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Sustaining a Family Business Beyond the Second Generation

Donna Wells Austin
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Donna W. Austin

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Scott Burrus, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Annie Brown, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Denise Gandy, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2018

Abstract

Sustaining a Family Business Beyond the Second Generation

by

Donna W. Austin

MS, Catholic University of America, 2015

BS, Virginia State University, 1997

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2018

Abstract

A significant number of funeral homes in the United States are family-owned businesses. These family-owned funeral businesses contribute to society throughout generations to create wealth, provide employment opportunities, and serve the communities that surround them. The purpose of this descriptive multiple case study was to explore strategies that leaders of family-owned funeral business owners in the eastern region of the United States used for intergenerational succession planning. Game theory was the conceptual framework for the study. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with 3 family business owners and review of the family businesses' professional association websites and family historical documents. Yin's 5-step process served as a guide for analyzing data. Data analysis revealed 6 themes: family succession values, the game, the players, strategies, payoff and rewards, and the outcome. Implications of this study for social change include family business owners' enhanced awareness of successful strategies, which may improve business continuity leading to an increased rate of intergenerational transitions within the funeral industry.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my father, Donald R. Wells Sr., who is no longer here to see me attain such a great accomplishment. My father was a Viet Nam veteran and hero that survived the war but lost the battle to cancer in 2016. I miss him every day. To my grandchildren, hopefully, each one will be inspired in becoming a scholar one day making a significant contribution to our great society.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

According to the Small Business Administration (SBA), a small business employs fewer than 20 employees (SBA, 2016), while the family-owned business involves at least two generations of a family who have had a similar influence on company policy and the interests and objectives of the family (Cater, Kidwell, & Camp, 2016). The probability of a family-owned business failure is exceptionally high during succession (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014).

Succession planning is a critical issue that researchers in the field of family businesses have extensively studied (Benavides-Velsaco, Quintana-García, & Guzmán-Parra, 2013). In an attempt to understand succession strategies, the study was aimed to examine successful strategies within family-owned businesses in the funeral industry; those businesses had accomplished a successful succession beyond the first generation of owners. The goal of this qualitative multiple case study is to bring awareness to social changes that may be necessary to improve succession rates for the family-owned funeral business.

Background of the Problem

The purpose of succession planning is to understand succession regarding finding and developing principal successors to ensure the growth and sustainability of small businesses (Sambrook, 2005). The family business community accounts for over 50% of employment in the private sector and employs millions of people (SBA, 2016).

According to Hiebl (2013), most senior family members who manage family-owned

businesses would like to sustain the family business over the long-term for the next generation.

Succession planning is necessary because the process helps diminish some of the conflicts that may occur in the family and the business before and during the transition of ownership and management from one generation to another (Betancourt, Ramirez, & Vergara, 2015). Family business impacts the local and national economies, which can present a unique set of challenges (Neubauer & Lank, 2016). Researchers suggested only one out of three family businesses survive from the first generation to the next; moreover, only 10% of family businesses successfully transition to a third generation (Braun, Latham, & Porschitz, 2016; Filser, Kraus, & Märk, 2013).

Studying succession processes after the second generation might provide an opportunity to understand the influence of complex issues related to intergenerational succession decreases (Lansberg & Gersick, 2015). Business continuity is a significant factor for family businesses; therefore, a business owner should see the value in succession planning (Sarbah & Xiao, 2015). The primary objective was to identify a conceptual framework and relevant strategies that resulted in successful succession planning for the family-owned business.

Problem Statement

Family-owned funeral businesses contribute to the nation's economy; however, like many family-owned businesses, they face continuity challenges because of changes in goals, attitudes, identity, behavioral routines, and informal networks (Marler, Botero,

& De Massis, 2017). The success rate of family-owned businesses in the U.S. is approximately 80%, but only 24-30% of the first generation continues to the next generation (Duh, 2015). The general business problem was that the succession rate of family-owned businesses decreased with each generation, with the specific business problem being that some family-owned funeral business owners lacked strategies for intergenerational succession planning.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies successful family-owned funeral business owners used for intergenerational succession planning. Small business funeral homes provide 86% of funeral business in the United States, while 14% of funeral business is corporate-owned (National Funeral Directors Association [NFDA], 2017). The population consisted of three successful funeral home business owners within the Eastern U. S. having transitioned beyond two or more generations. The implications for social change might serve incumbent similar business owners by gaining new knowledge in succession strategies in planning for generational sustainability benefiting their communities through needed services and employment.

Nature of the Study

The goal of the researcher was to gain an understanding of the problem using a qualitative case study. A qualitative method was appropriate for this study because family business research involved interactions of subjects in everyday life and experiences. De Massis, Sharma, Chua, Chrisman, and Kotlar (2012) argued family business researchers

recommended the qualitative method as a valuable method because family business is a complex phenomenon.

A quantitative design is an empirical research methodology in which data are in numerical form (Punch, 2014). The nature of this study was exploratory and not causally driven; therefore, a quantitative approach was not appropriate for this study. Using a mixed method design was not appropriate for this study because it might introduce a level of complexity added by structured and unstructured data, requiring a mix of open and closed-ended questions to collect information. These data could lead to ambiguity in responses and may often be time-consuming to analyze (Zohrabi, 2013).

Ethnographic, phenomenological, or narrative designs were possible choices for this study. Ethnographic focuses on cultural aspects from the participants' perspective, which may increase a threat to the credibility (Hammersley, 2016; Pelto, 2016). The ethnographic research design was not appropriate because it might require extended observations and immersions; these issues could limit the diversity of business owners who participated.

A phenomenological design was an idea or concept familiar to a small group of individuals, a minimum of three to 15. However, the phenomenological concept is used to discover and identify the meaning of participants' experiences with a specific phenomenon (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013; Smith, 2015; Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). Although the phenomenological approach focuses

on the lived experience of people, this design is relatively broad (Marshall & Rossman, 2014); therefore, this approach was not feasible for this study.

Narrative research could be either a research design or an area of study (Andrews et al., 2013; Goodson, Loveless, & Stephens, 2013; Lewis, 2015). As a research design, a narrative research is appropriate for studying experiences through the expressed stories of individuals. The narrative approach would include the tone of voice, pauses, laughter, eye movement, body language, emotions, and other elements which could be challenging and open to reinterpretation (Andrews et al., 2013). Details of this nature required a need to define and measure paralanguage; therefore, this design was not appropriate for this study.

A multiple case study design was appropriate because it was used to encapsulate multiple instances of real-life setting. The case study design is suitable for studies with bounded systems that require the collection of detailed information and use multiple sources (Yin, 2014). An exploratory multiple case study allows the researcher to verify findings by comparing results from multiple cases to increase rigor providing validity and reliability (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014).

Research Question

The following research question formed the basis of this study: What strategies did the family-owned funeral business owners use for intergenerational succession planning?

Interview Questions

1. What succession planning strategies do you currently have in place?
2. What are some of the influences used to get family support for a long-term vision?
3. What obstacles have you faced in implementing successful strategies?
4. How did your family address the obstacles related to succession planning?
5. How did you measure your succession results to determine if the strategies were successful?
6. What are some additional fundamental issues about your planning, implementation, and improvement strategies for succession would you like to discuss?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was game theory. The family business is a complex system which requires essential understanding, particularly when it comes to human behavior. Kjellman (2014) argued that human behavior is viewed, not only as a psychological function, but also incorporating sociology, biology, philosophy, cognitive, and other science disciplines. The game theory model can apply to human interaction relevant to social and economic factors (Osborne, 2003). Osborne and Rubenstein introduced game theory in 1994 to understand family business management relevant to decision makers, such as business owners and their interactions (Michael-Tsabari & Weiss, 2015). The game theory provides a possible conceptual framework of issues

related to family businesses (Michael-Tsabari & Weiss, 2015). According to Blumentritt, Mathews, and Marchisio (2012), game theory can be a foundation for the study of succession planning.

By approaching succession from the perspective of game theory, each participant could choose his or her strategy based on the choices of others. The focus of game theory was to model decisions and predict outcomes based on the interactions between a business owner and his or her potential successor. Family businesses are complex systems whose change strategies and interventions evolve (Beer, 2014). Using the game theory potentially enables business owners to use his or her rational thoughts, which could lead to a different conclusion as to which strategy is in his or her best interest when it comes to succession planning (Varoufakis, 2008).

Operational Definitions

This study contained operational definitions of terms or acronyms subject to various interpretations. Those definitions were provided to support the scope and nature of this study. The following list of operational definitions provided clarification to avoid misinterpretations of terms defined by peer-reviewed sources.

Family business: According to Gill and Kaur (2015), there is no precise definition of a family business. The complexity of definitions continues to challenge the scientific community (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999). However, Chua et al. (1999) defined a family business as being in pursuit of a particular business vision that is controlled by a family member(s) or a small number of families in a manner which is sustainable over a

period through family generations. Family businesses refer to businesses that involve more than one generation (Woodfield, 2015).

Generation: Denotes contrasts between birth cohorts based on age-related social factors popular among youth within-family or between generations that support lineage orientation (Ng & Parry, 2016).

First generation business owners: Use their entrepreneurial vision to create the family business (van der Westhuizen & Garnett, 2014).

Incumbent: The senior individual who currently holds the management leadership position in a family business, maintains much of ownership in the company, or represents family members who have majority ownership in the family business (Boyd, Botero, & Fediuk, 2014).

Intra-family succession: Transitioning leadership of the business to one or several of members of a family (De Massis, Sieger, Chua, & Vismara, 2016).

Small business: The Small Business Administration (SBA) defines a small business as having fewer than 500 employees; however, the definition can vary according to industries. For this qualitative research study, a small business has less than 50 employees (SBA, 2016).

Subsystems: The family system is a whole system, which consists of some subsystems. The subsystems include family relationships, environment, and business components. These subsystems are the building blocks integrated into ownership and management (Claver-Cortés, Molina-Manchón, & Zaragoza-Sáez, 2013).

Succession planning process: Family transfers or successions are the actions, events, organizational mechanics in which incumbent business owners transfer the business ownership or business management (Daspit, Holt, Chrisman, & Long, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Essential elements of assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were necessary to clarify and understand the construct of the proposed study; the perspectives and experiences according to the researcher and participants identified and described those aspects. Furthermore, the need to recognize and appreciate the biases held related to the phenomena by both the researcher and the participants might present a challenge. Based on the following assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, the results of the study may not prove interchangeable.

Assumptions

The purpose of the assumptions is to mitigate the misrepresentation of facts caused by undue influences (Yin, 2014). An assumption of the study was to assume that the incumbent understood the implementation of successful strategies for intra-family transition, which was the basis for a successful succession to make a connection between real-life cases and theory. The data collected from this study conceptualized the findings regarding the relevant theory and current literature. The participants provided truthful and honest answers regarding succession experiences. The case studies represented in this study provided sufficient data to address the research question.

Limitations

Limitations of research are potential weaknesses that affect a study (Svensson & Dumas, 2013), one of which may be the design and methodology, which could affect the application or interpretation of the results. Another limitation related to interviews because interviews were necessary to construct meaning; therefore, because the sharing of language is an intersubjective exchange between the researcher and participant, a single expression of the interviewee can have several different meanings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Other limitations included time, convenience, and necessary skill requirements of the interviewer, which might cause the researcher to overlook essential facts during the interviews.

Delimitations

Delimitations are characteristics which limit the scope and define the boundaries of this research study (Lynch & Welch, 2014). The inclusion of business owners in the funeral industry located only in the Eastern region of the U. S. could delimit the data and scope of the study. According to Yin (2014), a case study focuses on analytical generalizations; therefore, some case studies may not apply to a specific population or generalizable to the funeral industry. Another delimitation of the study was that the research population only consisted of family businesses that had been in business for at least two or more generations.

Significance of the Study

The benefit of this qualitative multiple case study was to provide valuable insights relating to successful strategies for family-owned funeral business owners who lacked strategies regarding intergenerational succession. Although current literature characterized components of succession planning by identifying the contributions to the succession process, the examination of strategies from a successful funeral home owner's perspective might contribute to improving family-owned business continuity within the funeral industry. The influences relevant to succession strategies within the context of a family-owned business would hopefully support recommendations later in the study.

Contribution to Business Practice

An effective succession plan for a family business could provide a roadmap that is necessary to align and support the business mission, values, and strategy for future generations (Ward, 2016). The incumbent might implement succession planning as a decision process by integrating succession strategies into the business goals. The succession planning process in family business is critical as business goals change according to family needs or economic performance (Ward, 2016). Succession within the family can be one of the most critical strategies in determining the longevity of business (McMullen & Warnick, 2015). The potential contribution of this study was to bring transitional strategic awareness and possible strategies for succession planning for family business owners in the funeral industry.

Implications for Social Change

The consequences of a positive social change in succession planning strategies could provide a framework for the incumbent family business owner because he or she has a responsibility to the successor of the family business. A business leader should impart family values, leadership, and management skills that align with the family business goals. These objectives for succession planning may contribute to the sustainability of family businesses for many generations (Lansberg & Gersick, 2015). Succession planning helps family members address leadership challenges when the incumbent decides to exit the business (Aronoff & Ward, 2017).

Successful transitions result in better business performance and may fuel stronger family member relationships, work, and family values as well as successor training (Ghee, Ibrahim, & Abdul-Halim, 2015). In contrast, a lack of strategies often leads to a breakdown of family relationships, which is a fundamental part of the business (Daspit et al., 2016). By providing family business owners with successful succession planning strategies, sustainable business growth may be fostered for the next generation and support the economic growth of the surrounding local communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A consideration of the relevant literature provided a foundation for examining and evaluating current and prior research concerning succession planning. Family businesses contribute significantly to the wealth and employment creation for many countries around

the globe (Sarbah & Xiao, 2015). The role of the family business owner is essential because his or her leadership strategies may determine the next successor.

The purpose of this literature review was to advance research in family-owned business succession by contributing to the understanding of the succession process. This study was also a response to further studies in family business succession. The overall objective of the study did not focus on the participants involved; but instead provides insight into issues regarding succession planning, the possibilities for generalization, and the identification of successful strategies in family business succession (Ramadani, Hirsch, Anggadwita, & Alamanda, 2017).

Succession planning is an important issue but a difficult challenge for family businesses because ownership and management may not be the same. Meier and Schier (2016) referenced succession as the transference of business ownership and control from one generation to the next. The family-owned business is value-driven and has issues regarding the identification of ownership and management between first generation and multigeneration businesses (Diéguez-Soto, López-Delgado, & Rojo-Ramírez, 2015). Ward (2016) argued family business owners needed to consider the possibility of implementing strategic planning processes as a developmental tool in itself for all next-generation family members involved in family business management.

Strategic planning is crucial because it requires an organization to engage in a process to alter its structure. Change is inevitable throughout our lifecycle, which unfolds in a prespecified direction over time (Hayes, 2014). The incumbent business owner

makes decisions every day based on experiences, which most often result in evolutionary change concerning culture, behavior, attitudes, and performance (Beer, 2014; Blanco-Mazagatos, de Quevedo-Puente, & Delgado-García, 2016).

Succession prepares the incumbent for the transitioning of leadership while addressing the continuity of the business for future generations. According to Ward (2016), succession occurs over an extended period, beginning even before the heirs enter the business. The family business succession process itself can be daunting, especially if the incumbent owner of the family business refuses to delegate responsibilities to successors or to relinquish the business (Poza, 2014).

According to the study, the literature indicated a family-owned business could have a successful succession by the end of the entire succession process. However, the next generation must develop critical characteristics and skills that include business and industry knowledge (Vassiliadis, Siakas, & Vassiliadis, 2014). Mussolino and Calabró (2014) argued that understanding the context and culture of the family business as well as the incumbent and successor's ability to facilitate the transition were vital to a successful transfer.

Empirical evidence from the literature had shown most research was concerned with family dynamics rather than strategies regarding business sustainability for the family business. Of the many valid empirical approaches to test family-owned business research questions, scholars needed to be aware of both the theory and the context of the study (Bettis, Gambardella, Helfat, & Mitchell, 2014). Chrisman, Chua, and Sharma

(2003) concluded most family business research topics were concerned with subjects such as leadership, ownership, behaviors, conflict, and succession planning.

Based on the literature, the research indicated the topic of family business succession continues to dominate the field; more than 20% of the articles refer to the succession process. However, most strategic approaches involving succession pertain to the economic performance of the business (Chrisman et al., 2003; Hatak, Kautonen, Fink, & Kansikas, 2016; Miller, 2014;). The goal of the literature review was to contribute to the family business research by answering the research question about strategies of successful family-owned funeral businesses for intergenerational succession planning.

Succession planning provides a framework to promote open and shared decision making, which is critical for reconciling family and business challenges (Benavides-Velsaco et al., 2013). Pounder (2015) demonstrated a disparity in the literature relating to successful strategies throughout the life cycle of family-owned businesses. By researching various dimensions of succession planning concerned with family-owned businesses, the intent was to develop an understanding using a qualitative multiple case study approach.

Literature Research Strategy

The literature review for this study was conducted using a systematic search of relevant and recently published articles in peer-reviewed academic journals, seminal books, and government websites as additional resources. Examination of the professional and academic literature revealed 235 resources. From these resources, 199 were scholarly

peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2014 and 2018; this number met the required 85% within 5 years of chief officer's approval for this section (see Table 1). Several articles and books were purchased because the resources were unavailable through online databases.

Table 1

Summary of References

<i>Reference Categories</i>	Count	Percentage %
Peer-reviewed journals <=5 years of 2018	199	85
Peer-reviewed journals >5 years of 2018	18	8
Non-peer-reviewed journals > 5 years of 2018	0	0
Non-peer-reviewed journals <=5 years of 2018	0	0
Dissertations within 5 years of 2018	0	0
Dissertations greater than 5 years of 2018	0	0
Books greater than 5 years of 2018	5	2
Books within 5 years of 2018	6	3
Government website resources	3	1
Other internet website resources	4	2
Total resources	235	100

Exhaustive research was performed by searching the keywords and phrases, including game theory, family-owned business, family firms, intergenerational, small business, business succession, succession strategies, succession planning, transgenerational, business transitions, family relationships, and funeral business. Walden University library database provided many of the peer-reviewed, full-text articles used for this study. The databases used were ABI/INFORM Collection, Business Source

Complete, EBSCOHost, Emerald Management, SAGE, SAGE Journal, Science Direct, ProQuest, and search engine Google Scholar.

The subject of successful succession strategies was limited because it was not possible to explore the types of topics regarding family succession in detail and give credit to all the researchers and theorists who had made contributions. Research studies conducted on family-owned businesses narrowed the theoretical framework because the studies are mainly from a family-owned business viewpoint (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). The goal was to explore antecedents of successful strategies regarding intergenerational succession and identify gaps for future research.

Conceptual Relevance of Game Theory

The principal focus of this research was the potential to contribute to the academic knowledge of successful succession planning strategies as identified by incumbent business owners. The discussion involved the incumbent's ability to transition the family business to the next generation. As the incumbent approaches his or her exit from the business, it may result in what game theorists refer to as strategic uncertainty (Bonau, 2017). The strategic uncertainty involves the inherent imperfections in decision making as to how the incumbent predicts other family members may make decisions regarding the succession process (Malekpour, de Haan, & Brown, 2016). The rationality of family members' behavior can influence the direction, long-term considerations, and non-economic goals (De Massis, Kotlar, & Chua, 2014).

Blumentritt et al. (2012) introduced game theory as a tool to help bring an understanding to family business research in succession management. There is significant concern about the lack of sustainability of family-owned businesses from generation to generation among many stakeholders, including the family, owners, and government (Memili, Fang, Koç, Yildirim-Öktem, & Sonmez, 2018; Neubauer & Lank, 2016). The application of game theory as a possible conceptual framework might explain succession strategies used by business owners, which had successfully transitioned their family businesses beyond two or more generations (Boyd et al., 2014).

The ability to provide continuity from one generation to the next seemed to be a desirable characteristic for the incumbent. However, McMullen and Warnick (2015) claimed intrafamily succession is rare, since only 30% of family-owned businesses survive the first generation retaining ownership within the family, while less than 10% of the family businesses succeed ownership to a third generation. According to Blumentritt et al. (2012), game theory could be used to analyze the decision and underlying factors related to succession processes that depend upon more than one decision-maker. Mathews and Blumentritt (2015) cautioned that a failed succession is a cause for a business to lose its family-owned status.

The research and other articles used in this study explored the theoretical constructs of game theory by drawing on the works of various authors. The articles included the works of Schelling (1960), Turocy and von Stengel (2001), Osborne (2003),

Gintis (2009), Blumentritt, Mathews, and Marchisio (2012), and Michael-Tsbari and Weiss (2015).

The development of game theory in mathematical form during the seventeenth century applied to nonmathematical applications in social and biological sciences. The literature revealed that game theory was revisited during World War II to analyze strategic interactions among combatants but eventually was discovered as a method for studying social processes. Turocy and von Stengel (2001) defined game theory as a formal study of conflict and cooperation. The concept applies when the actions of several players are interdependent, resulting in a situation where a player depends not only on their actions but also on the actions of other players (Blumentritt et al., 2012). Osborne (2003) defined a player as an individual or group of individuals that need to make a decision.

According to the literature, game theory is a science of strategy gaining prominence in various fields of discipline. Bohlin and Inha (2017) suggested viewing game theory as a bridge between abstract formal concepts of the theory and reality. Therefore, one might argue that real experiences and lessons learned by the incumbent and potential successor during the succession process could perhaps be the anchor which sustains the family business.

According to the researchers, game theory's purpose was to understand the challenges influenced by decision making when transitioning a business from one generation to the next. By examining the interaction between the incumbent and the

potential successor required rational but interdependent choices made by individuals about a family business leadership. For the game theory application to be successful requires a participant to interpret the identity and preferences, strategy, actions, and restrictions on those strategies, actions, and decisions of another; these considerations influence the outcome of the game (Blumentritt et al., 2012).

The game-theoretic model was described by Schelling (1960) as a plan of action stemming from the player's available information and a set of possible choices given individual preferences and prior assumptions about rationality. Schelling considered it as a model of decision making that depicts interactive contexts. Bonau (2017) assessed game theory with the goal of anticipating the behavior of players, given the choice of alternative strategies and options.

An organization's strategy may be interactive, and contingent based on the actions and reactions of others (Öberg, Shih, & Chou, 2016). Öberg et al. argued strategizing becomes a response to induce a change which could affect the strategic intentions of an organization either by reinforcement or disengagement. Neil (2016) maintained that there needed to be some understanding of how rational individuals accept decisions in an environment consisting of other individuals responding to their environment.

Schelling's (1960) argument was that strategy is not the traditional rationality that may apply to achieve long-term goals and competitive activities on a battlefield or at play. However, the level of rationality may depend on how players perceived their best course of action, which is dependent on the choices of others (Neil, 2016). Gintis (2009)

proposed one could justify the assumption of rationality if presupposing a full rational outcome.

Gintis (2009) assumed all individuals could reason, but their level of rationality dictates behavior. Furthermore, Gintis stated individuals are supposed to use their ability to reason according to the formulated laws of rational behavior and then behave accordingly. The author concluded the game theory concept was a generalization of the empirical framework because it modeled no specific structure on predicted behavior.

Schelling (1960) proposed that integrating psychological and environmental foundations of game theory could lead to building models. Players have cognitive abilities to coordinate decisions using processes that are psychologically realistic for problem-solving without the need for complicated calculations, high levels of foresight, and exacting standards of mutual knowledge (Neil, 2016). The psychological approach to rational thoughts indicated that decisions were according to what individuals ought to do, and players' values would inform decisions as to what conduct was most desirable.

Neil (2016) credited Schelling's (1960) study of strategy because of its broad theoretical context that integrated strategic processes and content into game theory. Neil argued Schelling's strategy of conflict (SoC) could be useful because it may provide a framework to inform research on strategy. The SoC was a part of the analysis of a strategy to form a basis for developing a rational behavioral consistent with game theory.

The SoC is related to the assumption of strategy for game theory, which includes applying game theory to strategy (Schelling, 1960). According to Neil (2016), an

objective of the SoC was to identify actual processes that contributed to strategic reasoning. The author claimed that Schelling did this by establishing a theory of interdependent decision to make sense of complex interactions.

Osborne and Rubinstein (1994) observed that the underlying assumption of the game theory be that decision-makers are rational and they reason strategically. Meanwhile, Turocy, and von Stengel (2001) claimed the game theory provided a language to formulate structure, analyze, and understand strategic scenarios. However, according to Gutierrez, Harrenstein, and Wooldridge (2017), languages did not provide a direct mechanism for reasoning concerning the behavior of players because there was the assumption that they act rationally and strategically while pursuing their goals. Dalpiaz, Tracey, and Phillips (2014) disagreed, stating succession was not only about rationality but language and meaning.

Chen and Sun (2017) argued there must be trust between parties; otherwise, this presented a problem in achieving long-term and stable development for organizations. The authors contended organizations adjust their trust and distrust strategies repeatedly by interacting with and imitating each other. According to Chen and Sun, based on the concept of rationality, game theory brought attention to the process of strategic adjustment and the stability of strategy selection, but not to the selection of the best strategy.

Mintzberg and Waters (1985) claimed decisions are not naturally strategic, arguing that many organizations created an environment which was not congenial to

strategic planning. Furthermore, a strategic plan does not necessarily mean strategic thinking (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). It was unclear how family businesses aligned their family and business decision making and strategic behavior to transition to the next generation.

Basco (2014) noted that there could be different degrees of family and business relationships that contributed to decision making process. Part of the process would include the family making the business a priority or focusing on family business operations, while making the family a priority. Basco also contended that the priorities of a family business could determine whether the business sustained longevity.

Constantiou and Kallinikos (2015) claimed information needed to be collected through a systematic and purposeful process because the results addressed specific details required for decision-makers and may improve accuracy in the prediction of future events including succession. According to Constantiou & Kallinikos, the incumbent and a potential successor can use the information derived from the data collected through a systematic and purposeful process to develop strategies. The authors noted the process did not have to be complicated but required thoughtful planning and collaboration.

For this study, the researcher began with the underlying assumption that the participants intended to have cooperative interactions. Succession would be mutually beneficial for both, provided they were not in competition with each other (Hollenbeck, DeRue, & Nahrgang, 2014; Venter & Boshoff, 2014). Another assumption was that at the start of the succession process, the incumbent and potential successors had no uncertainty

about the other's intentions and the likely actions and the interaction would be positive (De Massis et al., 2016). Moreover, in a cooperative game, it would be in the interest of each participant to anticipate the other participant's selection so that a mutually beneficial outcome can be realized (Gintis, 2009).

If each participant knowingly is motivated, the participants do not have to guess by interpreting informal signals (Michael-Tsbari & Weiss, 2015). The purpose of the game theory was an attempt to find equilibrium and, in that context, achieving equality in the succession process means the incumbent and potential successor needed to adopt a strategy that he or she is unlikely to change. Moreover, the outcome is reached based upon a set of circumstances resulting from the dependent actions of the two participants.

According to Gintis (2009), in a purely cooperative game, both participants must agree to their order of preferred outcomes so that there is no conflict of interest.

Cooperation is the alignment of beliefs and incentives for the participants to gain distinct benefits (Bonau, 2017; Gintis, 2009; Morschheuser, Riar, Hamari, & Maedche, 2017). The incentive for cooperation was to achieve an outcome that was satisfying for both participants.

Gintis (2009) claimed a game could contain either perfect or imperfect information, but it was important that all players knew the rules of the game and the preferences of the other participants. Michael-Tsbari and Weiss (2015) argued that communication should be a necessary tool for the incumbent and the potential successor to achieve equilibrium and a subsequent succession. The authors made the point that,

unless the incumbent communicated his or her intentions to the likely successor, there was no guarantee the succession process would launch.

According to the literature, game theory could analyze situations in which the choices and actions of multiple players were interactive and mutually dependent. The outcomes for one player may influence the decisions made by the other player(s) in the game. Game theory had been a notably useful model in some areas but has been less successful in others (Samuelson, 2016).

Therefore, further inquiry may be necessary to determine if the game theory may or may not be viable in exploring choice strategies by the participants that may lead to successful succession. The conceptual framework chosen for this study may enable the researcher to develop ideas from an iterative process using the framework and the study data. In conclusion, the goal was to use the game theory concept to test emerging ideas.

Family Business Defined

According to the literature, there was no clear definition to define family business. According to Pounder (2015), definitions relating to the family business involved the business having a more significant share of equity to exert control in top management and strategy. Neubauer and Lank (2016) argued that little effort must be applied by scholars to develop a definition because the various definitions used about family business would be too complicated by attempts to compare studies. Steiger, Duller, and Hiebl (2015) conducted a 10-year analysis of family business definitions from empirical research studies. Their results showed no consensus among researchers for a definitive definition;

however, their research included a limited number of journals and within a short time frame.

According to the literature, the family business is the most common form of business throughout the world, yet it is complicated due to the required skills and knowledge. Chua et al. (1999) argued that a family business needs to be defined in an operational and theoretical sense because family businesses are unique from other businesses. Chua et al. characterized the family business in several ways.

First, as being family-owned and family managed; secondly, family-owned but not family managed; lastly, family managed but not family-owned. Therefore, the distinction between ownership and management must be implicit (Chua et al., 1999). However, Diéguez-Soto, López-Delgado, and Rojo-Ramírez (2015) agreed that the existence of these components of family involvement did not guarantee the essence of a family business.

Chua et al. (1999) observed that it is a pattern of ownership that gives the family business its uniqueness: therefore, ownership involves facilitating business components such as goals, strategies, governance, management, and succession. Steiger et al. (2015) supported Chua et al.'s argument, stating that an understanding of the business components was an essential approach when defining family businesses. Although research studies referred to most definitions of the family business as ownership, management, and sometimes governance, Suess-Reyes (2017) emphasized researchers tend to neglect business continuity across generations as part of the definitions.

Moreover, governance and family identity are related. Sarbah and Xiao (2015) concluded that family business definitions vary depending on how a family member established himself based on the family's organizational structure.

The definition of family business remains complex because of the overlap between family and business issues. However, Ward (2016) stated the definition of family businesses should rely on their ability to achieve succession because succession is critical to the economy. Ward supported Pounder's (2015) argument that a family maintains legacy and traditions because traditions become the habit of anchoring the decision-making process for successors. The observance of the family traditions may remind the younger generation of family members about the origins of the business and set the tone for future decision-makers (Pounder, 2015; Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2014).

The sustainment of a family business involves family commitment as it is passed down to the sons and daughters as a legacy, thus preserving the family name. What makes a family business different from nonfamily businesses is the pursuit of this legacy based on family traditions, values, and the owner's vision (Jaskiewicz, Combs, & Rau, 2015). The pursuit of a family legacy facilitates family decisions and actions that influence future generations (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015).

Meanwhile, as the debate continues over the definition of family business, creating the legacy and preparing for succession requires time and planning. In a recent article, Pindado and Requejo (2015) said that a broader definition would allow theoretical

models of precise dimensions to avoid limiting the context of family businesses. Moreover, some definitions are aimed to capture core aspects, such as the family involvement in the business (Harms, 2014) and the incumbent's ability to exert influence over decision-making processes (Sharma & Mithas, 2014).

A gap still exists in the literature concerning researchers defining family business. For this study, using a broad definition enabled the researcher to identify a common bond among family businesses, and to compare and possibly differentiate characteristics from one business to another. Furthermore, the evidence may support generalization of findings as appropriate for this specific population.

Succession Plan

Succession planning is a necessary preparation which is essential to ensure family harmony and continuity of the business through the next generation (Adedayo, Olanipekun, & Ojo, 2016). Cater et al. (2016) characterized succession as a pattern which involves the transfer of both the management and ownership of a family business to the next generation. Although an incumbent may choose to disengage from the business for the next generation, this did not guarantee a successful transition (Sharma, Chrisman, & Chua, 2003).

Succession is a critical part of the lifecycle of family-owned businesses. According to the literature, succession planning is a systematic process for identifying a potential leader for continued business survival. Lui, Eubanks, and Chater (2015) viewed succession as an essential decision-making process by the incumbent to ensure business

sustainability. However, Gilding, Gregory, and Cosson (2015) characterized succession planning as problematic and concluded that effective succession planning is considered a sociocultural accomplishment.

Based on the literature, those sociocultural aspects involve the values, norms, and various traditions of the family as mentioned by Chua et al. (1999). However, other researchers, Galvin, Braithwaite, and Bylund (2015), concluded communicating those same values, norms, goals, and meanings must be continuously created and recreated over time in processes of social interaction and communication within the family and the business. This conclusion supported the work of Mussolino and Calabró (2014) who claimed that a smooth succession did not necessarily rely on succession planning, but rather in the succession process being consistent with family values (Bizri, 2016).

The literature viewed the succession process as a gradual change over time, which involves many different systems. Schepker, Kim, Patel, Thatcher, and Campion (2017) associated the succession process with organizational change. Kidwell, Eddleston, and Kellermanns (2018) suggested family businesses should take the opportunity during the succession planning to evaluate the family business culture and determine what elements are sources of strength and identify weaknesses. The identification of those essential elements, along with family cultural values is vital to the succession process (Zwack, Kraiczky, von Schlippe, & Hack, 2016).

Even though the literature indicated how important values are to the family business, De Massis et al. (2008) determined that a family business might be fragile

because of events or changes, such as the death of the incumbent or other interruptions, which could create chaos for the business. From the literature, many scholars cautioned that lack of a plan for succession could result in economic losses and possibly loss of the business. Ghee et al. (2015) contended the key to family business success and sustainability requires an effective succession.

Cesaroni and Sentuti (2017) considered the family and business as subsystems, which involve relationships between family members, individual emotions, personal feelings, communication, motivation and education, and transfer of the incumbent's role as soft issues. Cesaroni and Sentuti referred to the hard issues as the ownership subsystem, which concerns monetary, technical, and regulatory matters, inheritance, financing, and taxation (Vincencová, Hodinková, & Horák, 2015). Both soft and hard issues needed to be addressed to improve succession.

Succession planning should be a conscious effort for family businesses. Throughout the literature, succession planning is a long-term process which prevents sudden and hasty decisions. Overall, succession planning needed to be a conscious decision on behalf of the family organization to promote continuity to the next generation.

Despite the empirical evidence, some results continue to show that approximately 70% of family-owned businesses do not survive the transition from founder to a second generation (Hiebl, 2015). The Family Business Survey (2017) claimed more than 40% of family business leaders have a desire to name successors in the next generation of their

businesses, but only 23% have a documented succession plan in place (Cater et al., 2016; PricewaterhouseCooper, 2017). However, Le Breton-Miller, Miller, and Steier (2004) argued the high failure rate might be the result of a lack of uniformity in the succession process.

Although the literature showed succession is a process, and not an event (Boyd et al., 2014), Duh (2015) characterized succession as a multistage process. Ruggieri, Pozzi, and Ripamonti (2014) proposed the process occur when the incumbent passes the baton before the heirs enter the business. Meneses, Coutinho, and Pinho (2014) agreed that the succession process develops over several stages which continues to evolve.

Because the succession process involved changes in management, strategy, and control, and included the planning and execution, Churchill and Hatten (1997) developed an approach based on the life cycle of the business. Churchill and Hatten suggested the succession process consists of four stages. Stage one is owner-management in which the owner is the only family member involved in the business. The second stage is the training and development stage when family members of the owner learn the business. Stage three is a partnership between the incumbent and offspring, and stage four is transference, in which the incumbent transitions the business to the successor.

Family-owned business succession may be problematic because their offspring are often poorly qualified. Mathews and Blumentritt (2015) proposed that family businesses needed to be highly distinctive because unlike other companies, the institutionalization of this knowledge of business is in the form of a human-specific asset,

which derives from learning by doing. The authors acknowledged this component was missing from the family-owned business.

The literature stated knowledge was relevant to transferring from one generation to the next in family businesses. Also, the passing of business knowledge is detrimental to long-term survival. According to Mathews and Blumentritt (2015), the knowledge of family businesses is often individual-specific rather than business-specific.

Although the evidence suggested that family members should be involved in the family business, De Massis et al. (2008) argued the family member's abilities, interest, and the needs of the business must be in parallel. To understand the succession process, scholars developed various models regarding succession. The literature characterized succession as a dynamic and iterative process requiring a role transition of the incumbent simultaneously with succession planning (Marler et al., 2017).

For example, Mathews and Blumentritt's (2015) proposed game theory model, could give insight into individual interactions that may influence a potential candidate and the incumbent during the succession process. Cater (2016) argued researchers should consider if a successor would be willing to take over the business. However, Jayantilal, Jorge, and Bañegil (2015) used the game theory to investigate how culture impacted the selection of a successor.

Mussolino and Calabró (2014) developed a model that could address much of the uncertainty regarding critical influences for a successful succession. The authors defined a successful succession as the quality of the succession experience, which included the

family members' personal experience in the succession process, and the sustained growth and profitability of the business. Notwithstanding, the authors added that business performance measures determined the effectiveness of the succession.

An integrative model was proposed by Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2015) to explain what was necessary for succession to succeed. This model described succession as a four-stage process: (a) establish ground rules, (b) nurture and develop a pool of possible successors, (c) selection of successors, and (d) handoff to the chosen successor. The authors claimed these stages were pivotal to the succession process and furthermore, the process should include family contexts such as the family relationships, trust, respect, and roles of each member.

Conversely, Cater and Kidwell (2014) proposed a four-stage model for successor group development in family businesses that was aimed to identify the roles of the incumbent family leader and possible successors. The four stages are as follows.

1. The incumbent begins retirement planning and searches for potential successors, identifying them as candidates,
2. The incumbent evaluates potential successors and the successors enter the business, learn to manage, and may compete,
3. The incumbent chooses the successor group and reduces his or her leadership role, and the successors are identified and chosen,
4. The incumbent exits from company leadership by retirement or death and the successors operate as a leadership group.

Another model proposed by De Massis, Chua, and Chrisman (2008) suggested that the succession process was a chain of causation; the model was designed to be descriptive and identify influences which may likely prevent intrafamily succession. The model was developed using an iterative process which involved a review of the literature, analysis, extensive discussions, and adjustments. In conclusion, the authors suggested the succession process began with a decision-making process, which would eventually terminate when the incumbent transitions management and ownership control to the next generation (Alayo, Iturralde, Maseda, & Arzubiaga, 2016; De Massis et al., 2008).

What was interesting about this specific model is that it assumed that the incumbent went through a decision process which might be considered primarily rational. An incumbent is defined as rational if he or she seeks to maximize a payoff based on a decision with a preferred outcome (Michael-Tsabari & Weiss, 2015). Nonetheless, the incumbent must have a desire to engage in the succession process, and a potential successor must be available (Boyd et al., 2014).

Blumentritt (2013) argued a decision might involve two or more interactive decision makers, such as the incumbent and the potential successor, with both individuals having only partial control over the outcomes. In other words, either of the individuals may have no basis for rational choice without strong assumptions about how the other will act. Blumentritt (2013) claimed this kind of situation would complicate the scenario and result in problems, creating a breakdown of the standard concept of rationality.

Verweij, Senior, Domínguez, and Turner (2015) observed that the concept of rationality served as the categorizing principle of social life. However, an individual's decision was not initially meant to be dependent on another. Rationality is either formal or substantive (Rindova & Martins, 2017). Rationality depends upon an individual's point of view, which corresponds to their knowledge and beliefs as to whether an incumbent's decisions be rational or irrational (Kapeliushnikov, 2015). Even though there are other considerations for decisions regarding a transition, an incumbent must evaluate different characteristics of family members, the business, and the context to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the family business (Boyd et al., 2014).

The preferred outcome is derived from a culmination of multiple decision points after an extended period (Blumentritt et al., 2012). According to the literature, the incumbent would have to decide how the succession process would work by incorporating some required possible strategies based on those multiple decisions. Although various authors described succession as a process, Helin and Jabri (2016) argued there was a need to add a developmental aspect.

Helin and Jabri (2016) recognized the need to understand the decisions of the next generation's family members by evaluating the factors that influence succession along with the decisions and the process itself. By acknowledging succession as a process, Michael-Tsbari and Weiss (2015) chose to examine it by focusing on the aspect of communication between the incumbent and successor using the game theory. In their article, Michael-Tsbari and Weiss supported their research findings using the work of

De Massis et al.'s (2008) chain of causation because the method was an association for promoting the effectiveness of the succession process. Michael-Tsabari and Weiss stated that understanding the chain of causation will improve the lines of communication between the incumbent and the successor as the business transitions.

Communication is a vital part of the planning strategy. For communication to be successful, Schlag and Vida (2014) maintained the participants involved should not only talk but listen and must be able and willing to reevaluate their intentions. As a result, communication between the incumbent and successor reduces tension and increases harmony and effectiveness in the succession process (Michael-Tsabari & Weiss, 2015).

The use of the game theory may provide insights to the frequent failures of first-generation family businesses as the business transitions to the next generation. However, Michael-Tsabari and Weiss (2015) limited their study to what is referred to as the communication trap, preventing the launch of succession for the family business. The incumbent needed to communicate his or her intent if succession were to take place.

Further research may be necessary because Michael-Tsabari and Weiss (2015) assumed a minimal flow of information between the incumbent and successor would result in an adverse outcome in launching the succession process. Although the authors came to this conclusion, other results indicated that because succession is a process, without a proper succession plan, the family business could fail (Le Breton-Miller et al., 2004). According to Gilding et al. (2015), the creation of transparent and stable rules and

protocols to govern individual behavior facilitates a productive family business succession.

Incumbent leaders can facilitate the succession process through nurturing and developing the successor, but often, resistance to change is the precursor which impedes the succession process (Marler et al., 2017). This argument supported Boyd et al.'s (2014) reasoning that the incumbent must be willing to transfer the business. Marler et al. argued effective successions be most likely to occur when the incumbent is ready to prepare the successor by engaging in exit strategies for the transition.

DeTienne, McKelvie, and Chandler (2015) asserted that exit strategies are an essential part of business ownership, particularly with an estimated 40% of family business owners (ranging from 60 to 80% of all businesses worldwide) expected to retire by 2017. According to the authors, less than half of businesses will continue to the next generation. Hsu, Wiklund, Anderson, and Coffey (2016) noted that most scholars focus on the incumbent's exit due to performance issues, but from these authors' standpoint, business-to-family and family-to-business interference positively correlate to exit intentions.

Based on research, most family businesses do not consider an exit strategy, which results in a messy transition. Ma, Lu, and Xie (2014) believed that most individuals develop a strategic plan to enter business; therefore, the opposite is also true. Business owners should implement a strategic plan for exiting (Dehlen, Zellweger, Kammerlander,

& Halter, 2014). Justo, DeTienne, and Sieger (2015) proposed that personal reasons often contribute to intentional exits for the business owner.

De Massis et al. (2008) felt that the exit of heirs might lead to a lack of financial resources and result in the sale of the family business. However, Lockamy, Carson, and Lohrke (2016) investigated this premise using the model of De Massis et al. and found that it was theoretical and lacked empirical support. Therefore, by building on the De Massis et al. model, Lockamy et al. (2016) integrated several primary factors with which to identify and understand the critical determinants which prevent succession. The aim was to help business leaders develop strategies and rise above the obstacles to ensure an adequate succession. Lockamy's et al. factors comprised of: (a) process, (b) financial, (c) individual, (d) context, (e) relationships, and (f) governance.

Obstacles to Succession

Family business scholars have attempted to identify the predictors of effective succession strategies and have found that many obstacles impede the succession process (Sharma et al., 2003). Researchers have suggested that the individual most responsible for the continuity of the family business is the founder or incumbent leader (Gagné, Sharma, & De Massis, 2014). The crucial defining element of family business continuity is when the founder or the incumbent transfers the business to future generations (De Massis et al., 2016).

The principles the incumbent views as necessary would be essential as he or she began the succession process. The attributes of the incumbent that have brought him or

her success in the business may prove to complicate the process as ownership transfers to the next generation (van der Westhuizen & Garnett, 2014). Marler et al. (2017) contended the incumbent must be succession ready, which supported Boyd et al. (2014) regarding the incumbent's readiness. Daspit et al. (2016) cited timing for the incumbent as possibly influencing the business transition.

The literature told us that other vital influences which often affect family business succession were economic performance, competitors' actions, illness and aging, and the intentions or perspectives of the next generation. For example, when it became time for the incumbent to retire, the incumbent may be reluctant to transfer the business. According to Lansberg and Gersick (2015), this reluctance was most likely due to the incumbent sensing a loss of power and status.

Transference of power is critical to the family dynamics and could affect succession long before the business transitions (Ghee et al., 2015). According to Le Breton-Miller et al. (2004), interactions between the incumbent and other family members, such as the child, might have an impact on personality, values, and behavior. Also, according to empirical results, dysfunctionality does occur within the family because of a family member's need for the independence to assert his or her identity (Gilding et al., 2015).

Gilding et al. (2015) supported the argument of Lansberg and Gersick (2015) by noting that the incumbent might be reluctant to surrender the business because their lifelong investment in the business gives him or her power, control, and security. Ward

(2016) argued it might be unrealistic to expect the incumbent surrender control of their businesses readily because of the lifelong commitment. The incumbent needed to be willing and motivated to succeed the business to the next generation.

Other scholars such as Rukundo and Cyeze (2015) found a lack of commitment could be an obstacle in family succession. Ward (2016) proposed that, if family members lack the necessary skills to manage the business, a dependency on the incumbent can develop. If the incumbent created a paternalistic culture, this could lead to the dependence of family members during the lifecycle of the business and could cause immobility (Mussolino & Calabró, 2014). However, most often, the incumbent was under the assumption that he or she had prepared the next generation for a transition.

Succession planning is often not a high priority for the family business. Of the various obstacles presented in the literature for survival and successes, many family businesses had insufficient or no control depending on the circumstances. Empirical studies that examined family business transitions suggested more studies were necessary to improve family business succession by exploring the various stages of the succession process.

By not understanding the nature of transitions and the complexities of family business continuity, the family may compromise the business (Lansberg & Gersick, 2015). Ward (2016) supported Rosplock and Hauser (2014) by stating that, even though the incumbent wants to pass the business to the next generation, family members may not be gifted with the required skills to sustain the business. Ward had also suggested that

family members' roles sometimes changed during and after succession, which might affect the opportunities and resources of the family business.

The Role of the Incumbent

De Massis et al. (2008) defined an incumbent as the person that holds a top management position in the family-owned business and must eventually relinquish the position to another family member. Bozer, Levin, and Santora (2017) defined the incumbent as the definition of family business culture. For this study, the owner of the family business was known as the incumbent. According to previous studies, at some point, the incumbent needs to develop a successor for the future (Boyd et al., 2014; Le Breton-Miller, Miller, & Steier, 2004).

The incumbent business owner has a responsibility to the successor of the family business to impart family values, leadership, and management skills that align with the family business goals and objectives for succession. First generation family business owners should be cognizant that successors face different challenges today than previous years of the prior generation (Duh, 2014). The second-generation family member successor might be required to develop skills that differ from those of the first-generation incumbent business owner (van der Westhuizen & Garnett, 2014).

Family business researchers explain succession and its challenges from one generation to the next by indicating the incumbent business owner is a significant influence during the succession process (Chua et al., 1999). Researchers had identified gaps and called for an examination of the incumbent and his or her leadership decisions

regarding succession. When an incumbent begins to ponder his or her exit, the results suggested they should consider having an exit strategy.

From the literature, the decision-making process was an essential ongoing method for management. Blumentritt et al. (2012) noted there were few studies in which specific decision-making processes, i.e., those that explored succession management, had been examined. These included decisions by the incumbent to stay or leave, keep the family business, or appoint nonfamily leaders. Also, the authors investigated decisions by the successor on whether to work in the family business or to choose a different career.

Although leadership styles play an important role in succession planning, research suggested management practices could influence succession. Researchers had also suggested that as the business matures, factors such as ownership, organizational structure, and managerial style often change (Ward, 2016). However, Bozer et al. (2017) proposed the leadership style of the incumbent play a role in the family business as to how it is structured and its business protocols (Muriithi, Waithira, & Wachira, 2016). Sharma et al. (2003) proposed it was often the lifestyle of the incumbent, which determined when he or she decided to retire.

Previous researchers provided insight into what motivated incumbents, such as to grow the business, secure an income for retirement, and ensure future employment for family members, and provide the sense of pride and achievement (Lansberg & Gersick, 2015). The motivation of the incumbent dictates whether he or she would consider

succession. Bozer et al. (2017) argued that incumbents recognize the need to plan succession, but very few do.

If the incumbent decided to continue the business, he or she should establish ground rules concerning how to manage growth; success requires a strategy and planning. The ground rules provide guidance and help to align personal values with the business goals (Le Breton-Miller et al., 2004). Strategies do not always produce the expected outcomes if the needs and interests of family members diverge (Braun et al., 2016). Family members do not necessarily have the same intent or goals as the incumbent (De Massis et al., 2016).

Cater and Justis (2010) conducted a qualitative case study consisting of four family businesses. The results suggested the incumbent passed the business to multiple family members in shared leadership. The authors proposed this idea based on families with members that belong to different generations and noted concerns as to succession for intergenerational businesses related to the incumbent's lack of communication with the family or inability to let go of control of the business.

Braun et al.'s (2016) research article about the Mondavi Winery enterprise and its business succession as an example of multiple generational families and their inability to align the family intentions with the strategic business intent. The differences in expected strategies among family members caused the business to fail. The researchers argued that families often rely on traditional strategies for the family side of the business and tend to neglect the business portion of the company. Mathews and Blumentritt (2015) observed

that most individuals do not always know what they want or their opinions change over time; therefore, the presence of multiple generations does not necessarily lead to a positive outcome.

Geyer (2016) claimed that intentions mattered when it came to decision makers. The perception of an act is dependent upon the assessment of the intent; therefore, the intent of an individual is the antecedent to future activity (Hallam, Dorantes, Cardenas, & Zanella, 2016). From a strategic perspective, an incumbent's intent should be an active and rational management process that leads the family business to pursue a specific long-term strategic goal (Chen, Liu, Ni, & Wu, 2015).

What was the intent of the incumbent? Did he or she intend to transfer the business to the next generation? The intentions are assumed to capture motivating factors that influence the incumbent's behavior regarding succession (De Massis et al., 2016). However, De Massis et al. suggested the intent depended on the amount of effort the incumbent planned to exert in performing his or her succession. The aim would involve the decisions that helped the incumbent develop and carry out his or her vision for the next generation (Ward, 2016).

The literature had suggested as the incumbent prepared the next generation, communication might prove to be a challenge. Interpersonal communication skills are necessary for any business organization. Michael-Tsabari and Weiss (2015) made a valid argument regarding the lack of communication involving succession, which they refer to as the communication trap. The authors claimed that lack of communication did not

necessarily have to be personal conflict or emotional. Therefore, could the lack of transferring information to the successor be the result of the incumbent not knowing his or her intentions?

Mathews and Blumentritt (2015) suggested the incumbent and potential successor actions or decisions may influence one another according to their preferences. Mathews and Blumentritt investigated various models of succession and revealed that most models focused on the development of a potential successor and the decision-making processes of the incumbent. The authors stated that previous analyses did not consider the interactions of all parties involved in succession.

As part of their investigation, Mathews and Blumentritt (2015) claimed situations in which the actions of the incumbent depended on the actions of others are interdependent. Conversely, the incumbent was dependent upon the potential successor's activities regarding the succession process. To understand the succession process, further examination of the activities to include the interdependent relationships between the incumbent and potential successors, the strategic choices available to the participants concerning succession, and the anticipated outcomes would be necessary.

The Successor's Role

The successor's role is critical to the succession plan for the next-generation family member, but it depends on his or her ability, needs, and goals (Samei & Feyzbakhsh, 2016). Rogal (1989) described the successor or the heir as one who envisions some possible futures, including interesting and troubling ones. Therefore,

most likely those visions contain certain latent assumptions which may predispose the heir to a less-than-optimal course of action. Rogal suggested that, by breaking down a vision of the future into discrete components, it was possible to reconstruct those parts in unexpected and satisfying ways. Rogal claimed at the very least, such an analysis uncovers unexamined compromises embedded within the heir's visions, thereby setting the stage for acceptance or reconsideration.

Unless the family member was interested in pursuing inclusion of the next generation, researchers had shown that succession should not be confused with success. For a family business to remain successful, the incumbent must generate a new strategy for every generation that joins the business (Sharma, Chrisman, & Chua, 1997). The potential successor's experience throughout the succession process could determine to what extent they are prepared to take over the business (Mussolino & Calabrò, 2014). Nordqvist, Melin, Waldkrich, and Kumeto (2015) agreed that the successor's experiences might affect the outcome of the succession.

From the literature, the business needed to be in a good position for the succession process to occur. Aronoff and Ward (2017) recommended the incumbent assess the current business environment and vision for the future to ensure the potential successor had the appropriate skills through development and experience to assume the leadership position. Ghee et al. (2015) contended succession experiences vary across generations, whereas the age of the successor could be relevant to the adaptability of the process.

There was minimal attention in the literature regarding timing as an essential element in succession planning. Michel and Kammerlander (2015) supported Le Breton-Miller et al. (2004) argument that timing is critical not only to the incumbent and successor but it relevant to the business because of the changes within the environment. Kidwell et al. (2018) argued external environmental changes and social norms continue from one generation to the next, which includes respecting authority, strengthening social bonds, and communicating.

As mentioned earlier, the investigation conducted on the communication trap, Michael-Tsbari and Weiss (2015) supported Kidwell et al. (2018) by using the game theory to demonstrate the impact of deficient communication between individuals involved in succession and how it can hinder the process. In conclusion, Michael-Tsbari and Weiss argued communication needed to be vital because it related to family harmony. The authors' stated harmony was necessary before succession regardless of whether the incumbent or the potential successor initialized succession.

Overall, findings in this field indicated there was attention on succession, but then the successor was left out of many studies. From a strategic management perspective, succession required the best successor to the business (Sharma et al., 1997). The family's vision determined whether the business would grow and be profitable, but the goals must be stated to establish the best choice when it involved leadership for the next generation.

Based on previous studies, an appropriate technique for a smooth transition of power of the business required strategy. Le Breton-Miller et al. (2004) introduced an

integrative model that contributed to the successor process by integrating variables such as culture, social, family norms, and industry environment in the business context.

According to the authors, using the following four-stage process facilitated succession:

(a) establish ground rules, (b) nurture successors, (c) selection, and (d) hand-off or transition.

Throughout the literature, finding a suitable successor was essential to the business continuity. Once the incumbent identified a successor, he or she must have the capability to lead, manage, communicate, and commit to taking over the business (Aronoff & Ward, 2017; Cater & Justis, 2010; Le Breton-Miller et al., 2004). Previous studies indicated that a competent successor was a crucial variable in a successful succession process although Mussolino and Calabrò (2014) argued for other key variables, such as creating an environment to facilitate the process. Samei and Feyzbakhsh (2015) concluded that proven skills, performance, and experience of the successor, including decision-making abilities, might result in a definite succession.

Succession Strategies

Planning for the continuation of a family-owned business is an essential responsibility of a business owner. Tabor, Chrisman, Madison, and Vardaman (2017) stated that attributes such as demographics, size, age, industry, and governing board were instrumental to the continuity of family business. Urick, Hollensbe, and Fairhurst (2017) claimed the interpretation of age-based approach relative to generational understanding could be problematic. Ward (2016) suggested studying each generation of a family-

owned business according to their terms concerning planning since each generation had unique problems and needs.

A family-owned business could position itself to anticipate and capitalize on opportunities by using strategic planning to gain market prominence and build a successful brand (Schaffmeister, 2015). Empirical studies have identified many strategic areas as part of the structure that supported the business environment. Pounder (2015) contended planning is fundamental for the family-owned business to overcome some of the challenges. The ideal plan allowed the business to calibrate family and business needs to each family member's interest.

The family-owned business succession not only involved family members but other stakeholders, such as vendors and clients. Every individual has a different style of leadership and abilities for dealing with family members and those stakeholders, which can affect business strategy and its culture (Sharma et al., 1997). Succession involves multi-dimensional changes as leadership is transferred to business and family (Le Breton-Miller et al., 2004).

Succession planning strategies need mechanisms such as communication, credibility, positive feedback, recognition, rewards, and incentives. According to Stephan, Patterson, and Kelly (2016), identifying and operationalizing these mechanisms could facilitate positive behavior and create opportunities for change in behavior and attitudes.

From the literature, there were very few strategic decisions based on economic factors. Dalpiaz et al. (2014) argued that the creation and evolution of a family business undertaking should be a linear and strategic process. According to Chrisman et al. (2003), succession requires changes in strategy and business structure, which include opportunity and resources. The strategic process required the family to develop and adopt goals following a course of action to achieve those goals.

Dalpiaz et al. (2014) claimed priorities involving family and noneconomic goals take precedence over business goals to include the concept of planning for the future. The authors argued there might be times when the family may not be rational in an economic sense. This reasoning explained why Ghee et al. (2015) suggested that the importance of the incumbent place on traditional values and vision, which are critical to the development of a family-owned business.

Ward (2016) supported Fletcher, De Massis, and Nordqvist (2016) by stating that the essential characteristics and value of the incumbent shaped the family business future and strategy. A successful transition of the family-owned business is a result of a healthy business (Neubauer & Lank, 2016). Ward argued that competition and conflict could be favorable for the growth of the business because it allowed family members the opportunity to develop new ideas.

According to the literature, family business succession could maximize success for the family business. Family success had a positive impact on the family business, not vice versa (Ward, 2016). The incumbent or founder of the family-owned business

established and developed his or her organization with the intent to create a family legacy as well as wealth and to ensure survival (Goel & Jones, 2016). However, perpetuating a family legacy would require the incumbent to manage the succession by finding a replacement.

The incumbent wanted to ensure that his or her legacy remained intact. The legacy of their commitment to the industry, business, and position is paramount to having a competent successor (Collins, Worthington, & Schoen, 2016). Napolitano, Marino, and Ojala (2015) argued business historians tend to use the survival of a business as a barometer for success, but the longevity of a family business is integral to the prosperity of the entire family. Business longevity requires exogenous factors, such as the type of business, location, and size is determinants which influence survival (Napolitano et al., 2015).

Although typical characteristics for extraordinarily long-lived businesses throughout history are a relatively small or medium size and family ownership, 99% of all businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises, unable to expand to considerable entities because of the scarcity of resources or strategic choice (Napolitano et al., 2015; Szczerbak, 2017). Ghee et al. (2015) argued that a successor might be able to run the family business; however, he or she may not know how to expand the business.

Ghee et al. (2015) viewed the second-generation successors as having more education and, according to the researchers, higher education affords the new generation with the ability to adapt to competitive environments, new technology, new markets, and

gain new customers. Ghee et al. claimed future generations seemed to lack experience in handling changing and dynamic environments, while the incumbent vacillated in his or her decisions, wasting resources and creating conflict and confusion in the process as a result of inconsistencies in strategic initiatives (Moss, Payne, & Moore, 2014).

Ultimately, those decisions became essential to the success of the business.

Due to the challenges in the business environment, Szcerbak (2017) argued that both large and small businesses require strategies. Szcerbak stated as part of those strategies, business owners might need to assess the collective management of local resources and the demand for product and services as a key to longevity. Szcerbak recommended family businesses adapt business strategies and practices to meet the changing environment to succeed over time.

Based on the literature, there are various models which facilitate successful transitions for family business leaders to develop strategies to overcome obstacles which impede the succession process. From the research, there were few findings concerning the decisions that a family business made and their strategic goals. According to the researchers, family business development is necessary to understand succession and develop strategies (Blumentritt et al., 2012).

Ward (2016) proposed a three-circle model of family business. The author suggested that family-owned businesses plan on four different levels simultaneously and interdependently. These strategies were to produce a business strategy plan, leadership and ownership succession plan, a personal financial plan for family members, and a

family continuity plan. The plans needed to address the incumbent's vision for the future about the family members involved in the business, how many of them participated, and what roles family members may fulfill (Meier & Schier, 2016). Other variables, such as internal and external environments, including political, sociocultural, and technological, could affect the business strategy, incumbent strategy, and also impact family participation in the business (Charles, Ojera, & David, 2015).

Braun et al. (2016) stated that the strategy required a successful implementation. For successful implementation of a strategy, De Massis, Kotlar, Campopiano, and Cassia (2015) argued one must understand the processes by which family firms execute their strategies because this could affect family business performance and behavior. The strategic goals of the family business were a result of the ability and willingness of family members.

Since humans are involved in planning, particularly in business or some other area, there was a need to familiarize themselves with various business models since forecasting the future was uncertain (Arregle et al., 2014). According to Arregle et al. (2014), uncertainty grew over time, which introduced risk. However, research had indicated family businesses are relatively stable systems so long as the founder or the incumbent remained in his or her position (Kammerlander, Dessi, Bird, Floris, & Murru, 2015).

Scholars needed to understand the evolution of the family business and the interactions of the various subsystems (Cano-Rubio, Fuentes-Lombardo, Hernández-

Ortiz, & Vallejo-Martos, 2016). Gundry, Kickul, Iakovleva, and Carsrud (2014) noted that family businesses are systems which comprised of two subsystems: family and the business (Sharma et al., 1997). Although the family business is considered a system, family members could be susceptible to initial conditions (Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund, & Hansen, 2016).

The characterization of the family business as a system positions it in the category of being prone to disturbances. Buma (2015) described a disturbance as interactions which have the potential to cause considerable, nonlinear, or unexpected changes in ecosystem structure and its functions. For example, disturbance, such as illness, divorce, or death might cause destabilization in the family business (Galvin et al., 2015). However, a viable business could still be in operation even when the incumbent creates a void in business continuation but not a death of the business (Coad, 2014).

Family business succession is an iterative and dynamic process which occurs over time as planning takes place (Marler et al., 2017). Since the family and business are two different systems, any small disturbance in a system is likely to find some asymptotic configuration that is not necessarily equilibrium and leaves the possibility of oscillations in the systems, which can lead to eventual chaos (Arrow, Ehrlich, & Levin, 2013). Chaos over time might disrupt the incumbent, making long-term forecasting, formation, and implementation of a strategy very difficult. Hence, under the game theory concept, when assuming the incumbent as a rational individual, chaos likely affects his or her decisions in the succession process (Bonau, 2017).

According to Blumentritt et al. (2012), when using the game theory, the games were played under certain conditions, including the structure of the game and possible strategies that the individual could select. The authors called this the rules of the game. The strategies in the game theory were courses of actions available to the participant.

Utilizing the game theory as a concept may give insight into the incumbent's decision-making process before succession and the possible strategies based on the available courses of action. Allio (2015) disagreed because, according to the author, managers do not make rational decisions but merely act to maximize the utility of their decisions. Allio contended that today's business owner must cope with many variables and based on these circumstances, the game theory did not apply.

Family business leaders may or may not be strategic but selecting the best strategy for today does not guarantee it would be an ideal strategy in the months ahead or the next few years (Allio, 2015). Bryson, Edwards, and Van Slyke (2017) defined strategic planning as a deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shaped and governed what an organization is, what it does, and the reasons why. Akaeze and Akaeze (2016) described strategy as the theory of business on how to compete successfully. According to these descriptions, it was unclear what kind of measures could be used to determine how the decisions were made by the incumbent and whether the characterizations could be considered a successful succession event.

Schlepphorst and Moog (2014) suggested that, evaluating a succession required an individual to be able to distinguish between the qualities of the transition experience

and if the succession process was adequate. According to the authors, quality reflects the experiences of the family members involved in the process. Some quality characteristics to measure regarding family issues were conflict, trust, rivalry, resentment, and stress (Nosé, Korunka, Frank, & Danes, 2017). The basis for determining adequacy was the result of the outcome of the succession process (Mussolino & Calabrò, 2014).

van der Westhuizen and Garnett (2014) contended a successful transition led to a higher chance of success and long-term profitability. The authors stated that the succession process was delicate; therefore, increasing the chances of finding a competent successor required a well-considered and planned succession. Succession planning supports the facilitation of growth and continuity of the family-owned business because it may decrease indecision related to the business owner's plans for succession (Neubauer & Lank, 2016).

Family-Owned Funeral Business

Sales in the funeral service industry in the US have estimated at \$17.2 billion annually by 2019 (NFDA, 2017). The cost of a traditional funeral averages \$12,000, which lists it as the third largest expense for an individual beyond a house or an automobile (Sanders, 2012). A funeral service consists of three components: a ceremony and tribute, which is a funeral or memorial service; the disposition of remains, through burial or cremation; memorialization, through monuments, markers or inscriptions (Whitaker, 2005). By definition, the funeral services industry encompasses all the activities related to preparing the deceased for viewing, transportation of the deceased

from place of death, and the service and final disposition, e.g., at a cemetery (Korai & Souiden, 2017).

As of 2017, there are 19,322 funeral homes, which employ more than 115,000 individuals in the U. S. (NFDA, 2017). Small business funeral homes are responsible for 86% of the funeral business in the U. S., while only 14% of funeral businesses are corporate-owned (Tamakloe, 2015). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, n.d.) has cited the labor force for this industry as being expected to grow 7% between 2014 and 2024.

A family-owned business accounts for 60% of the workforce and is a significant familial influence on intergenerational careers (Yoo, Schenkel, & Kim, 2014). Sanders (2012) maintained that growth in the funeral industry in the U. S. itself occurs by preserving a social good, but otherwise, the industry is structured to appeal to the moral economy. Funeral business success is mainly due to the continued growth of the population (Vargas-Hernández, 2013).

In a survey conducted by Kreischer Miller's Center for Private Company Excellence (2016), 62% of the senior generation of owners would transition their business within the next ten years. The survey noted that 65% are uncertain about a retirement plan, and approximately 51% did not have a succession plan in place. With significant changes occurring in the funeral industry over the past 15 years, one difference was the ongoing transformation from a collection of small family-owned businesses into substantial national and international corporate entities (Whitaker, 2005).

The succession rate of the family-owned funeral businesses is decreasing with each generation due to large corporations as they continue to absorb the smaller businesses to cut out competition; rationalize its staff, services, and assets while increasing the cost of funerals (Tamakloe, 2015). On the flip side, as baby boomers age, they demand and are opting for more cost-effective alternatives for funerals, such as cremations or green burials. As baby boomers move away from the traditional funeral service toward other methods of body disposal and memorialization, the funeral industry faces structural, cultural, and technological changes (Beard & Burger, 2017a).

A business owner needs to understand the inherent changes in the industry; this allows them to capture the intricacies of the funeral business and the interrelationship of business practice, cultural changes, new technology, and customer demand (Beard & Burger, 2017a). These changes would require the next generation to become more knowledgeable in areas such as consumerism, marketing, and technology. The incumbent would have to make a decision that focused on a successor to whom he or she could provide training and ensure their success.

A question remained for the owners and researchers as to how success may be measured relative to norms for the funeral industry. Research indicated there were critical success elements such as governance, knowledge transfer, and management which were essential to the long-term survival of the family-owned business (Bogers, Boyd, & Hollensen, 2015). The critical elements identified in the literature could be relevant to successful succession for family-owned funeral businesses (Neubauer & Lank, 2016).

Therefore, these critical elements were used as guides while collecting data on the case studies selected for this proposed study, case studies that would, hopefully, revealed successful succession strategies in family-owned businesses.

The selection criteria were aimed to facilitate comparisons among cases, and participants were sought out using the available evidence and research that was relevant to answering the research question. Understanding the decision-making processes that influenced successful transitions among family-owned funeral businesses gave insight for incumbents who lacked strategies for decision making and transitioning beyond the first generation. Up to this point, the research on succession still leaves many unanswered questions about a successful succession event.

Finding the Lifeline

The ability to survive over generations is a significant phenomenon for the family business. Bakoğlu and Yildirim (2016) asserted that the persistence of control by the same family over generations should be the driving force of continuity. The family business has a strong historical presence and a universal footprint in society and the economy. According to the literature, many authors had suggested strategies to improve family business sustainability were necessary as a lifeline to future generations.

Gill (2013) contended that decisions about the future be made based on the understanding of the past and where family members fit into the historical and social fabric of their community (Ball, 2017). White (2017) believed that people project themselves directly into an image of the future. In other words, an individual's sense of

self-impacts the decision-making process as succession planning articulates perceptions of the future about the past (Gill, 2013; Sergeeva, 2016).

Steier, Chrisman, and Chua (2017) argued that family businesses are shifting attachments to the original business. The authors claimed a family was more inclined to exit from a business that no longer provided benefits, such as value creation or a lack of family engagement. From a generational perspective, White (2017) maintained that past generations relied on the children and grandchildren as the backdrop in a pattern of continuity, using practical and ethical decisions that were now difficult to pursue.

The pursuit of a potential successor had become a challenge as family members perceptions differ on aspects of active ownership (Cherchem, 2017; Helin & Jabri, 2016). It appears the family business owner placed a higher value on socioemotional wealth, such as the value associated with maintaining constant control over the business activities (Hernández-Trasobares & Galve-Górriz, 2016). Firfiray, Cruz, Neacsu, and Gomez-Mejia (2018) referred to socioeconomic wealth as the collective set of non-economic functionalities that family business owners assume as owners. Reay, Jaskiewicz, and Hinings (2015) argued the concerns for family reputation might contradict the control of undertakings by the business.

Lefebvre and Lefebvre (2015) observed the incumbent's best interests for the future generation was by preparing them socially through either direct or mediated social interaction with various stakeholders, such as other family members, other businesses, suppliers, and the overall local community. The authors claimed the succession

experience for the potential successor determined whether he or she would either retain the family business past or completely reject it. Lefebvre & Lefebvre argued that the expectation for the family heir to take over the business could seem to be an obligation rather than a free choice.

Gill (2013) argued that the generation of today could lack family values because of a detachment from historical time in a philosophical tradition, which the author refers to as *generationalism*. Delmas and Gergaud (2014) maintained that future generations do possess the element of being an heir, which qualifies them as a stakeholder, and is necessary for family business survival. However, Delmas and Gergaud argued the assumption of heirs inheriting the business might determine the way an incumbent behaves in anticipation of intergenerational succession (Pineiro & Yung, 2015).

Vauhkonen, Kallio, Kauppinen, and Erola (2017) discussed intangible socioeconomic resources such as attitude, behavior, and future goals of the incumbent contribute to the socialization of the next generation. The authors claimed some resources were not as valuable, but if the incumbent lacked essential resources, either tangible or intangible, the result could be a negative influence on the next generation. Kidwell et al. (2017) argued that significant events of the past made an impact on how the family members behave in the present and the future.

It was not clear that the lack of tangible and intangible resources available to be passed from one generation to the next might cause a decline in family-owned funeral businesses. Further, it might not be that an incumbent necessarily chose a family member

for intergenerational transfer. Lui et al. (2015) argued it might be the incumbent's emotional attachment to carry the family name through the business that drives the choices.

The controlling family places importance on a business identity that reflects the family and on transgenerational sustainability to continue the legacy of the family (Neckebrouck, Manigart, & Meuleman, 2017). The identity of the business perpetuates the legacy which gives the family a healthy attachment; therefore, they are less likely to accept nonfamily members into the business (Neckebrouck et al., 2017). From a human resource perspective, Daspit, Madison, Barnett, and Long (2018) asserted that family businesses often favor family over nonfamily employees, with the authors suggesting that family members tend to maintain a balance with moderate levels of cohesion within the family structure.

The literature pointed out that reverence for family, culture, and tradition was handed down through the generations. Weismeier-Sammer and Hatak (2014) argued the reverence for the business history and tradition be fundamental to family business succession. Dalpaiz et al. (2014) proposed that perhaps the successors in family businesses may need to use the family legacy to construct a vision of the future that would be consistent and compliments prior generations of family business leaders. Furthermore, the researchers suggested that most incumbent leaders had a desire to leave a legacy for family members.

De Massis et al. (2016) viewed the legacy of a family business as an asset created by the incumbent generation to provide benefits for future generations. Although researchers had not explicitly defined a family legacy, Hammond, Pearson, and Holt (2016) offered a theoretical explanation of the critical artifacts (tangible and intangible) and preferences, which the authors considered as interrelated. The authors proposed a formal definition as a social legacy, which consisted of a network of meanings associated with the family transferred through shared stories and broader social tactics (Hammond et al., 2016).

Anglin, Reid, Short, Zachary, and Rutherford (2017) argued the legacy of the family gave identity to the business and defined the perception of a family business, both internally and externally; the legacy serves as the foundation of the business' reputation. Family members recognized that the status of the family business is critical for long-term viability and to attract the cooperation and loyalty of stakeholders who provide useful resources (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2015). Carr, Chrisman, Chua, and Steier (2017) stated that more clarification was necessary as to the nature and components of this legacy. Hammond et al. (2016) viewed the family legacy as a significant component of the decision-making processes within the family business.

Hammond et al. (2016) proposed that shared stories of family history should lead to collective aspirations and goals that aid in developing a set of strategic choices, which reflect in the actions of the family members. The authors claimed the shared stories or narratives might result in strategies that family business successors need to legitimize

themselves and their actions. However, Hjorth and Dawson (2016) suggested a narrative analysis involving family history might be useful in analyzing the issues of succession, and that by tracing the events of the family business life, an iterative approach may be used to comprehend human behavior and the complexities of social interactions (Dawson & Hjorth, 2012).

Chrisman, Chua, De Massis, Minola, and Vismara (2016) claimed that researchers needed to understand decision-making processes regarding strategies which determined behavior and performance and affected family goals and resources. Sund, Melin, and Haag (2015) argued an incumbent maintained a substantial influence in both the second and third generations. Therefore, Sund et al. (2015) suggested that behavioral control might be related to the previous generations' retention of managerial characteristics and business practices over several generations (Michael-Tsabari, Labaki, & Zachary, 2014).

Hamilton, Jack, and Cruz (2017) contended that narratives might provide a framework, which gives context to meanings, thoughts, motivations, shared memories, and family experiences. Rance, Gray, and Hopwood (2017) described narratives as a way for human beings to make sense of past experiences. However, Fraser and MacDougall (2017) noted that a common problem with narratives was that an individual might not know where the boundaries of a story begin and end.

Wright, Chrisman, Chua, and Steier (2014) supported the use of narratives in some cultural contexts to legitimize successors and strategies. Smith's (2017) argument was that all stories were narratives, but not all narratives were stories; this left a gap in

research concerning narrative genre in the context of family business. Overall, Hamilton et al. (2017) viewed narratives as a form of communication which served to articulate the family's organizational culture, navigate change, and provide stability.

Delmas and Gergaud (2014) contended the business owner's intent for transgenerational succession needed to encourage sustainability. According to Delmas and Gergaud, family business sustainability came in many forms. Schaltegger et al. (2016) argued for developing a business model to meet those needs of the present generation but did not compromise the future generations' ability to meet their needs and achieve goals (Özçelik, 2015). Schaltegger et al. suggested that linking family business models with sustainable corporate strategies might improve the financial outcomes for the business.

It was essential to determine how were the needs of the next generation could be met to sustain the family business. Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2017) suggested that some families would create a new company aligned with the talents, needs, and desires of the younger generation. McMullen and Warnick (2015) supported family businesses entry into a new industry-specific business sector to satisfy entitled family members (Fox & Wade-Benzoni, 2017).

The new business investment might satisfy the need for autonomy while reducing family conflicts and facilitates harmony (McMullen & Warnick, 2015). The entry into a new business might require the talents and inputs of nonfamily members if a family-owned business deviated from the existing business requiring knowledge, skills, and

experience beyond the capabilities of the controlling family (Gu, Lu, & Chung, 2016). Because family businesses had a concern regarding business continuity, more family businesses implemented training and mentoring of the younger generation than did nonfamily organizations (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2015).

Mentoring is the sharing of knowledge or knowledge accumulation (Distelberg & Schwarz, 2015). Dhaenens, Marler, Vardaman, and Chrisman (2017) argued that mentoring did provide some degree of commitment to the family business, but the authors recognized that sometimes mentoring might be dysfunctional, e.g., when a successor's goals did not align with the family business or demands placed on the successor by the incumbent. Dhaenens et al. (2017) proposed more research might be necessary because there was very little information about the influence of mentoring in family business compared to nonfamily organizations.

Giulott-Soulez and Soulez (2014) recommended that scholars research the differences in generational values. Al-Asfour and Lettau (2014) argued engagement with the younger generation could be a challenge when having to replace retiring baby boomers. Scholars acknowledged that younger generations did have a desire to work, but the work needed to be challenging (Pyöriä, Ojala, Saari, & Järvinen, 2017). Al-Asfour and Lettau recognized there was a need for the younger generation to understand the relationship of their work to the overall mission of the family business so they may see benefits from their work.

Glover and Reay (2015) argued that some strategies had been identified to provide family businesses sustainability through economic growth; however, researchers had given minimal attention to the survival of small family businesses that experienced poor financial returns. Those businesses identified as economically disadvantaged potentially did continue from one generation to the next. In these cases, it was unclear how the incumbent provided an incentive for his or her next generation when the revenue was inconsistent.

Parker (2017) argued that perhaps the incumbent needed to provide tangible and intangible capital as an incentive for the potential successor to continue the family business. Randerson, Dossena, and Fayolle (2016) noted that, because a family-owned business is a heritage business, implementing robust governance models and rules for the next generation provided strong incentives to conform to traditions. Madison, Holt, Kellermans, and Ranft (2015) suggested a type of governance that facilitated strategic flexibility and innovativeness.

According to Allen, George, and Davis (2018), a personalized form of governance, such as relationships and family influence that aligned with the family business decision maker and owner, resulted in a strategic benefit. Madison et al. (2015) cautioned that aside from the structure created, governance associated with family ownership might not be the best quality because family dynamics and potential conflicts could become a challenge. Van Aaken, Rost, and Seidl (2017) acknowledged that owner-

managers tend to make decisions to benefit their families, as opposed to the long-term viability of their business.

Aparicio, Basco, Iturralde, and Maseda (2017) argued that seeking alignment between family and business identities could influence the business economic goals. The overlap of family and business identity tended to be a motivating factor which propels the family to strive for a favorable reputation instead of pursuing financial goals intended to satisfy non-family stakeholders (Aparicio et al., 2017; Memili et al., 2018). Revilla, Pérez-Luño, and Nieto (2016) observed that, unless the ruling family had a distinct set of family-centered goals, the cost of business failure tends to be relatively high (Evert, Martin, McLeod, & Payne 2016).

Because family business owners seemed to be motivated not only by financial objectives but nonfinancial as well, preserving their socioemotional wealth could affect their ability to be innovative (Diéguez-Soto, Manzaneque, & Rojo-Ramírez, 2016; Memili et al., 2018). Lambrechts, Voordeckers, Roijackers, and Vanhaverbeke (2017) indicated that nonfinancial objectives, such as maintaining authority, control, and influence over the family business or perpetuating the family legacy, could be crucial reference points in strategic decision making. Holt, Pearson, Carr, and Barnett (2017) agreed that family businesses might benefit from strategies to pursue family-centered nonfinancial outcomes because these have relevance and meaning for the family and the business.

Schenkel, Yoo, and Kim (2016) argued the alignment of interest should be placed on ownership and management to foster a stronger foundation because ownership and management did not necessarily transition simultaneously when succession leadership changes occurred within the family business. Bennedsen, Fan, Jian, and Yeh (2015) thought there should be a compromise between control and alignment of interest; ownership is concentrated with the incumbent or distributed among stakeholders. The authors concluded most businesses start off relatively small, which limited the number of stakeholders. However, when ownership of the business peaks, it tended to be highly concentrated, and control benefits immediately outweigh those of economic and interest alignment (Bennedson et al., 2015).

Schlepphorst and Moog (2014) argued family businesses had less experience in hiring practices compared to nonfamily businesses. Schlepphorst & Moog stated most often family businesses replaced management less often than the average nonfamily business (, 2014). The authors claimed more research was necessary to determine the recruiting and selecting of successors because the peculiarities of family businesses could influence the decision in favor of a family successor who might not have the qualifications or attributes.

Omotayo (2015) mentioned that, once succession from the previous generation occurred, the new generation should be prepared to create new knowledge which contributes to business performance and creates competition. Wang, Zuo, and An (2017) considered younger people as more suitable than their predecessors because of their

desire to accept new ideas and new technologies. The succession process provides an opportunity for the incumbent to create innovation and renewal for the family business (Hauck & Prügl, 2015; Matzler, Veider, Hautz, & Stadler, 2015; Gundry, 2014).

Dodd, Theoharakis, and Angelo (2014) introduced organizational renewal, a concept that is focused on self-understanding and may be valuable to the family business because of the specific characteristics and interconnections existing in the family structure. The authors suggested that successors did often show respect to previous generations by continuing same business practices as their predecessors. Dodd et al. proposed that the family should maintain high expectations and provide incentives for preserving a strong reputation, even as family members were encouraged to take entrepreneurial risks.

However, Arrondo-García, Fernández-Méndez, and Menéndez-Requejo (2016) supported the idea that family businesses might need to engage in riskier ventures to preserve their socioemotional wealth; however, the decision to take risks should be contingent on the current business environment (Smith, 2016; Sciascia, Nordqvist, Mazzola, & De Massis, 2015). Many scholars had proposed the incumbent's goals, intentions, and motivations might determine whether the family business would engage in risky ventures (Basco, 2017; Chrisman, Fang, Kotlar, & De Massis, 2015). Classen, Carree, Van Gils, and Peters (2014) argued family businesses favored investing less for innovation; however, this did not indicate the business was less innovative (Kammerlander, van Essen, & Zellweger, 2015).

Hnátek (2015) also suggested that the successor needed to create new knowledge and proposed a creative concept called design thinking. Several scholars recognized this method as helping successors to identify new business opportunities and refresh the core business by creating new visions and values to generate innovative, competitive strategies (Hnátek, 2015; Liedtka, 2015).

Sergeeva (2016) posited that self-identity requires an individual to engage in networking so he or she may align with aims and objectives and create an identity as an innovative champion. As an innovative champion, the concept was designed to take risks in identifying, refining, and supporting innovations introduced by individuals and groups within the organization. Sergeeva viewed this as an opportunity for businesses with changing and dynamic environments to be proactive with innovation and improve products and services.

Family business success is not only contingent upon its strategic position in the market but also on continuing to create and develop unique capabilities (López-Cabarcos, Göttling-Oliveira-Monteiro, & Vázquez-Rodríguez, 2015). Many scholars viewed some family businesses as competing in established, low innovation markets, but many of these firms operate in tumultuous and competitive environments demanding significant innovation in products, markets, and services (Miller, Wright, Le Breton-Miller, & Scholes (2015). Otherwise, if the family intended to pass the business on to the next generation, there should be a continuous renewal of processes to prevent stagnation (Cucculelli, Le Breton-Miller, & Miller, 2016).

Röd (2016) argued family businesses owners who had a desire and ability to be innovative had a higher chance of survival across generations. Feranita, Kotlar, and De Massis (2017) contended innovation required a family business to become entrepreneurial and take risks to survive in highly dynamic and competitive markets to achieve their long-term vision (Prajogo, 2016). Bennedsen and Foss (2015) claimed there was substantial empirical evidence to support that the antecedents and effects of technological innovation differ between family and non-family owned businesses; whereas, some findings were conflicting about the impacts of adopting innovative strategies and more research was necessary.

The funeral industry today uses technology and a variation of alternative traditions to memorialize the dead; one alternative for the industry has been to become more diverse in methods of disposing of remains (Beard & Burger, 2017a). Innovation and technology contribute to the family-owned funeral business owner's needs to strategically change their business models and enhance business to remain competitive (Beard & Burger, 2017b). Notwithstanding, the family-owned funeral business must consider the stakeholders they serve. Bennedsen et al. (2015) argued religious business owners on average tend to take less risk and invest less in fixed and intangible assets as opposed to businesses founded by non-religious owners.

Stakeholders must understand the actual value of innovation, and in some instances, might need to develop new capabilities to benefit the business (Hillenbrand, Driessen, & Koll, 2015; Kammerlander, Sieger, Voordeckers, & Zellweger, 2015).

Stakeholders come from diverse backgrounds and norms and therefore have expectations about the way business should be conducted (Hillenbrand et al., 2015). Still, even with better access to information, customers tend to use previous funeral homes known to their families (Audebrand & Barros, 2017; Villamin, 2016).

According to the literature, the high costs of funerals in the industry had led families away from the traditional way of burial. With the increase in market share by corporations, the family-owned funeral businesses are diminishing due to lack of successful strategies based on industry changes (Arshed & Danson, 2016). According to Arshed and Danson, a majority of family-owned small businesses with less than 50 employees are vulnerable to succession failure. The authors noted that not only governance and management issues affect succession but cultural differences could also.

Audebrand and Barros (2017) argued that culture played a role in economic inequality within the funeral industry. The authors claimed that, at one time, culture protected the family-owned funeral homes from price competition. However, the family-owned funeral business must maintain its identity and a good reputation because a funeral is sensitive; therefore, its status is always at risk (Beard & Burger, 2017b). According to Beckert and Musselin (2013), strategies for funeral businesses are closely related to cultures and traditions, which can sometimes be a disadvantage for business strategies.

Beard and Burger (2017b) made an argument that with decreased profitability in the funeral industry, these businesses are at a disadvantage when it comes to marketing. The funeral industry is taboo or thought to be offensive to consumers when it came to the

advertisement. The authors suggested embracing diversity and technology were a necessary strategy for the business.

Finding a lifeline to family business succession for the next generation requires understanding and knowledge of family history, culture, and traditions. These issues remain complicated for researchers and scholars. The alignment of interest and family values with the incumbent plays a significant role for the next generation. Identifying, comprehending, and prioritizing the needs of family and stakeholders are essential in a business climate.

van der Westhuizen and Garnett (2014) argued the responsibility of the incumbent should be to provide support to the family-owned business beginning with the first generation (Ramadani, Bexheti, Rexhepi, Ratten, & Ibraimi, 2017). The transfer of increased knowledge and skills across the generations serves to develop new strategies for the family business (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2015; Muskat & Zehre, 2017). According to Dyer, Nenque, and Hill (2014), the transference of knowledge through business practices from one generation to the next creates human capital.

Dyer et al. (2014) described family capital as the human, social, and financial resources the family members need to succeed in the business. The authors argued that historically, in industries like the funeral business, owners passed on the secrets from one generation to the next and gained competitive advantages within the industry. Dyer et al. stated that family capital had a powerful influence on stakeholders because commitments

made by families were likely to be more trusted, which provided a positive image and excellent reputation for business.

Summary

In summary, an initial review of the literature revealed that the topic of succession in family-owned businesses continues to make progress; however, family business succession remains a complex and unpredictable process. Although family businesses contribute to over 80% of the world's economy (Ward, 2016), the influences on a successful succession are multifaceted and convoluted.

For example, there was no universal definition of family business among scholars. Researchers indicated succession was a process; however, many scholars focused on the obstacles which prevented succession within family-owned businesses. Succession planning was necessary as a business practice because it facilitated the family business success beyond the first generation.

More than 40% of family business leaders had a desire to name successors in the next generation of their businesses (Cater et al., 2016). The findings from this research indicated that strategic planning was not a priority for most family businesses. Therefore, strategic choices and succession planning for privately held family businesses required further study.

In succession planning, much of the research was not empirical and focused on the managerial aspect of the business. There was limited use of existing models for predicting outcomes with more reliable data that could provide researchers an

opportunity to study the characteristics of successful transitions using a qualitative approach. This literature review also contained research on critical elements, such as family history, socioeconomic wealth, innovation, and transference of knowledge as necessary for a successful family business succession.

The use of game theory as a concept to inspire strategic studies has limited applications, but there were possibilities in the social and biological context for human logic and reasoning for decision making. As noted in the literature, several authors had applied game theory to fundamental concerns regarding family business succession. As a tool, researchers could use game theory to analyze concepts used in social reasoning that deal with situational decision making and conflicts; potentially making a connection between real-life cases and theory.

Barros, Hernangómez, and Martin-Cruz (2016) argued that different generations might have different perspectives and expertise for business, which could result in uncertainty. Those uncertainties might impact family business performance and affect other business stakeholders (Hamad, 2016). Researchers needed to contribute to family business strategies involving succession by understanding the decision-making process when owners were navigating the uncertainty when the incumbent made his or her exit from the family business (Roundy, Harrison, Khavul, Pérez-Nordtvedt, & McGee, 2017).

Tsai, Lin, Lin, Lu, and Nugroho (2017) cautioned that the family decision-maker might encounter uncertainties from both business and non-business environments. These uncertainties made the decision-making process more challenging than for a nonfamily

organization. As the discussion among researchers continues, results may provide more insight into family businesses and focus on successful succession strategies. The goal of this study was to further theoretical understanding of family-owned funeral business and its dynamics regarding the intergenerational transition.

Transition

Section 1 provided the foundation for the research study and a background for understanding succession planning and the lack of strategies for family-owned funeral businesses regarding intergenerational transitions. The primary objective of Section 1 was to introduce the study, background of the problem, problem statement, and the nature of the study. The review of the literature provided a basis for describing, evaluating, and synthesizing family succession literature by integrating the cognitive dimensions using game theory as a conceptual framework.

Section 2 contains a discussion of the methodology and design that was used to evaluate successful strategies used by successful family-owned businesses during succession. I discuss in this section the requirements for the study participants and population sampling methods related to this study criterion for data collection. The details for data collection include the management and storage of data to ensure congruence with the research question and goal of the study. Finally, Section 2 ends with a discussion concerning reliability and validity to ensure quality standards comply with doctoral research.

In Section 3, I provide a discussion on the presentation of the findings related to the literature and subject. Besides the interviews, the section contains a discussion of data analysis relating to the research question and implications for social change as well as recommendations for further study. Lastly, Section 3 ends with reflections during the doctoral study journey and conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

A qualitative case study approach was appropriate for examining successful succession strategies in family-owned businesses. The following sections include the additional components necessary for the study. The components are as follows: purpose statement, the role of the researcher, the research method and design, population, and sampling of data. Other elements introduced in this section are the data collection instruments, techniques and analysis, reliability, and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that successful family-owned funeral business owners use for intergenerational succession planning. The population included three funeral home business owners within the Eastern US. This population was appropriate for this study because funeral homes owned by families or individuals provide 86% of funeral business in the U.S. while 14% of funeral business is corporate-owned (NFDA, 2017). The implications for social change might serve other similar incumbent business owners by providing new knowledge concerning succession strategies. The results may support planning for generational sustainability and benefits for their communities through needed services and employment.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative interview brings responsibility as the instrument for data collection (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). Serving as the instrument of data collection as the researcher has the advantage of being on the inside; the purpose is to bring understanding and the ability to establish intimacy, which might promote truthfulness from the participants (Yin, 2016). Mertens (2015) argued other responsibilities for a researcher included relevant aspects of self, personal bias and assumptions, expectations, and experiences based on the researcher's ability to conduct the research.

According to Camfield, Duvendack, and Palmer-Jones (2014), bias is prevalent in qualitative research because the researcher may tend to see a pattern where none exists. Multiple cognitive and behavioral biases is a standard in all forms of research (Camfield et al.). As the researcher, being in the funeral industry made me aware of bias during the research; therefore, I discussed the necessary steps used to mitigate preconceived notions that could affect the results of the data.

Furthermore, individuals could make assumptions about events he or she remembered about vivid occurrences without clarification (Camfield et al., 2014). The researcher should be cognizant of *experimenter bias*, which specifies that he or she might have an attachment to a specific theory, therefore discounting other plausible arguments (Camfield et al.). The goal was to evaluate the data as objectively as possible and draw conclusions based on the evidence.

A semistructured interview form was used to mitigate bias in the study. As the researcher for this study, using a detailed journal was necessary to record progress during the research process, and interview details were recapped with the study participants to clarify ambiguous information. I maintained the confidentiality of the participants during the research process, which included the data collection, data cleaning, and dissemination of research results.

As the researcher, I was responsible for collecting, analyzing, and reporting findings and conclusions derived from multiple resources. During the study, I was accountable for the review of literature based on existing knowledge, research method and design, and the selection of participants. Researching the quality of resources closely related to the topic should increase reliability giving credibility to conclusions (Patton, 2015).

Furthermore, Yilmaz (2013) argued that researchers needed to state the epistemological and theoretical foundations of the study to ensure good quality research. As part of the research, I used in-depth investigation based on the method of inquiry to generate insights into the presence of the phenomena and whether it was relevant to the potential theoretical perspective. The author advised that existing theoretical concepts may not underlie the existence of a phenomenon (Yilmaz, 2013).

Bettis et al. (2014) suggested the research study, methods, and techniques needed to be done appropriately by using good judgment, while Denscombe (2014) had argued that good sense and experience of the researcher be indicative of the sampling process.

According to Padgett (2016), sound judgment in the qualitative research included awareness and acknowledgment of error.

A key objective of this study was reviewing the literature based on other researchers who had conducted sampling under similar conditions and be aware of limitations. However, the limited sample size would not necessarily invalidate the findings (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Yu, Abrizah, and Saadat (2014) suggested by choosing a data collection protocol to ensure that participants involved in relevant activities coincided with an appropriate phase of the study and accommodate research constraints. The establishment of a systematic, transparent process might be necessary to allow the reader to judge whether the research method selected and decisions made during the data collection were reasonable (Meyrick, 2006).

An interview process with a semistructured approach using open-ended questions allows for soliciting responses and development of ideas while providing flexibility (Edwards & Holland, 2013). As the interviewer, using this approach facilitated the ability to probe topics and understand the lived experience and meanings that were relevant to the research objectives. A one-on-one voice recorded personal interview helped to capture responses and controlled the interview process.

The semistructured interviews and interview questions for each participant were in the same order listed in the interview Protocol (Appendix B). The interview protocol provides a systematic, comprehensive, and balanced approach for interviewing (Castillo-

Díaz & Padilla, 2013). The questions were prepared ahead of time to support a competent interview.

As part of the moral responsibility to the participants of the study, being aware of critical ethical issues was necessary to proceed with the study. Protecting the study participant's privacy was of the utmost importance. To conduct a highly professional study required maintaining a level of respect, care, and attention that the participants expected. The principles of respect, benevolence, and justice in the Belmont Report (1979) requires the participants understand the intent of the research and its potential risks or benefits, and that he or she voluntarily consented to participate in the study (United States Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 1979).

The Belmont Report (1979) establishes the gold standard definition of biomedical research ethics as it defined the three ethical principles which protected the rights and well-being of individual research participants. The first principle refers to individual autonomy, which is respect for persons, meaning an individual should be treated as an autonomous agent and must have sufficient information about the study. Potential participants were able to decide whether they wanted to participate independently. The show of respect included the participant's viewpoint about the study.

The second principle is beneficence and nonmaleficence and is required so the researcher could maximize benefits and minimize harm to research participants. As a researcher, I ensured the individuals' well-being by carefully considering the risk-benefit ratio of participation. Finally, the third principle is justice or the fairness principle which

requires that researchers equitably distribute the risks and benefits associated with research across society (HHS, 1979; Mikesell, Bromley, & Khodyakov, 2013). I obtained Walden University's IRB approval number 05-24-18-0171069 and addressed each principle during the research study.

Each potential participant was sent an email invitation stating the specifics of the study and requested his or her participation to include the researcher's contact information. (see Appendix A). Confidentiality was assured, and answering any questions regarding the study was either through email or telephonically. The participants were made aware of their ability to withdraw at any point in time during the interview. Once all signed informed consents were received, the interviews were scheduled. I informed the participants all data collected would be secured, encrypted on a hard drive for 5 years. After 5 years, I would erase all data upon expiration.

There was no personal relationship, nor did I have professional associations where there are supervisory power influences over the participants or as the researcher. The specified characteristics of participants were necessary to answer the research question to meet the goals of this study. The topic of family-owned business succession strategies was the area of interest because my having been in the funeral industry serving the community for over 40 years.

The funeral business is a loyalty-based business; therefore, with the change in demographics, the business owner faces a decrease in his or her client base (Bunch-Lyons, 2015). Large corporations continue to acquire small family-owned funeral

businesses (Tamakloe, 2015). The interview process was aimed to collect sufficient information-rich data that would contribute to social change. The family business owners that lacked successful strategies might benefit from the success of small business owners who have effectively transitioned their family-owned funeral business beyond the first generation.

The credibility, authenticity, and integrity of the study were crucial. Because this study involved emergent codes, themes, and concepts, it was essential to mitigate bias, personal values, and judgment. Bracketing may be necessary to set aside any preference, bracketing being the process of minimizing one's own bias and influence during the research process (Chan et al., 2013).

To mitigate bias, as the researcher, a reflective journal was maintained throughout the process of analysis to provide a measure of distance and bracketing of assumptions served to reduce bias. Bernauer (2015) recommended implementing an oral coding technique, which facilitated traditional methods by transforming qualitative data to promote more authenticity and trustworthiness of findings. According to Bernauer, listening to voice recordings over several days at a time and rereading interview notes helps the researcher gain knowledge and reflect on what was heard and not heard.

Participants

The family-owned small business funeral home owners were the focus of this multiple case study. The population for this study consisted of three business owners, active and retired, who had successfully transitioned their business beyond the first

generation. Research participants came from a population of small family-owned funeral businesses in the Eastern U. S. region.

The selection of participants was critical to this study; therefore, the source for recruitment came from the membership of the NFDA and Nomis Publications from which a list of funeral homes located throughout the US. The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA, 2017) identified several funeral homes in the Eastern region as having succeeded beyond the first generation. Algozzine and Hancock (2016) recommended that participants for a study should have knowledge and opinions to provide insight regarding the research question.

To gain access and availability of the participants, I used the Nomis directory, NFDA website, and social media to call or obtain the email address of participants to obtain scheduling after IRB approval. I traveled to the selected funeral homes to conduct face-to-face interviews with several participants in their natural environment. However, I considered other alternate methods for interviews, such as Face Time and Skype because of scheduling conflicts. Online interviews have emerged in qualitative research, by helping a researcher improve in methodological understanding and the use of online interviews in qualitative research (Silverman, 2016).

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) recommended the researcher establish ground rules for a study with multiple participants. Bell (2014) claimed that ground rules reduced the possibility of conflict before the interview process. Another objective for the researcher was to develop a relationship through interactions with the interviewee to

encourage dialogue. I employed a biographical approach using the following strategies to encourage a working relationship: (a) maintained engagement with the respondent; (b) kept track of questions for further probing; (c) repeated back answers to show respondent that I was listening; (d) showed warmth, attentiveness, and humor when necessary; (e) and maintained ethical sensitivity.

I gave each interviewee the purpose and intent of the research study to clarify any questions before the interview. Obtaining consent from participants for anonymity and confidentiality was a priority to ensure privacy. After the interview process, I followed up with participants using member checking to confirm the accuracy and appropriateness of the interview.

Research Method and Design

The three possible methods for research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Mertens, 2015). According to Yilmaz (2013), qualitative and quantitative are the two major approaches to research appropriate for the study of the social and the individual world. De Massis et al. (2014) argued that family business research required a combination of perspectives and triangulation through multiple levels of analysis. Qualitative studies continue to make essential contributions to family business research providing strong, rich stories about family dynamics (Evert et al., 2016).

Research Method

A qualitative method is an approach for this study because the research involved interactions of subjects in everyday life, which required examination in detail (Yin,

2016). The focus of this study specified a phenomenon and its meaning for the participants involved, and the processes that occurred in this setting made this method suitable for the small family business owners in the funeral industry. A qualitative research method was designed to study complex issues, specifically for this study, the business problem relating to small business owners who lacked strategies concerning intergenerational succession.

A qualitative method allows the researcher to have flexibility and enabled the researcher to have an open mind while investigating the phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The role of the researcher is to understand the phenomena from the perspective of the participants while seeking answers as to the what, how, and why questions regarding quality instead of the amount, quantity, intensity, or frequency (Yilmaz, 2013). A qualitative approach also allows the researcher to measure the quality of something versus a quantity (Yin, 2014).

A quantitative approach is not suitable because qualitative findings are significantly prolonged, more detailed, and unpredictable in content (Descombe, 2014). A quantitative method could be used to determine whether a result was causally related to one or more variables, and to what extent they are described using a deductive approach and predetermined sets of standardized responses based on theory (Yilmaz, 2013). However, for this study, using a quantitative method would not provide insight into the participants' individual or personal experiences; therefore, the respondents would not

have an opportunity to describe his or her feelings, thoughts, frames of reference, and experiences resulting in limitations for the study.

Mixed methods research combines both qualitative and quantitative methods, which could be beneficial if applied by a skilled researcher (Bryman, 2015). A mixed method could provide an advantage to address broad complex issues (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Although mixed methods with a quantitative component could be a viable choice to provide stronger credibility for the findings, time constraints and cost would not make this a good fit for the study.

Research Design

A case study design is considered a flexible method which can produce background information about an issue (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). The case study design is characterized as an empirical inquiry to explore real-life situations to answer exploratory or descriptive research questions such as how or what (Yin, 2014). The objective of this particular research design was to align with the research questions and purpose of the study.

There are several approaches, such as ethnographic, narrative, or phenomenological design to explore the research question (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). An ethnographic case study is to observe day-to-day interactions including patterns of behaviors, culture, and customs within groups. Ethnographic design requires the researcher to immerse him or herself in the research, and the results included perceptions and interpretations from both the researcher and participants (Hancock & Algozzine,

2017). Ethnography would be ideal for targeting the specific culture regarding the funeral industry; however, this study was not a good fit due to time constraints and possible financial hardship for the researcher.

A narrative approach consists of biographical themes and patterns reflecting on an individual's life for historical and archival purposes; therefore, this design does not align with this study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). A phenomenological design aims at capturing the experiences of individuals from their perspectives while uncovering themes of invariant structures or underlying meanings based on those experiences; however, this design would not allow for empirical generalizations (van Manen, 2016). Therefore, a phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study.

To explore successful strategies for family business owners required an in-depth examination through the lens of the participants. De Massis et al. (2014) proposed that a case study design could be relevant to family business research because the family business exists between two systems, family, and business. According to Yin (2014), a case study would be the standard research design among business practitioners.

Because a case study is considered a flexible method design, multiple case studies were employed to produce background information concerning successful strategies related to intergenerational succession planning. A multiple case study design supports the researcher's ability to examine the data within a specific context (Yin, 2014). According to Stake (2013), a group of four to ten case studies would be beneficial for a multiple case study.

Multiple case studies provide a broader exploration of the research question and conceptual framework evolution (Yin, 2014). The primary objective of this multiple case study design was to explore the unique patterns of successful strategies that family business owners use to transition beyond one generation to the next. The chosen design was to provide a deeper understanding of the strategies regarding successful successions.

Choosing a multiple case study was an attempt to understand any similarities and differences among the strategies business owners employ. Both elements may be essential in generating new knowledge through the processes of comparison and contrast (Palinkas et al., 2015). The researcher's ability to understand the phenomena based on those similarities and differences facilitated in the generation of evidence, which provided a significant contribution to research.

Case studies require multiple lines of evidence from numerous resources to support external validity (Stake, 2013). Part of the research required data collection from numerous sources of information; these included written documentation, interviews, observations, and audio recordings with permission from the targeted population of family business owners in the funeral industry. As a multiple case study design, the sample needs to be structured around the context and not the participants themselves (Ritchie et al., 2014).

Although study designs differ, the general rules regarding data saturation should have enough information to replicate the study and no new data, themes, and coding was feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Hammarberg, Kirkman, and de Lacey (2016) argued a

correlation needed to exist between adequate sampling and attaining saturation. In other words, that depth, as well as breadth, of information contribute to saturation. The research design should be crafted to deliver coherency and effectiveness to meet the requirements for a study (Thorne, 2016).

The purpose of the central research question and interview questions is to develop clustering themes, codes, and patterns to collect rich, quality data (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). Bendassolli (2013) suggested classifying and categorizing data into categories for the organization and conceptual development. The same interview questions among the participants for data collection were necessary to ensure data saturation.

Population and Sampling

Purposeful sampling is appropriate for a case study because the number of case studies was less significant than the criteria for selection (Yin, 2014). Sampling refers to specific data sources from which data was collected to approach the research objectives (Gentles, Charles, Poeg, & McKibbon, 2015). Sampling should be consistent with the aims and assumptions inherent in the use of the qualitative method (Palinkas et al., 2015).

An applicable sample was composed of participants who best represented or had knowledge of the research subject. Yin (2014) argued two or more case examples are adequate to meet the research objectives; however, the selection of participants based on criteria was at the discretion of the researcher. The criterion for the population sample

was an incumbent family business owner (past or present) in the funeral industry selected purposefully to yield cases that were information rich.

Family-owned funeral businesses identified as resources for sampling were in the Eastern region of the United States. A purposeful sampling strategy included family historical documentation, events, and experiences which emerged to identify conceptual boundaries and relevance of categories. However, as a researcher, providing full details is essential; otherwise, purposeful sampling would be difficult for the reader to judge the trustworthiness of sampling (Elo et al., 2014).

An objective of the researcher was to ensure the sampling process was consistent with the research method and design. A family-owned business for this study was described using the following demographic characteristics: (a) funeral establishment; (b) age of the business establishment; (c) past or present owner of the family-owned funeral business, and (d) number of succeeding generations. As the researcher, I also identified strengths and weaknesses that affected the number of interviews required to achieve saturation. Some of the causes could be due to sampling procedures, the quality of the interview, and the researcher's experience level.

For the sampling process, a researcher uses literature reviews based on previous studies with similar methodology to cite problems, designs, and recommendations by noted scholars (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi (2017) noted that saturation in qualitative research was an indicator of an

adequate sample size. According to Hennink et al., the meaning of saturation remains ambiguous in practice.

The sampling strategy involved the identification and selection of the participants, succession experience, and willingness to participate. The semistructured interview with four participants answering all the questions and following the interviews, I did a recap of the critical points with the participants. The use of member checking resulted in redundancy that provided rich data to achieve saturation.

Edwards and Holland (2013) suggested a modification or the addition of cases to the sample set could be necessary as the analysis of data progressed to achieve theoretical saturation, which occurred when no further issues or insights emerged from data, and all relevant conceptual categories were identified, explored, and exhausted. However, during the coding process, the sample size might need to be increased to collect additional data for redundancy of information (Saldaña, 2016). Patton (2015) specified that purposeful sampling of information-rich cases could teach a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry. The choice of a sampling strategy required the researcher to construct a comprehensive understanding concerning family business owners and their strategies for intergenerational succession planning.

According to Padgett (2016), there might be a possibility that sampling would change in response to the needs of the study. The author recommended the researcher to keep in mind not to sacrifice depth for the breadth of the research. Therefore, as the researcher, it was vital that I maintained flexibility when pursuing sampling goals.

The data collection process needs to include a strategy, which establishes a climate of comfort and trust; the process enables the participants to construct biographical family history and express their thoughts and ideas to generate rich data (Kornbluh, 2015). The interview questions should be fact-based so that the participants could answer *what* and *how* questions that facilitated dialogue, storytelling, and follow-ups to strategic verbal and non-verbal clues guiding the interview (Tracy, 2013).

Ethical Research

Ethics provide moral principles which govern standards of conduct in research and other disciplines (Resnik, 2015). These rules of ethics also referred to as standards, which assist members of a particular discipline to coordinate their actions or activities, establishing the public's trust based on those standards. Ethical norms provide goals for research which include the individuals who conduct scientific research or other scholarly or creative activities (Resnik, 2015).

The ethical norms of the research are to not only to provide autonomy but also to be transparent, accountable, and honest in communicating methods, procedures, data, results, and publication status (Resnik, 2015). As the researcher, I did not fabricate, falsify, or misrepresent data. The notion of accountability and transparency provided insight into fulfilling data requirements and expectations in various circumstances (Mayernik, 2017).

As part of the research process, a researcher should remain objective by avoiding bias in experimental design, data analysis, data interpretation, peer review, and other

aspects of research (Resnik, 2015). I avoided or minimized bias or self-deception. Resnik noted that having respect by giving authors credit for their intellectual property was critical to the research.

During research activities, it was essential to maintain proper records to include data collection, research design, journals, and correspondence of the funeral businesses. The need to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the businesses and participants was of the utmost importance. The participants received an informed consent form, which was a full disclosure document explaining the purpose of the study, the interview procedure, a confidential clause, and statement of consent for participants.

According to Bell (2014), the consent form reduces legal liability for the researcher by indicating that participation is voluntary and the participant is allowed to withdraw at any time before or during the interview. To avoid any hint of coercion, I did not offer incentives for participation and gave each participant time to read through the form and answer as many questions about consent as she or he needed to ask.

If the participant did not wish to sign the consent form, I did not conduct the interview or attempt to compel them to grant consent. I politely thanked the individual for their time, left them contact information, the consent form, and information about the study. Sappleton (2013) argued that it is the responsibility of the researcher to allow each participant the option to change their mind and reschedule for an interview if possible.

It was crucial, as the researcher to guarantee confidentiality and privacy. The names of participants and the businesses were fictional to maintain confidentiality. I

redacted information where applicable. Each funeral home business was assigned a number to replace the funeral home identity, and the participants were assigned an alphabetical letter to ensure confidentiality and privacy.

To ensure security from unauthorized access, all data, records, and files, including informed consent forms and interview recordings, were stored on a flash drive that was password-protected. I will store the password-protected flash drive for the next 5 years after completion of the study. After the 5 years, erasing the magnetic hard drives of all password-protected drives, consent forms, interview recordings, and transcribed data will be destroyed.

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher serves as an instrument of data collection (Collins & Cooper, 2016). The primary data source was the interviews, which were conducted using semistructured, open-ended questions. Interview questions facilitate the interviewees to construct reality by pondering situations that provided rich data and not just answers to the specific questions (Yin, 2014). The goal was to collect data relevant to answering the research question.

In addition to the interview process, McGovern (2016) recommended the data collection process should incorporate a range of data, including secondary sources of evidence. Examples of secondary sources are direct observations, documents, succession plans, and audiovisual materials. Padgett (2016) proposed using visual images to elicit

responses from participants because people process images before spoken or written language. The use of visual images was applied to the study to develop typologies.

As a first-time qualitative researcher, implementation of an interview protocol guide (see Appendix B) was essential in data collection. The purpose of the interview protocol is to facilitate the interview process for the researcher, the acknowledgment of participants' rights, the interview guidelines, and a timeline (Bell, 2014). The interview protocol includes a script for the researcher before the interview and, after the interview, a prompt to ensure the interviewer had collected informed consent (Josselson, 2013).

Ritchie et al. (2014) argued that the researcher was required to decide the best ways of collecting data in the research setting to permit meaningful and insightful comparisons. Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014) recommended that an interviewer should research the knowledge of the indigenous community's customs, practices, beliefs, and anything analogous to the family business when designing the interview. Miles et al. (2014) suggested an appropriate physical location for the interview process would be a professional business environment away from where the participants managed their day-to-day business operations, events, processes, and procedures.

Collins and Cooper (2016) argued a researcher was an intricate part of the context of a qualitative study; therefore, it was essential to develop an understanding of the study. Collins and Cooper also claimed researchers needed to have a high level of aptitude and emotional intelligence (EI) and characterized EI as the ability to monitor and regulate feelings which helped guide thought and action using five essential competencies: self-

awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. As the instrument of data collection, the researcher's level of EI aided in becoming familiar with and understanding the norms, values, and culture of the participants.

Secondary data collection resources such as business documentation, family historical artifacts, literature reviews, textbooks, and journals provided details relevant to the topic of successful strategies and the research methodology. The collection of secondary sources proves to be important in the exploratory phase of the research to help answer the research question (Bendassolli, 2013). Reuse of previous qualitative data from archived repositories and published citations provide an opportunity to study the raw materials of past research projects to gain methodological and substantive insights (Bishop & Kuula-Luumi, 2017).

As a qualitative researcher, it was necessary to evaluate the quality of the research. Scientific rigor required various strategies to enhance the credibility of the research (Kornbluh, 2015). The application of a methodological triangulation using primary and secondary data sources is critical as a means of cross-referencing to increase the credibility of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The implementation of member checking is another tool for identifying bias and misunderstanding for the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Member checking allows the researcher to ask the participants to edit, clarify, elaborate, and at times, delete their words from the transcripts which ensured the reliability of the research findings (Bryman,

2015). Member checking also ensured that the participants understood the purpose of this study.

Data Collection Technique

Triangulation of evidence from multiple sources is necessary for validating that the study's finding is robust (Yin, 2014). Individual interviews and focus group interviews represent two of the most effective ways to collect data in qualitative research studies because these allow the researcher to capture the voices of participants (Ritchie et al., 2014). Utilizing semistructured interviews as a means to collect the data collection enabled me to obtain insight into the routine and challenging experiences as well as the meanings attached to experiences lived by the participants.

Semistructured interviews were used to keep the theme of the research but follow-up questions were utilized to confirm and clarify information. Interviews represent the most common way of collecting data in qualitative research studies; this included verbal and nonverbal data during the interview process (Silverman, 2016). According to Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014), 93% of humans communicate nonverbally, while 7% of communication is verbal.

Hopefully, I was able to identify and evaluate the necessary skills and knowledge base for strengths and weaknesses for the interview process. Open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B) and use of a script were essential to facilitating a successful study. The role of the researcher is to present the interview questions and filter

subjectivity and address the central research question for this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Online interviews in real-time, which included visual contact, was a possibility to save time for this study. The advantage is to avoid costs and inconvenience for both parties (Denscombe, 2014). The goal was to conduct a face-to-face interview; however, an on-site interview required the interviewer to schedule an appointment. The on-site interview became a challenge to the researcher because each participant had to find time in his or her schedule, which was sometimes beyond the control of the researcher.

The interview questions were structured to facilitate asking multiple participants the same questions. The interview process was an estimated 50 to 60 minutes. Otherwise, the researcher may not be able to achieve data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saturating data ensures replication in categories and sustains transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability (Akaeze & Akaeze, 2016).

Supplemental data should provide clarity and understanding to corroborate the collected data (Tight, 2017). In the case of this study, secondary sources of data including, pictures, artifacts, biographical, and historical records provided by each funeral business were used to supplement the interviews and observations. A rigorous and ethical approach to data collection was employed.

Data recording included noting the method used to contact potential respondents, the number of times, and location. Other information collected was the number of people approached for the study and the number of individuals that participated. Merriam and

Tisdell (2015) suggested it might be necessary for the researcher to adjust during the interview process to allow for the design of the study to emerge in the research. Ritchie et al. (2014) proposed the researcher should oscillate between testing emergent theories and collecting data that would allow the theory and data collection to inform each other.

I provided the information collected from the different participants, different locations, and different circumstances; therefore, audio recordings of the interviews transcribed and copies to participants via email. Member checking was used to ensure the accuracy of interviews with participants. I did not receive any recommendations from the participants regarding their transcriptions.

Data Organization Technique

The data should be organized as it was gathered so that the stages of data analysis were integrated into making comparisons and identifying differences (Ritchie et al., 2014). The organization of the data included the preparatory phase, the organization phase, and reporting phase. To ensure the trustworthiness of the content analysis, Elo et al. (2014) recommended starting by selecting the best data collection method to answer the research question.

I aimed to organize the data to achieve consistency. Therefore, the preparatory phase consisted of data collection method, sampling strategy, and the selection of interviews, observations, journals, photographs, other written documents, and memos as a combination of various methods. The collection of data allowed me to identify recurrent

themes, categories, observe patterns, and identify related themes to answer the research question.

The organization phase provided details regarding the concepts or categories created to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. By using data, triangulation allowed me to compare information obtained with the literature reviews relating to previous studies. The reporting phase introduced the findings, which included the limitations and recommendations of the study.

Data collection is an ongoing iterative activity and a critical aspect of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data organization aided the researcher in exploring the personal meanings of crucial moments by examining facets such as speech mannerisms, non-verbal communication habits, and valuable points of cultural knowledge (Saldaña, 2016). The transcription of the data facilitated the identification of patterns, developed explanations, and typologies.

A preliminary analytic step was to map context, meanings, and processes to establish themes and categories. The analytical phase produces detailed descriptions and understandings from the perspective of the participants (Ritchie et al., 2014). Watkins (2017) recommended the use of appropriate tools to organize, reduce, and analyze data.

The use of a database is considered practical for indexing, organizing, and annotating field notes, transcripts, archival documents, reflexive journal entries, and other materials relevant to the study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016; Saldaña, 2016; Silver & Lewins, 2014). The implementation of a strategy to index documents is appropriate for

organizing the data for transparency, perusal, auditing and cross-referencing with other sources related to the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Computer-aided software for qualitative research facilitates transcribing interview text, graphics, audio, and visual material (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Using computer-aided tools helps streamline the data process and assisted in the preparation of a clear and organized presentation (Watkins, 2017).

The organization of a researcher's ideas is critical in analytical work, regardless of the methodology (Silver & Lewins, 2014). All data relevant to the study were kept strictly confidential. The data collection abided by compliance with the requirement of keeping the data on an encrypted password-protected computer hard drive for 5 years, with a backup file to mitigate the risk of data loss. After 5 years and according to University protocol, all data relevant to this study would be shredded, erased, and or incinerated, depending on the material source.

Data Analysis

Miles et al. (2014) suggested that data analysis should begin with organized record keeping and monitoring of notations during the study. The use of inductive exploration of the data allows the researcher to identify emerging themes, patterns, or concepts and then describe and interpret those categories (Nassaji, 2015). The analysis should include not only the procedural steps, but also decisions concerning ways to manage the data, the analysis operations involved, preliminary conclusions to which the investigation led, and any concluding comments (Miles et al., 2014).

The semistructured questions of the participants were organized using the same questions and in the same order to enable coding of the text based on relevance. The goal was to validate the findings through multiple case studies of the generational business owners. The data collected from the semistructured interviews may fill a gap in family business knowledge about succession strategies and issues the participants expressed through observations, perceptions, and reactions from the lived experiences.

By achieving empirical saturation, the results should be analyzed with existing literature using interpretative reasoning (Meier & Schier, 2016). The use of the computer-aided software assisted in categorizing themes, interpretation of results and presentation of data to answer the research question. Qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, is a well-established tool used to support data analysis (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2015).

The NVivo software facilitates the analysis of raw data collected from interviews to identify themes and clusters based on each participant's experience (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Syed and Nelson (2015) suggested an extensive list of codes may be required for an inductive generation to search for key themes informed by existing literature on the subject. NVivo provided a modeling tool which allowed the researcher to map concepts, patterns, and relationships to clarify the research question.

The visualization tools within NVivo helped to provide the ability to understand the triangulation of data using interviews transcriptions from audio recordings,

participant observations, historical pictures, biographical documents, and journaling into categorizing into themes. By applying the triangulation of data as a strategy for validation, is an approach to the generalization of analyses, and a route to further knowledge (Flick, 2004). Finally, coding queries derived from the literature reviews assisted in linking relationships to the data analysis establishing a pattern. Overall, the goal was to construct emergent themes, decontextualize, and reconceptualize through transcribed recordings, direct observations, existing literature, and the conceptual framework, game theory by providing consistency from the various patterns to determine whether the research was credible.

The introduction and explanation of the results were essential in producing a coherent and meaningful understanding of what strategies the family-owned funeral business owners used for intergenerational succession planning. Therefore, presenting clear descriptions using transcription and coding yielded insight. Hopefully, this would assist the reader in understanding what assumptions I used to form the analysis.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the dependability and consistency reflected when the research findings are replicated or duplicated (Morse, 2015). However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintained that dependability occurred over time through observation and under varying conditions. Funder et al. (2014) argued that research studies could be impossible to replicate, therefore, to avoid questionable

research practices, the researcher used appropriate analytic strategies, share data, and complete reporting of results.

The application of the triangulation of data and other resources provides the researcher with a broader picture and an understanding of the phenomena (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017). An in-depth interview using the interview protocol (Appendix B) throughout the research process served to address dependability and credibility. The semistructured interview questions allowed for flexibility to raise questions during the interview based on the interviewees' responses; the follow-ups provided depth in the responses to ensure trustworthiness. The implementation of member checking with the interviewees was to capture the meanings of their lived experiences correctly.

Validity

Chen (2017) described validity as to the degree to which evidence, either empirical or theoretical, supported the interpretation of the data. The criteria for validity included member checking, audit trail, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and disconfirming evidence (Lub, 2015). Chen argued that the application of validity procedures of qualitative inquiry required an investment of time and energy.

According to the literature, there was no universally accepted terminology and criteria used to evaluate qualitative research. Elo et al. (2014) noted that it was essential to report how the results developed. The criterion determined the findings to be valid or generalizable. Credibility, transferability, and confirmability establish the trustworthiness of study findings (Morse, 2015).

In qualitative research, credibility is related to the affirmation of valuable and believable study results (Noble & Smith, 2015). The credibility of the researcher is vitally important in qualitative research since he or she was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis during the study (Denscombe, 2014). I enhanced credibility using strategic methods such as member checks, triangulation of the data, peer debriefing, and examinations from previous literature.

Member checking with the participants as reiterated was necessary to enhance the study's credibility through the reaffirmation of the participants' interview to confirm answers. The application of triangulation of various data collected allows for greater confidence to reduce unforeseeable associations and biases due to specific methods (Lub, 2015). I employed peer debriefing to enable peers and academic professionals to scrutinize the study, offer feedback, and challenge assumptions. Finally, literature from previous studies that were related to strategies about intergenerational succession was used to find commonalities and evidence to strengthen validity.

Transferability or external validity is the generalizability of a study's results which includes rich descriptions of participants, contexts, and attributes (Lub, 2015). Furthermore, high external validity is desirable because conclusions from a study can be applied to situations beyond the immediate context, increasing the scope of a theory's prediction and control (Brigham, Lumpkin, Payne, & Zachary, 2014). The goal was to provide ample data for another researcher to duplicate this study. Although the authors

offered suggestions about transferability, according to Elo et al. (2014), it is the reader's discretion as to if the reported results could transfer to another context.

Confirmability of the data parallels objectivity, which includes a level of accuracy, meaning, and integrity of the research results as verified or endorsed by others (Elo et al., 2014). Yin (2014) argued that using an audit trail consisting of journals and other documentation during the study allowed others to observe the step-by-step procedures. As the researcher, I used data triangulation methods, which involved the use of multiple sources for data collection, including semistructured interviews, audio files, archival and other company documents, and reflective journal records. Triangulation enables the researcher to explore the same phenomenon from different angles and perspectives, which ensured the validity of the study findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

The goal was to have a relevant number of case studies to provide sufficient data to ensure meaningful saturation. Collecting data and analyzing them simultaneously until no new information emerged was the guiding process for achieving data saturation. Although data saturation was complicated, the final study included the process of assessing saturation.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 of this study established the purpose of this study, identified the role of the researcher, and included a description of the participants. I further discussed and elaborated the rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology and multiple cases study design over other methods and designs. This section included descriptions of the (a)

population, (b) sampling technique, (c) ethics, (d) data collection, (e) data organization, (f) data analysis, and (g) reliability and validity.

Section 3 consists of an in-depth discussion of the findings of the completed research and the importance of the results to professional practice. The discussion in Section 3 also addresses the aspects of social change, recommendations for actions and further study, and reflections. The research concludes with limitations and suggestions for future studies.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies used by funeral home business owners related to succession having transferred their businesses to the next generation. Section 3 includes the presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections of the study, and study conclusions. The findings include six themes: (a) family succession value, (b) theoretic game, (c) game players, (d) strategies, (e) payoff rewards, and (f) outcomes, as well as correlating themes to the literature related to the succession process.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies family-owned funeral business owners used for intergenerational succession planning. From the literature, the succession process had a different meaning among family business owners, which may be the reason that the literature indicated succession rates have not changed from generation to generation. The literature confirmed that succession strategies had become a focus of attention in the study of family businesses because the rate of survival beyond the second generation was approximately 15% and a third generation was less than 3% (Bozer et al., 2017). The aim is to bring awareness concerning intergenerational succession strategies through the lens of an incumbent business owner.

Examining the successful strategies related to intergenerational succession may prove to be socially relevant to the family business owner, based on his or her intentions regarding succession planning. The decision to succeed to the next generation does require an understanding of factors which influence those decisions since the literature had suggested that succession depended on the actions of others. Furthermore, the incumbent must be willing to select and mentor a successor for the business to continue.

A multiple case study design was selected to draw on the experiences of specific family-owned funeral business owners regarding those successful strategies to answer the research question. Yin (2017) argued a multiple case study could be more compelling mainly if the theory was subtle or desired more certainty. Therefore, an assumption was made to reduce the amount of uncertainty by collecting applicable data relevant to the study.

During the study, there was an emphasis on the components instrumental to family-owned business succession strategies with a focus on the incumbent's and successor's intent regarding succession. By using the conceptual framework of game theory as a guide could lead to what strategies influenced the incumbent and successor's decision to pursue his or her interests rationally and possible outcome based on their choices (Colman, 2013). Stirling and Felin (2016) characterized rationality based on behavior from a social perspective, which might include human intentions such as cooperation, compromise, and altruism, or antisocial motives to include conflict, meanness, and manipulation.

The study included six semistructured interview questions (see Appendix B) concerning successful strategies. The researcher's objective was to identify successful strategies by drawing on those experiences based on the interview questions, the research question, and central themes from the literature review. The results of this study included the successful strategies that family-owned funeral business owners used for intergenerational succession.

Presentation of the Findings

This research study sought to answer the following question: what strategies do the family-owned funeral business owners use for intergenerational succession planning? The objective of the study was to seek insight into the interactions of the incumbent and whether his or her intentions led to successful strategies that supported funeral business intergenerational succession. After seeking IRB approval, a search through the National Funeral Directors (NFDA) website and Nomis Publications was utilized to seek the necessary participants for this study.

Although the process of searching became a bit time-consuming, it was necessary to target specific funeral businesses to meet the criteria. The website searches identified generational funeral homes based on their websites' historical and biographical information. Invitations (Appendix A) to participate in the study were sent by email through the website contact information link.

The findings derived from the interviews and observations during a two-month period. Approximately 30 invitations (Appendix A) were emailed to funeral

establishments requesting study participation. Other invitations (Appendix A) were sent out through funeral association groups on Facebook, Messenger, and cold calling by telephone using the Nomis Yellow Book directory.

The responses received were very minimal or nonexistent for the first three weeks. Follow-up emails were sent, producing only two solid leads for interviews. Cold calling by telephone resulted in five interview acceptances, but only two confirmed and scheduled an interview. Ultimately, the total number of participants in the case study was four.

The use of the Internet has its advantages sending out invitations, which provides a lower cost, administrative ease, and the potential of reaching a more significant sample; however, not all participants may be computer literate (Hunter, Corcoran, Leeder, & Phelps, 2012). Yin (2018) recommended navigating with caution by setting time limits when using social media to avoid being overwhelmed. A telephone interview is another option, but considered a less attractive alternative to the face-to-face interview (Novick, 2008).

The nature of the funeral business created a challenge in securing face-to-face interviews. The disadvantages of face-to-face interviews included the high cost per participant, geographical and time constraints associated with traveling (Heath, Williamson, Williams, & Harcourt, 2018). Overall, when considering the effect of participating in research, it was essential to acknowledge the potential impact on those involved, including the researcher, because of a lack of training and inexperience, and

possible concerns regarding confidentiality (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2009).

Purposeful sampling for participate selection was necessary to obtain in-depth, information-rich responses. The intent for purposeful sampling used in this study was to provide successful replication contributing to generalizability. Polit and Beck (2010) argued that using concepts, relationships, and patterns, which tend to develop redundancy by interviewing different types of people as they identify with similar human experiences, enhanced generalizability.

The research study aimed to collect data which were representative of the population. Alphabetical codes were used rather than names to identify the individual participants to ensure confidentiality and privacy. All data files were anonymized and securely stored as required.

Six interview questions (see Appendix B) were provided to each participant by email before the actual interview took place. Once the participants acknowledged receipt and emailed agreement, the informed consent was forwarded for signature and returned to the researcher. During the initial interview process, the researcher reminded the participants of confidentiality, no compensation, the ability to opt out of the study, and safeguarding of all research data and materials.

The participants for this study were instrumental in their core businesses and responsible for managing day-to-day business operations. The six open-ended semistructured interview questions facilitated a discussion among the participants based

on the study criteria related to the research question. All direct quotations by participants were utilized to ensure the interpretation of the data directly linked to their words. I asked permission to audio record each session. Each interview with the participants was transcribed verbatim and stored as word documents for analysis.

Qualitative inquiry requires researchers to know credibility techniques well enough to apply and synthesize them to help justify their findings (Laio & Hitchcock, 2018). Member checking is wherein the participant is asked to review the interview transcription to confirm the accuracy of data before coding and analysis, and after the final analysis to validate interpretations of the data (Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller, & Neumann, 2011). Therefore, I employed member checking to clarify the interview responses of the participant to include thoughts, observations, and experiences as confirmation to enhance accuracy, credibility, and validity of this qualitative case study findings.

The interviewees were asked to share experiences by providing successful strategies used regarding succession that might help future and existing family-owned funeral business owners in search of long-term strategies for transitioning to the next generation. The sample size should reach the number of participants sufficient to meet data saturation standards (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation was complete when information became redundant producing no new categories or themes. Overall, the goal was to link these results with the concepts and findings identified in the literature using interpretative reasoning (Bengtsson, 2016).

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Funeral Home Case Study	Year Established	Number of Successions	Gender	Primary Role	Participant
Case 1	1902	5	M/F	Incumbent/Child	A/B
Case 2	1938	4	M	Retired Owner	C
Case 3	1952	3	M	Incumbent	D

Table 2 above represents demographic information regarding the cases in this study. The participants were funeral home incumbents ranging in age from 59 to 74 years. One adult child participated in the interview process. Based on the number of generations of the funeral businesses, the average intergenerational succession occurred every 22.8 years.

Theme 1: Family Succession Values

Santiago (2000) described a smooth succession as not being uniquely dependent on succession planning, but instead on the succession process being consistent with family values. Le Breton-Miller et al. (2004) observed that a successful succession was the achievement of the subsequent positive performance of the business and ultimate sustainability of the business. Beginning with the findings, the participants in this study delineated the value of succession by identifying essential components related to successful intergenerational succession.

The components identified by the participants were governance, management, family, and family legacy. Although the participants mentioned business performance

relative to financial gain, the findings indicated continuity of the business based on the family legacy to be most significant. Stockmans, Lybaert, and Voordeckers (2010) argued that the founder and his or her legacy were central to a business' strategy setting and decision-making processes.

Case studies one and two (A, B, and C) stated the family business strategy for succession required the business to be purchased by the succeeding generation. In case study three (D), a third generationer stated he had expected his sons and daughter to join the business; however, they indicated a lack of interest because of the lack of personal time and the commitment that was vital to the funeral industry. The 24-hour on-call concept of funeral service was not appealing. Participants A and D shared concerns about the inability to take family vacations or the overbearing incumbent from a prior generation.

Based on the interviews, the incumbents' focus was on the younger generation to continue the family legacy that each had built to leave behind as a reminder of, not just the business, but himself. These findings suggested families that assimilated with a legacy might provide a greater understanding of why and when intangible components of wealth such as control, tradition, and social status are highly valued (Carr et al., 2017). The importance of the legacy established that nonfinancial concerns might influence strategic decisions in the family business.

According to the literature, successive generations want the security of the income that comes with grand lifestyle activities, but from the business perspective, Hiebl (2014)

concluded this could pose a threat to family business. Case study one (A) stated the previous generation were riding in nice cars and going to Cancun, while he was stuck working the holidays, overnight calls and weekends, maintaining that was not going to happen for the rest of his life. Ward (2016) proposed that a change in ownership plans require different strategies. However, family members' assumptions and their ownership intentions contoured the components related to business strategy.

Cubico, Togni, and Bellotto (2010) claimed values were the fundamental component of the family business. Ward (2008) described values as an independent driving variable which shaped every dimension of family business management. However, from a family business perspective, Dumas and Blodgett (1999) contended that values answer the question of what was most important to the family, while core values were the deep-seated pervasive standards that influenced almost every aspect of their lives. Dumas and Blodgett also stated that one must include an individual's moral judgments, their responses to others, and their commitments to personal and organizational goals.

From a strategic point of view, the participants indicated specific values were necessary to create the organizational culture of the family business. According to Corbetta and Salvato (2004), values created an overlap between business and family commitment which helped to develop a family business culture. Also, Sharma and Nordqvist (2008) maintained that long sustaining family businesses were the result of a fit between family values and governance structure.

Case study two (C) stated the first generation set ground rules for the family businesses, but in case study one (A and B), the family business held a corporate license which was governed by a family board. Two of the case studies (A and D) stated prior generations made it clear that family members would be involved in the business.

Poza (2013) argued that, inherently, the founder should establish ground rules to set the culture of the business. Neubauer and Lank (2016) agreed that creating a governance system could preserve the culture and values of a business. According to Lee and Chu (2017), family governance aims to facilitate family control, business and sustaining performance.

Meanwhile, the findings suggested that a level of control by previous incumbents might have an association with family values among the family-owned funeral businesses. The findings also revealed the participants did not identify family governance as a strategic objective in sustaining the family-owned business but rather as the purview of overbearing business owners. Carney (2005) argued a family business gained a strategic benefit when they rely on a form of governance based on personalized relationships, family influence and, most importantly, alignment of interests between dominant decision makers who include, most likely, in each of these cases, the business owner.

The participants' backgrounds varied regarding intergenerational succession. Case study one (incumbent A and adult child B) acknowledged they currently work for the family business, established in 1904. Participant B stated, at a younger age, her father

(Participant A) articulated his desire for her and her brother to be a part of the funeral home, but, while she and her brother were required to work in the business, to own it, they had to prove that each could manage the business.

Participant B from case study one, a fifth generationer, had recently decided to join the family business after unsuccessful outside ventures. Although her older sibling had been in the family business for some time, Vera and Dean (2005) argued daughters face difficulties in family business succession because of a general preference for the oldest offspring (regardless of gender) to take over the business. Lambrecht (2005) proposed examples set by parents or siblings usually determine whether the children embraced or rejected the family business.

Meanwhile, case study one (A and B) stressed that being in their family business was not guaranteed. The succession of their business was contingent upon the ability to finance the business from generation to generation. However, studies have shown that debt financing done by one generation could have an impact on future generations (Molly, Laveren, & Deloof, 2017).

Case study two (C) has a family business established in 1938, with the fourth generation now in charge, and case study three (D) established their family-owned business in 1952. Of the three case studies, two case studies (C and D) inherited the family business, although, as mentioned, the third case study (D) did not have offspring working in the business at the time of the interview. Van Aaken et al. (2017) claimed most family-owned business surviving at least two generations are typically sizable and

established, whereas, by the third generation, the interests of the family tend to diverge, weakening the family bond.

Other values mentioned in the three case studies (A, C, and D) spoke to family relationships, socioeconomic wealth, shared experiences, and business performance. During the study, the participants indicated having a positive performance of the family business was necessary for providing the resources to ensure survivability to the next generation. However, the intent of this study was not to examine whether there was a connection between family values and business performance.

From the research, the management of family businesses had significant strategic implications. The literature stated a family business does evolve; therefore, the strategy and the priorities required changing. Furthermore, regarding the managerial processes and structures, the business should attract and develop the leadership of the potential successor, while planning and implementing effective long-term strategies (Aronoff, 2004).

Also, based on the literature, there was still ambiguity surrounding the generational aspect of the ownership structure regarding how it evolved. Le Breton-Miller et al. (2004) claimed it was strategically crucial to determine who might be acceptable as the next suitable successor. Because of the findings, a pattern emerged indicating each successor was nurtured across generations to take over the family-owned funeral business.

According to the findings, the family-owned funeral business succession process was found to be consistent with Le Breton-Miller et al.'s (2004) four main stages: (a) establishing ground rules, (b) nurturing and developing potential successors, (c) selection, and (d) the final hand-off to the chosen successor. The results were consistent with Poza's (2013) description of family culture as it encapsulated the values, beliefs, and governance which influenced how the individual and the business operated when confronted with decisions, choices, opportunities, and risks. Finally, from the research, it became apparent that a repetition of a continuous time interval of succession among the three case studies occurred approximately every 20 to 23 years.

Theme 2: The Game

The game is fundamentally a formal system of rules with varying outcomes depending on values and players' influence according to their behavior resulting in consequences that are optional and transferable (Démuth, 2013). Démuth proposed that strategic decisions based on a situation often result in not knowing how one player would act, assuming all players involved used rational strategies of behavior. Therefore, game theory may determine situations that required negotiations between players.

The case studies presented were intended to research the incumbents' intentions based on his or her strategy regarding succession to the next generation, by providing a model for future decision-making for unsuccessful family-owned funeral home businesses. Game theory is a complex process, but the literature indicated because we live in a world of systems, it can help with various skills that involved systems such as

decision-making and problem-solving. From the findings, the game theory had some implications for a possible framework regarding decisions relative to successful strategies.

Although the game theory was initially related to mathematics, Camerer (2003) argued that mapping social situations to game theory were useful because it helped to know what to look for in strategic interactions to change the game to one's advantage. In the three cases studied, each incumbent had sought what was best in his or her situation. Regarding game theory, Turocy and von Stengel (2001) referred to a situation as a game since the individuals involved made decisions based on how they value the possible outcomes of those decisions.

The game required each incumbent to define their goals, evaluate their relative importance, assess costs and benefits for each desirable course of action related to their succession strategy (Camerer, 2003). According to Blumentritt et al. (2012), decisions made at earlier points in the game affected the possible strategies for later rounds. The literature referred to the later rounds of the game as being repetitive; therefore, the game theoretic model could correlate to the succession process as family-owned businesses transition across generations.

In each of the case studies, the incumbent stated during their formative years; previous generations set the game rules or governance specifying the business and family priorities. The findings showed that as potential successors observed the incumbent over time, he or she waited to see the outcome of the previous game before deciding to join the

business. The results also indicated these family-owned funeral businesses reiterated succession over time, based on the strategies from past generations.

From the information players are given about the strategies chosen by others, another player made his or her move contingent on the other player's past moves. Because of this pattern of repetition, one might argue that there may be a possible relationship to the game theory since a player decided his or her intentions regarding succession based upon what another player had done in the past. The literature characterized this as a dynamic game theory (Fundeberg & Levine, 2016).

Using game theory as a tool to model and understand complicated interactions, the theoretic model divides into two categories; cooperative and non-cooperative (Farooqui & Niazi, 2016). The game theory concept would consider the incumbent and successor being a cooperative two-person game, primarily for decision making because each participant needed to know the other's intent for mutual benefit (Kelly, 2003). The analysis indicated a cooperative game among the participants was the result of an early, bilateral decision based on the successor and the incumbent's intention.

Therefore, the cooperative game for a family member who decided to succeed the family-owned funeral business made a strategic alliance with the incumbent early to further the continuity of the business. The strategic alliance was the result of the incumbent and successor making a commitment that required cooperative behavior, which enabled both players the opportunity to achieve their mutually compatible goals. Several literature reviews implied that, if the previous generation offered opportunities

which aligned with the personal needs and career interests of the successor, he or she would most likely take over the family business (Sharma et al., 1997).

Participant B from case study one had decided to live life according to her terms based on her needs and, during her formative years, had no incentive to serve as the next generation in the family business. The findings indicated this as a non-cooperative game. The disinterested family member had a goal in mind which involved his or her self-interest, not considering the intentions of the incumbent.

Another example based on the evaluation of case study three (D) stated that his children were not currently interested in being the fourth generation because of the required commitment to the family business. The findings were in alignment with the noncooperative game as participant D's children's intentions not to join the business now were contingent upon the previous game played by their father. Since the funeral business was complicated and time-consuming, the successor saw no incentive for long-term planning. Furthermore, if the incumbent made a unilateral decision about the business, it would, therefore, result in no mutual benefit for either player.

Blumentritt et al.'s (2012) model described game theory from a strategic management standpoint, specifying games under certain conditions with possible strategies. The game was considered useful to frame a problem or situation. According to Blumentritt et al., once the game was specified, the rules were applied, and the players did not change.

Based on the evidence, the incumbents made known his or her strategic intention regarding future generational succession. The findings revealed that the incumbents intended to pass their businesses on to their children, which related to Lindquist, Sol, and Van Paag's (2015) argument that having a parent as an entrepreneur increased the probability of the birth children becoming entrepreneurs by 60%. However, the analysis in this study showed some family members, although expected to do so, had no interest in succeeding in the family funeral business.

According to the literature, the game was about decisions; therefore, individuals made decisions according to their preferences based on the value of the expected outcome of those decisions (Colman, 2013). Case study one (A) stated that his grandfather controlled the business up until he was 95 years of age. Participant A's father had died while he was attending Mortuary College.

Therefore, it was up to Participant A to make the best move for himself. Information given to participant A during his grandfather's generation determined his strategy since his father, the third generation, was now deceased. Participant A did not know whether it was the best move but, hopefully, it would benefit both him and his grandfather.

Case study two (C) stated he was not interested in the family business because he worked for the federal government and knew his family could not match his salary. Case study three (D) knew he was destined to be a mortician from his early childhood. The game theory, therefore, incorporated not only rationality but also common knowledge

assumptions, which enabled each potential successor to anticipate the incumbent's strategy regarding the succession process.

According to Michael-Tsabari (2013), a non-cooperative game could defer the succession process. Therefore, case study three (D), who had no children currently working in the business, might need to reshape his strategy of the game for his next generation. More importantly, the literature indicated that to succeed in a family-owned business, the incumbent would inherently need to create value to stay in the game.

Theme 3: The Players

Blumentritt et al.'s (2012) model described game theory from a strategic management standpoint, specifying games under certain conditions with possible strategies. Although Nowak and Sigmund (2004) agreed from a biological standpoint, the game theory application could become an issue when it came to selecting a family member. The outcome of strategic interactions could be affected by preferential treatment (Nowak & Sigmund). Conflict and sibling rivalry within the family can become an issue creating distention which may affect family harmony (Jayantilal, Jorge, & Bañegil, 2016).

Although the research indicated each incumbent communicated his or her intent to pass on the family business early in the game, how did the incumbent get those family members to cooperate and buy into the game? The rationale of game theory might indicate the mere fact we are all players in the game of nature (Birner, 2015), the reason

being, as Gutierrez et al. (2017) explained, that every player in a game had goals they wanted to achieve.

Moreover, humans are known to alter their behavior in response to changes in their environment, whether social or physical (Lee, 2008). As a result, the game theory had implications for the outcomes of decisions that depended on the behavior of multiple decision makers, although difficult to predict and required highly adaptive decision-making strategies (Blumentritt et al., 2012). The findings aligned with Schleppehorst and Moog's (2014) suggestion that succession had multiple stages which began as a pre-succession or early introduction into the family business.

The analysis inferred the strategic plan used by each incumbent provided the rationale by outlining both family and business priorities set by the previous generation. In retrospect, the participants saw the value of joining the family business based on those strategies. Furthermore, the findings were consistent with Vega-Redondo's (1996) confirmation that the proliferation of successful strategies might be through conscious human action instead of automatic birth and death processes.

Theme 4: The Strategies

In game theory, strategies referred to any course of action available to a player (Blumentritt et al., 2012). There was a vast number of strategies available to a player in a game, but Blumentritt et al. proposed a player should assume that all participants were aware of the strategies available to them. Based on this knowledge, the outcomes of the games tend to vary depending on the choices a player had made.

According to Osborne (2003), game theory did not assume that players were rational. For example, in case study one, participant A, the daughter showed no interest in the incentives provided by the family business in this non-cooperative game. Therefore, the incumbent might have considered her decision as nonrational. Based upon participant A's self-interest, she defected from the game, and the strategy was now dominant. Therefore, according to Ott (2013), it did not matter whether a player was rational or not.

However, Ott (2013) argued that strategies in game theory conflicted with the use of strategic management. Allio's (2015) contention was that game theory did not work since business management involved many variables. Nowak and Sigmund (2004) observed that successful strategies developed through inheritance, copied through imitation or were acquired knowledge gained by learning.

From the study, the participants gave insight into strategic development they received from life experiences. The findings determined that, during the successor's formative years, the incumbent made his or her intention known. Nowak and Sigmund (2004) described this characterization as a straightforward game of evolution. Weibull (1997) defined an evolutionary game as being a two-person game, which offered two strategies with few possible outcomes. Evolutionary game theory refers to how the social state changes as players change their strategies over time (Lahkar, 2012).

The strategies applied using game theory were an essential part of making a game simultaneously solvable and meaningful (Colman, 2013). The strategies available in

game theory are pure equilibrium, mixed, or dominant. The strategies vary according to the type of game.

A probabilistic mixture of two strategies, such as the hide-and-seek game by two players, described a mixed strategy (Bonau, 2017). Fudenberg and Levine (2016) described dominant strategies as a single game played once, but Tavares, de Vargas Mores, and Tomazzoni (2015) considered a strictly dominant strategy generated the most significant gains for the player, which was independent of what another player might do. However, a pure or Nash equilibrium meant one player might not be better off, provided that another player not change his or her strategies (Schlag & Vida, 2014).

The results from the study could infer a Nash equilibrium since the potential successor knew what strategies were available from the information given by the incumbent about succession. The pure equilibrium benefited all parties involved in the succession process, leaving no surprises. According to the research, the three case studies indicated a two-person game, using the strategies as follows:

Table 3

Emergent Strategies: Frequency Mentioned by Participants

<i>Strategies</i>	PT A	PT B	PT C	PT D	Total
Family governance	12	2	8	6	29
Family name recognition	9	1	15	12	37
Family legacy	13	5	7	7	32
Incumbent's intent	6	3	8	2	19

Knowledge and skills	9	2	6	4	21
Education and training	6	4	3	4	17
Motivation	9	1	8	2	20
Loyalty	5	0	6	3	14
Legal and professional services	5	2	3	4	14

Table 3 represents the phrases most frequently used about succession strategies from a combination of interview transcripts and documents from participants into NVivo 12. The NVivo search tool was used to search and integrate text, coding, and elements, such as family, governance, and other logical relationships to establish patterns. Although the qualitative software was not necessary for valid and reliable research, Auld et al. (2007) suggested that analytic processes that involved NVivo software improved the efficiency of the analysis to provide greater proficiency.

From the findings, the strategic influence to ensure the business continuing from one generation to the next was related to a single activity or repeated activities. However, as has been pointed out in the literature, it was necessary to have effective control. The study identified that from the family-owned funeral businesses examined, business strategies revolved around the incumbent.

The study sought to show that decisions the incumbent made placed less importance on economic goals and more significance on social and family intentions. A family legacy had been discussed in the previous literature as an influential driver of

decision making and behaviors within family businesses, resulting in noneconomic goals (Hammond et al., 2016). The findings included the following assumptions: that the legacy of the business could inhibit creativity as the incumbent preserved family wealth as opposed to taking risks; and the potential successor might have determined there be no other available choices. The literature showed evidence which supported that family business owners tend to make strategic decisions based on their biological legacy (Gersick, Gersick, Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997).

Although each case study succeeded beyond the second generation, the results of the study indicated case study one and case study three family-owned funeral businesses remained small, showing no indication there was growth potential in family management. However, case study two's business had indeed grown. Cerdan and Hernández (2013) suggested that family businesses might prefer to remain manageable and small enough for the family existence to have meaning, although it could be less competitive.

Theme 5: The Payoff/Reward

The dynamics of the family, the business, and ownership change the nature of family business over time (Lansberg & Gersick, 2015). Results from the study indicated family-owned funeral businesses pursued a lifestyle rather than a revenue growth structure. From the findings, the three case studies implied a high payoff for the potential successor in the case studies that involved psychological, emotional, social benefits, which included social status in the community and a decent lifestyle.

In strategic thinking, only the payoffs mattered, not by whom they were provided (Nowak & Sigmund, 2004). In other words, if the funeral home owners wanted to transition the business to the successor, both players needed to cooperate, with each player receiving a reward for doing so. According to the findings, each player followed his strategy, which produced an outcome resulting in equilibrium no matter what strategy the other player used.

For example, the payoff for the case study one (A), who planned to retire within the next two years, was the fifth generation having to buy him out of business. Secondly, case study two (C) had retired, and his children rewarded him with a buy-out of the family business. Both incumbents had an exit strategy of selling the business to the next generation. DeTienne and Chirico (2013) claimed this type of strategy was most common among family-owned businesses.

Another incentive for the successor was to perpetuate the family legacy and the socioeconomic wealth of the family (Hammond et al., 2016). The family-owned funeral business provided stability over the course of generations; therefore, each successor had a sense of obligation and emotional attachment towards the family and business. Further examination based on this study may give insight relative to a successor's obligation and the desire to commit to the family business, which could be used to provide a broader understanding of family business strategic processes and outcomes.

Theme 6: The Outcome

The family-owned funeral business succession brought about challenges for each case study involved in the research. The outcomes in family business succession relative to successful strategies revealed family values, family involvement in business, balancing the needs of the family and the business system. Stafford and Tews (2009) claimed individuals who cannot distinguish between work and family environments experience adverse outcomes.

The case studies' scenarios seem to relate to the dynamics of their strategies about each generation's succession. The family values, tradition, and culture, along with work/family demands, had some effect on family relationships and rewards. In the findings, a possible outcome for Participant A was survival of the fittest, which he acknowledged when he worked for his grandfather and father.

Once his grandfather died at age 95, then it became a family conflict among his siblings as to who would ultimately run the business. Participant A eventually had to buy out each sibling to keep the business within the family, which affected the outcome of the family's relationship. Although the family-owned funeral business succeeded into its fifth generation, the conflict created an imbalance in the family and business system.

In the case of Participant B from case study one and Participant C from the second case study, as stated in their conversations, each had to make a choice during the later years of adulthood to finally join the family business. Furthermore, this was not the initial desire of either participant. However, the individuals better understood the

circumstances in which they found themselves and the challenges that lay ahead as they transitioned into the family business. In the end, the family legacy became important because of the realization of the incumbent's mortality.

Applications to Professional Practice

Although human ideas, perceptions, knowledge, and preferences shape reality, Birner (2015) suggested these characteristics facilitate the future of social interactions. Kotlar and De Massis (2013) argued inherited social interactions tend to be more effective than professional social interactions in managing objectives toward the formation of collective commitment that aligns family goals. According to Birner, trying to understand and shape reality was most often described in game-theoretical terms.

The flexibility of game theory allowed for the testing of various involved strategies by helping to explain the success experienced in the cases examined and laying a foundation to improve practice. Information was available to help make those strategic decisions, whereas a participant, in this case, the incumbent, needed to decide the future of his or her business. Birner (2015) concluded that strategies at our disposal maximize the chance of survival.

Social reality required the application of knowledge; therefore, knowledge was essential for the survival of the family business (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). From the study, the family-owned funeral business had a specific knowledge considered a leading strategic advantage. Each participant had acquired the skills and ability to succeed to the next generation.

Cabrera-Suárez, De Saá-Pérez, and García-Almeida (2001) argued that knowledge transfer in the succession process was critical in the development of the ability to maintain a competitive advantage in family businesses. The findings did indicate that early training for the successor during their formative years was not only a critical component but proved to be an effective strategic approach for the case studies. The application of family governance, apprenticeship, and a quality relationship with family members created the environment necessary to transfer the business.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of the study indicated the influence of family business ownership, relationships, traditions, and family values affect intergenerational succession within the funeral business. Since the literature claimed that family businesses made up 80% of companies globally, and employ 60% of the U.S., Carr and Sequeira (2007) argued that business ownership had an impact on future generations. Tetrault Sirsly and Sur (2013) proposed that differences in ownership structure affect strategies related to sustainability efforts for businesses.

Therefore, having identified successful strategies provided by these funeral home owners who had successfully transitioned might help sustain failing businesses within the industry. The incumbents made a note of challenges which affected their small business funeral home succession. However, the challenges provided an opportunity for social change because overcoming those challenges enhanced the business owner's ability to develop, plan, and implement strategic planning to transition their family-owned business

to the next generation. The impact of the challenges each incumbent faced provided the future generation with an ownership structure that included governance, commitment, and family legacy.

What proved to be socially significant was the incumbents' decision and actions based on his or her intentions and how the potential successor perceived them. As a decision maker, the incumbent might have preferences regarding consequences that affected a successor and therefore choose their actions with the goal of improving or reducing the well-being of the successor (Lee, 2008). Inherently, as Carr and Sequeira (2007) suggested, it might be the attitudes, behavior, and intent concerning how the incumbents interacted with others, possible individual life choices, and how they decided what lifestyles and roles they assumed that could influence the motivation of their potential successor.

The literature implied early socialization by the incumbent was necessary as it played a vital role for the potential successor (Schröder & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2013). Camerer (2003) argued that children developed cultural standards through oral socialization. During the interview process, early socialization, as mentioned by the participants, had an impact which resulted in a positive relationship between the incumbent and successor. According to Hammond et al. (2016), the decision-making process of a parent as an owner and manager of family-owned businesses could influence their children with their intention to and preference for keeping the family legacy.

Although the findings indicated that each incumbent had different motivations for transitioning their businesses, fundamentally, none of them deviated from the chosen strategy. As a result, each incumbent provided their families with direction, business goals and objectives, values and governance, from which the business built over generations, as they provided an economic lifeline for the next generation. Hopefully, the results of this study will contribute to social change regarding strategies by identifying essential components that influenced family-owned businesses' successful strategies via empirical results.

Recommendations for Action

Succession represents a significant challenge in any family business. Family business succession has a profound effect, not just on the owners, but also the family and other stakeholders involved in the funeral business. A recommendation would be to examine further how different needs and expectations across various stakeholders, such as the incumbent, successors, family, and nonfamily members, are associated with the fundamental elements of effective intergenerational succession (Bozer et al., 2017).

Funeral home owners represent 60% of the private industry are eligible for retirement by 2020, which could affect future generations (NFDA, 2017). In conducting the research, it became clear that legacy was vital to the family and the community. I would recommend, from a long-term strategic perspective and because of identity and family reputation, there should be a focus on the relationship, which includes attitudes, behavior, and governance, to help establish a commitment with the next generation.

Most often issues such as ownership, business management, governance, and succession, coupled with family history, present challenges among family members (Joshi, Dixit, Sinha, & Shukla, 2018). The research revealed there needed to be a balance between family and the business because the two systems were not always on the same wavelength. From the research, family business owners indicated family problems from previous generations to include business finances, unforeseen circumstances such as the death of the owner, or the incumbent refusing to relinquish the business to the successor.

Another recommendation is that future researchers seek to apply different game theory concepts and other theories to examine intergenerational succession to develop the best strategies and actions for both the incumbent and their potential successors. The findings of this study offered small-business funeral homeowners the opportunity to consider early succession planning to increase the probability of generational transition success. Sharma and Irving (2005) suggested family members that commit to the business are more likely to pursue a career in the family business, participate in a leadership role, and find satisfaction with the succession process. Finally, as the researcher, disseminate the results of this study to the research participants via email and funeral industry colleagues through effective and appropriate platforms such as lectures, conferences, business journals, and training seminars.

Recommendations for Further Research

Despite sample size and a variety of measures taken to ensure saturation and the validity of the study, there were several limitations associated with the study that might need addressing in future research. Although the case study approach provided rich details, the first limitation was the recruitment of participants, which was critical to the study. I assumed that recruiting participants using existing funeral service association networks would result in a larger pool of participants, but in fact, this was not the case.

The goal was to recruit five to seven case studies in the process. Having only three case studies could affect the interpretation of the results. The sample size might be considered negligible and may not be generalizable to a broader population. However, the advantage of having three case studies was that it provided a buffer against observer bias (Voss, Tsikriktsis, & Frohlich, 2002).

Fusch and Ness (2015) agreed that data saturation was not about the numbers, but rather the depth of information received. However, Bernard (2012) suggested the researcher used what he or she could obtain. Thompson et al. (2006) recommended different recruitment strategies should be implemented to reach different segments of the population of interest.

Secondly, the sample of family-owned funeral businesses was geographically limited. For future research, I would also note the need to address accessibility because few options were available for data collection since interviews were difficult to schedule.

Another recommendation was to consider other study designs since case studies in social sciences were stereotyped as providing a weak structure of generalization (Yin, 2014).

The characterizations of the study considered only the incumbent and the successor. The sampling did not include interviews with other family members such as siblings or other stakeholders who may be involved in the business. Future studies might need to consider data from other funeral business owners that failed the succession process to identify the necessary strategies.

Despite the need for further methodical and validated studies, family businesses should be encouraged to devote sufficient resources and consideration towards succession to promote long-term survival. For example, if there is a change in the relationship between the incumbent's and successor, this may be a result of either deciding to realign his or her identities and lifestyles. Alternatively, from a post-succession aspect, could this affect the incumbent's relationships with family and nonfamily members may require further examination.

The literature had shown game theory as questionable in providing reliable results in the application of decision-making in practical settings because human behavior deviated from predictions of the traditional game theory (Bonau, 2017). Finally, future research might provide an opportunity to explore game theory by investigating the incentive for potential successors relating to the decision-making related to strategic outcomes as well as determining how game theory could be used to study strategic interactions which play a fundamental role in social science. The findings did encourage

future research and help to contextualize the topic for any potential improvements for successful strategies relative to family-owned funeral business intergenerational succession.

Reflections

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies family-owned funeral business owners use to succeed to the next generation. The Doctor of Business Administration doctoral journey was the ultimate challenge of my academic life. This journey required discipline and good ethics. As a veteran, having known what it meant to be disciplined and faced many challenges, the doctoral journey required a level of discipline necessary for commitment to the research, to mitigate biases and preconceived notions.

Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012) argued that responses that the researcher applied across various patterns might have similarities in item structure or wording, inducing similar responses that could create a level of method biases. Method biases could affect reliability and validity. Podsakoff et al. suggested controlling biases by obtaining measures from different sources. As a novice researcher, the criterion (the participant) provided measurements, as well as secondary sources, such as family business historical documentation and artifacts.

Following the Belmont Report (1979) protocols and other techniques recommended by various scholars helped to mitigate bias and improve validity. Those techniques included the understanding that validity has three categories: (a) criterion-

related, (b) content and (c) construct validity, (Mohamad, Sulaiman, Sern, & Salleh, 2015). Content validity provided a means for measuring how well the questions represented the possible questions relating to the central research question.

The examination of the information received from the participants about the topic needed to be relative to the specific characteristics regarding successful strategies. As the interview process began, it was essential to be aware of personal experiences. Furthermore, the planning process allowed for evaluation of study expectations, which was necessary for recognizing personal bias during the research.

Utilizing the appropriate analysis for the study required detail and structure. A qualitative content analysis provided the research method with the subjective interpretation of the content of text data by a systematic classification process of coding, identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). An essential factor in the data collection process was to record and detail responses and direct observations as they occurred instead of waiting until later.

Although an understanding of the data collection would come later, it was critical to capture everything said during the data collection process, not knowing what would be essential to the study. Bengtsson (2016) suggested that having preconceived knowledge of the subject had its advantages because this could help to minimize bias as long as it does not affect the participants or the interpretation of the results. However, member checking by the participants was essential to ensure their intended meanings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Overall, the journey was worth all the challenges that I incurred while in the doctoral program. The excellent resources provided by the University during this doctoral journey allowed my ability to reach this milestone. Overall, the completion of the doctoral program had provided the necessary credentials for my being a competent leader in the field of business and management.

Conclusion

This research study had offered a broad reflection on the six key themes which emerged from the data collected. The intergenerational strategies derived from the case studies to answer the research question suggested there were several underlying patterns which influenced the succession of the family-owned funeral businesses. The findings evoked a pattern which was consistent with research conducted by Miller et al. (2003) indicating how important it was to maintain the family legacy and to ensure control of the business. Other strategic influences included family dynamics, which played a role in the successful strategies of the three case studies.

The incumbents realized the value of strategies that helped create their family legacy was an advantage in succeeding the business from one generation to the next. The family legacy continued to be a source of pride and promoted loyalty. The family business was instrumental in maintaining family togetherness as it provided value, culture, and future goals not only for the family but for their community. Some context influences revealed in the study included mentoring, education, and development as a

probability for increasing intergenerational succession for the family-owned funeral business.

Each incumbent demonstrated leadership characteristics such as professionalism, experience, and discipline. According to Miller (2003), professional and educational experience exhibited in the management of the family business most often was an influence on the successor. The case studies presented an existing pattern whereas the incumbent played an influential role as the successor eventually decided on his or her career in the funeral industry.

Although the study addressed occasions when a successor joined the business in later adult years, the findings indicated this did not impact the relationship between the incumbent and the successor nor did it affect the strategy to succeed. The findings suggested that, although the strategies varied among funeral business owners, the results could be useful in understanding the relationship between the incumbent and the successor. Ultimately, the family values, which included responsibility, respect, and commitment, perhaps influenced the decision of the successor to join later in life.

Sharma et al. (2003) proposed that an incumbent's perception of the business and family relationships differ significantly from those of successors. However, based on the results, it was clear that each family that had succeeded to the next generation noted having a positive succession experience. Family business succession impacts not only the owners but families and their employees who depend on these businesses for their livelihood, which inevitably would create a host of implications for society.

The three cases studied focused on successful strategies rather than business failures, which was necessary to improve business practices for family-owned funeral businesses who wanted to succeed to the next generation. Qualitative research was found useful for this study; however, further research might be necessary for this area to establish a consistent methodology for family-owned funeral business succession processes. Perhaps most importantly, the study captured the stories of these remarkable family businesses by identifying common characteristics that may be useful for other business owners and practitioners facing intergenerational succession challenges. The unique nature of the funeral business owner, moreover, the family businesses they manage, could always present challenges for broad generalizations, but the stories might be beneficial by providing ideas to promote theory testing and improve business practices for future generations.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Sustaining a Family Business Beyond the Second Generation

Purpose: To obtain information about successful strategies from family-owned funeral business owners that have transitioned their businesses to the next generation.

Introduction	
Welcome	<p>Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. You are one of 5 principals from the North/Southeastern region of the United States selected to provide information on the subject being discussed today. In this interview, the focus will be on identifying successful strategies regarding your family-owned business from one generation to the next.</p> <p>I will describe the study, as well as your rights as a participant. Please feel free to ask me questions, request clarification, or request me to repeat information as I discuss the study and your rights as the participant.</p> <p>Your answers will be not be associated with your name unless you clearly indicate your agree to have me use your name. Each participant will be given an identification number on the interviewer's sheet. You will be audio recorded. All information will be confidential and kept password encrypted on my laptop.</p>
Interview Code#	<p>Interviewer:</p> <p>Location:</p> <p>Date Length in minutes: _____</p> <p>Age:</p> <p>Education level:</p> <p>Profession:</p> <p>Family status:</p>

<p>Direct Observations:</p> <p><i>Disposition</i></p> <p><i>Gestures, eye contact, non-verbal signals</i></p> <p><i>Atmosphere</i></p> <p><i>Interaction during interview</i></p> <p><i>Three main points made during discussion</i></p>	<p>Notes:</p>
Interview Questions	
<p>Q1. How many years have you served as the business owner?</p>	
<p>Q2. How would you define successful?</p>	
<p>Q3. What succession planning strategies do you currently have in place?</p>	
<p>Q4. What are some of the influences used to get family support for a long-term vision?</p>	
<p>Q5. What are some obstacles you have faced in implementing the succession strategies?</p>	

<p>Q6. How did your family address the obstacles related to succession planning?</p>	
<p>Q7. How do you measure your succession results to determine that the strategies were successful?</p>	
<p>Q8. What are some additional fundamental issues about your planning, implementation, and improvement strategies for succession would you like to discuss?</p>	
Conclusion	
<p>Review and Summarize major factors from the discussion.</p> <p>Ask participant to verify responses.</p>	<p>Script: Thank you for taking the time out to participate in this interview discussion today. I will be interviewing a number of other funeral home business owners throughout the region to identify successful strategies regarding succession to the next generation.</p> <p>My goal is to add to the body of knowledge concerning the subject and hopefully these strategies will be beneficial to</p>

<p>Ask interviewee</p> <p>any questions from interviewer regarding the process</p>	<p>other funeral homes businesses for generations to come.</p> <p>There may be a need to ask a few follow-up questions from our interview. I will need to verify our discussion and to ensure confirmation of the answers you have provided. With your permission, I will need another few minutes of your time when you have availability.</p>
<p>Reiterate the confidentiality agreement</p>	<p>Question:</p>
<p>Make certain have contact information for follow-up</p>	<p>Response:</p>
<p>Remind interviewee that he or she will receive a transcript of interview process</p>	<p>Ensure all paperwork is signed, give copies to interviewee</p> <p>(recording agreement/confidentiality statement)</p> <p>Try to obtain a second interview if possible for member checking. Let participate know it will not be a long interview, just to confirm answers.</p>

	Follow-up Questions
Q1.	
Q2.	
Q3.	