount about family firm leadership, succession planning, and impacts on social change. The overall amount of information that family firm leaders shared with me was invaluable to my doctoral study. I feel very fortunate that these leaders were so generous with their time and knowledge.

Conclusion

The overreaching effects of strategies that firm leaders implement in their succession planning for the family firm's transference of leadership could increase the probability of firm sustainability. Giarmarco (2012) concluded that most failed transference of business to future generations is due to a lack of succession planning. I collected data on family firm leadership and succession planning strategies that family firm leaders implemented to increase business sustainability. Findings from this doctoral study may also contribute to the existing knowledge regarding the strategies that multigenerational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning from the incumbent generational leader to the successor generational leader to ensure business sustainability.

Additionally, the findings can promote positive social change feasibility if family firm leaders implement succession planning strategies to transfer leadership in their family firms. El-Chaarani, (2013) further emphasized the need for the entire family to become involved in succession planning; succession is a big issue in a family-owned business, which constitutes the main success element of the family firm. The successful transference of the family firm leadership to ensure business sustainability affects local economies by decreasing business failures that impact employment rates. This study may positively impact local economies due to the probability of lower business failure rates in firms in which their leaders implement these succession planning strategies to transfer their business from the incumbent leader to transgenerational leaders.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Participant Code: __________ Date of Interview: ________________________

Interview Mode: Face-to-face_______________

Telephone________________________

Guidance notes:

1. Introduce myself and explain the purpose of the study to the participant(s).
2. Inform the participant(s) that the interview will last approximately 60 minutes.
3. Retrieve signed informed consent forms.
4. Write the label assigned to the participant on top of the interview sheet to ensure confidentiality.
5. Will ask permission and audio record the interview and assign the same label to identify the data.
6. Watch for non-verbal cues.
7. Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth information.
8. Wrap up interview thanking participant.

Family Firm Criterion:

1. A single-family must share at least 50 percent of the ownership.
2. The family members must manage strategic decisions.
3. At least two generations belonging to the same family must be present in the firm.
4. The leadership of the firm must have used a succession planning process to transfer leadership.

Research Question: What are the strategies that successful multiple generational family firm leaders use to implement succession planning for business sustainability?

Interview Questions:

1. Who are the family members who held a leadership role in your family firm, and how long did they stay in the position?
2. Who chose you for succession in this role, and what were the key factors behind the decision?
3. What were the strategies in the succession planning process you found useful for the transference of leadership of this family firm?
4. What were the critical issues in the planning process affecting your decision to stay in the family business and take over the current leadership role?
5. What are the strategies you, as the leader, implemented in your succession planning process for the future leadership succession transition?
6. How has utilizing a succession planning strategy benefited the sustainability of your family firm?
7. How does your leadership style help you develop strategies for succession planning for your family firm for transgenerational sustainability?
8. What else would you like to add about succession planning strategies that I have not covered in the interview questions?

Schedule follow-up member checking interview

Participant Code: __________ Date of Interview: ________________________ Interview Mode: Face-to-face_______________ Telephone________________________ Guidance notes:

•Share copy of succinct synthesis for each question in the interview

•Bring in probing questions related to other related information found

•Walk through each question, read the interpretation, and ask: Is there anything that you would like to add that may be helpful for this research study?