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Navigating Power Dynamics in Father-Daughter Transitions: A Comparative Study of Family Businesses Across Cultures

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MSc in International Management

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Resumo

As empresas familiares são consideradas o núcleo da economia global. Incorporam objetivos económicos com dimensões emocionais e culturais que moldam a governação e a sobrevivência a longo prazo.

O processo de sucessão é o mais importante e complexo na existência de uma empresa familiar. Esta dissertação analisa especificamente a sucessão entre pai e filha, onde visa compreender o impacto das estruturas culturais, da dinâmica familiar e das normas de género nos resultados da sucessão, através de uma revisão sistemática da literatura de artigos revistos por pares publicados entre 2019 e 2025. Na análise, é evidente que os caminhos para a liderança de empresas familiares seguidos pelas filhas dependem, da vontade dos pais de ceder o poder, dos estereótipos sociais e do contexto cultural e que, apesar dos avanços, ainda existe uma escassa representação das filhas que se tornam sucessoras. A comparação entre Portugal, Japão e USA mostra que as barreiras existem em vários países, mas variam em grau: o Japão é o sistema mais fechado, Portugal é uma sociedade em evolução e os Estados Unidos são relativamente mais abertos, embora ainda exista preconceito. Esta dissertação contribui para a literatura ao questionar informações conhecidas sobre transições de poder entre pais e filhas, conseguindo destacar lacunas que poderiam ser abordadas em estudos futuros. Por fim, a dissertação recomenda o aumento da visibilidade da experiência de sucessão feminina em diferentes culturas, com a finalidade de permitir que filhas, em posições de sucessão, aprendam umas com as outras e se destaquem como futuras líderes.

Palavras-chave: Empresa familiar, sucessão, dinâmicas pai-filha, género, cultura, liderança
Sistema de Classificação JEL: M14 - Cultura Empresarial, M16 - Administração de Empresas Internacionais

Abstract

Family businesses are considered to be the core to global economy. They incorporate economic goals with emotional and cultural dimensions which shape the overall governance and long term survival. The succession process is the most important and complex change of their lifecycle stages. This dissertation looks at the situation of father daughter successions, where it aims to better understand the impact of cultural frameworks, family dynamics and gender norms on succession outcomes through a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2025.

In the analysis, it is evident that the routes to leadership taken by daughters depend on whether fathers are willing to cede the power to them, on the continued social stereotypes as well as wider cultural context, and that despite gender developments in equality, there is still under-representation of daughters becoming successors. A comparison of Portugal, Japan and the USA shows that the barriers exist everywhere but varying in its degree: showing Japan as the most closed system, Portugal as an evolving society and the United States relatively more open, although implicit biases still exist. This dissertation makes a contribution to the literature by challenging known information on father-daughter transitions, managing to reveal some gaps that could be addressed through future studies. Finally, the dissertation recommends the increasing of the visibility on female succession experience in different cultures in order to allow daughters to learn about each other and excel as future leaders.

Keywords: Family business, succession, gender, father-daughter transition, culture, leadership

JEL Classification: M14 - Corporate Culture, M16 - International Business Administration

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Introduction

Family businesses are the backbone of global economy as it represents a significant portion of companies and jobs in most countries (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2021). These social organisations differ with other forms of organisations in that they have a twofold identity of both economic organisations with performance and strategic objectives and social institutions that are engrained in family bonds and values (Rodrigues, 2021). This peculiar mixture forms both advantages and weaknesses and they must affect governance, leadership and long-term continuity.

Succession is perhaps one of the most crucial stages to go through when dealing with the lifecycle of a family business because it defines the long-term survival of an organisation and its capacity to grow (Baltazar, Ferreira, & Silva, 2023). This is not an easy process owing to the fact that it blends business strategy and family relationships (Porfrio, Felicio, & Carrilho, 2019).

The key in determining these transitions is gender. Although gender equality has improved, daughters are still less appointed as their successors in comparison with sons (Nguyen, 2022). The change can be traced in particular areas, with the recent study demonstrating that women executive positions in family-owned companies may lead to a beneficial effect on innovation, governance and sustainability (Alvarado-Alvarez & Euwema, 2024). Nevertheless, the existence of long held stereotypes is still considered a problem you have to prove yourself as a woman, and this is not expected of your successor who is likely male.

The succession by a father-daughter combination introduces further problems. More often fathers serve as the gatekeepers of power and their readiness to support daughters as leaders is critical to the results of such transition (Polo, 2020). However, cultural traditions and social norms still construct the masculine leadership as a factor that affects the way authority is distributed and rewarded (Associação das Empresas Familiares, 2020). It is crucial to grasp these dynamics in various cultural settings because the traditional meaning of the daughters as valid successors of their fathers greatly depends on how they are perceived in terms of tradition, vegetative law and cultural social attitudes (Maseda, Iturralde, Aparicio, & Cooper, 2023).

This dissertation, Navigating Power Dynamics in FatherDaughter Transitions: A Comparative Study of Family Businesses Across Cultures aims at trying to explore how

leadership, negotiation norms and gender norms play out in succession processes. The research goal is to determine cultural, structural and relational points that surround father-to-daughter transitions and offer details that can lead to more equitable headship in family organizations (Calabrò, Bang, Basuthakur, Fedy and McGinness, 2020). To meet this objective, this paper will conduct a systematic review of all the literature available on the subject of father-daughter succession in family businesses, with the hope of pulling together what already exists and identifying the gaps that future investigations should fill. The following research questions guide the study:

RQ1. Where does the current literature find insights on father to daughter succession of family owned businesses?

RQ2. What do the published research results teach us about the gendered power dynamics and cultural influences in the process of succession?

RQ3. In which areas do we need more investigation to help daughters make leader transitions in more diverse cultural contexts?

Methodology

Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2019 and 2025 are the focus of this review, which takes a methodical approach to literature reviews. This dissertation follows a systematic literature review method to outline the current body of literature regarding father-daughter succession in family businesses and corresponding gendered power dynamics. The review process followed multiple steps to guarantee transparency, consistency and scholarly rigour. The preliminary search was conducted using Google, Google Scholar and the ISCTE institutional thesis database. Various keywords and their combinations were utilised, such as ‘family business’, ‘succession’, ‘women in family business’, ‘female leadership succession’, ‘father-daughter succession’, ‘gender dynamics in family business’ and ‘cultural context in family business’. The terms aim to cover the broader research on family business succession as well as the specific gender-related challenges faced by daughters in leadership roles and the cultural context impact.

Descriptive Analysis

The search process provided approximately 50 academic articles. Initially, sources with lower academic relevance, including undergraduate theses were excluded. The review focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, complemented by a limited selection of institutional reports and academic books that offered crucial statistics or conceptual frameworks. While undergraduate theses were typically excluded, one undergraduate study (Polo, 2020) was included due to its unique focus on father-daughter succession, a topic that is not often addressed in other literature. A temporal restriction was then put in place, keeping only sources published from 2019 onwards, with a few significant articles published prior, such as Handler (1989). The earlier contributions have been preserved for the establishment of conceptual foundations and theoretical frameworks that continue to have significant influence in current discussions on family business succession.

In the stage that followed, the relevance of each source was meticulously assessed. Articles that exhibited considerable content overlap, reiterated similar arguments or did not directly engage with the topic of succession, gender dynamics in family firms, women in leadership or cultural context were excluded. This process ensured that there was no redundant work and the retention of only the most relevant inputs.

The sample was narrowed to 15 key articles, which were analyzed comprehensively and form the basis of the literature review in this dissertation. These papers appeared in a number of reputable journals such as Gender in Management: An International Journal, Review of Managerial Science and Journal of Family Business Management.

The majority of the chosen studies used qualitative research designs and the most popular methods were case studies, interviews and narrative analyses. Purely quantitative studies were rare, while a smaller percentage made use of mixed-method frameworks, statistical analyses or systematic literature reviews. This trend indicates that the domain is concerned with in-depth and contextually aware investigation of interpersonal relationships, cultural processes and gender power relationships within succession processes. The literature is geographically scattered across Europe, North America, Asia, and Latin America. The variety of study environments highlights the topic's global relevance and provides opportunities for cross-cultural comparison, especially when it comes to understanding how institutional settings, cultural expectations and social norms impact the acceptance and growth of female successors in family businesses.

For the sake of transparency, a full list of the 50 initially chosen sources is included in Annex 1, while the final selection of the 15 core articles is detailed in Annex 2.

Thematic Discussion

1. Family Business

1.1 Definition of the Concept

Given the complexity of these enterprises, the definition of family businesses has been an area of dispute in academic circles. The diversified forms of ownership, management styles and participation rates of diverse family generations are the main causes of the lack of consensus (Rodrigues, 2021). The fundamental issue with family businesses is that they serve as both social institutions with roots in family and economic entities (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996).

According to an accepted definition presented by Chua (1999), a company is deemed a family firm if its leadership and management are focused on achieving the goals of its family members. Birley included a generational element, arguing that one of the most important factors is the desire to pass on the company to the following generation. This idea of leaving a legacy is seen within newer views that link firm strategy to a long-term focus and family identity (Birdthistle & Hales, 2023).

Cultural and emotional aspects have been added to current definitions. Rodrigues (2021) highlighted the significance of looking at the identity and values that unite the family and the company along with ownership and management. Similarly, Maseda (2023) pointed out that decision-making is influenced by subjective variables like trust, loyalty and emotional commitment just as much as through financial priorities.

Institutionally, the European Commission (2009) offers a pragmatic and policy-oriented definition, stating that a business qualifies as a family firm if: (1) the majority of decision-making rights are held by the founder or their family; (2) at least one family member is actively involved in the management; and (3) there is a clear intention to maintain family control. This framework has been widely adopted in comparative and policy-oriented studies.

The literature agrees on a number of important aspects, despite various definitions: family ownership, leadership involvement, transgenerational intention and the impact of family values (Baltazar, Ferreira, & Silva, 2023). The primary distinctions between family businesses and non-family businesses are also supported by these factors. Family businesses often combine financial objectives with non-economic goals like reputation upkeep, family harmony and legacy protection, in contrast to non-family businesses where

decisions are usually made only based on economic performance (Nguyen, 2022). When family priorities clash with business requirements, this combination can lead to both unique assets such as resilience and patient funding, as well as difficulties with leadership.

In summary, identifying a family business demands a complex approach that takes into account intention, leadership, generational involvement and cultural identity in addition to ownership. Understanding this complexity is essential to comprehending how family businesses function and change over different contexts.

2. Succession

2.1 Concept of succession

As one of the most important, strongly debated and challenging periods in a family business's development, succession has a significant impact on both longevity and strategic direction (Baltazar, Ferreira, & Silva, 2023). It describes the transfer into the ownership, leadership or both from one generation to the next (Porfírio, Felício, & Carrilho, 2019). Although the concept might seem simple, the interlinked personal, emotional and professional relationships make executing it often challenging (Rodrigues, 2021).

Handler (1989) famously defined succession as a long-term strategic process that starts years before the actual leadership transition, rather than just as a moment of change. According to academics, succession planning is a crucial and unavoidable stage for any family business hoping to endure for many generations. This point of view is still applicable today since studies supports that success depends on early planning, effective communication and well-organized transition plans (Nguyen, 2022).

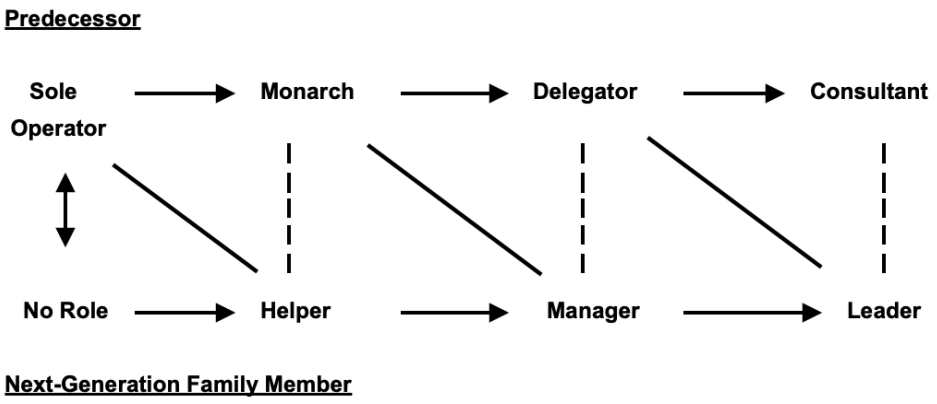
The transfer of a legacy, a set of values and a family identity that is ingrained in the company is often what makes succession in family businesses different from that in non-family businesses (Birdthistle & Hales, 2023).

Succession has become increasingly recognised in the literature as a dynamic, negotiated process that is influenced by family dynamics, individual skills, and social factors like business standards, legal frameworks and culture (Alvarado-Alvarez & Euwema, 2024). Because of its multifaceted nature, succession must be seen as an evolving transition that requires adaptability from all parties involved rather than as a singular event.

2.2 Succession Processes

In family businesses, the succession process is a gradual and complex transition that unfolds over time rather than a single event. Proper preparation is necessary to guarantee longevity and stability as it entails the transfer of ownership, influence and leadership from the present generation to the following (Baltazar, Ferreira, & Silva, 2023). One of the most widely recognised and frequently used models of succession in family businesses is presented by Handler (1989), who outlines it as a process of role adjustment that occurs between the predecessor and the successor. Succession is viewed as a dynamic, changing process in which both actors progressively adjust to new roles and expectations rather than as a single event. The predecessor typically begins out as the sole operator, maintaining total control over daily operations and decision-making, as shown in Figure 1. The founder eventually assumes the role of monarch, in which they retain dominant authority while carrying out less responsibilities. Eventually, as the process progresses, the predecessor takes on the role of delegator, stepping aside from the day-to-day operations of the company to offer primarily guidance and direction. In the last phase, the founder takes on the role of an external consultant, leaving the company but continuing to provide assistance and their expertise. The successor goes through a parallel process at the same time. At first, the successor has a vague role with little involvement and unclear duties. Then, as trust and confidence grow, the successor takes on the role of a helper, assisting with small operational duties while being under close supervision. The next-generation family member eventually assumes on the role of manager, having formal responsibilities and decision-making authority within the company due to the growing knowledge and effort. The final transformation occurs when the successor becomes the leader, holding full strategic and operational control.

Figure 1. The Succession Process: Mutual Role Adjustment Between Predecessor and Next-Generation Family Member(s)



Adapted from Handler, 1989, p.194

The crucial role of relationship quality and communication has been a recurrent theme in recent research. Mutual trust improves, uncertainty decreases and conflicts that could otherwise harm the process are minimised when the current leaders and possible successors have an open dialogue (Maseda, Iturralde, Aparicio, & Cooper, 2023). Similar to this, the founder willingness to give up control and the successor's capacity to prove their abilities and establish credibility within the company have a significant impact on succession outcomes (Alvarado-Alvarez & Euwema, 2024).

Succession processes are further shaped by cultural context. Who is considered to be a legitimate successor and how transitions are handled are determined by norms regarding authority, succession and gender roles (Nguyen, 2022). While succession may follow generally similar stages across cultures, comparative research has revealed that the significance of leadership, authority and family responsibilities differ substantially, which influences the tactics used by families to maintain continuity (Birdthistle & Hales, 2023).

3. Women in Family Businesses

Despite the growing number of women working in family businesses, their leadership routes continue to be shaped by cultural norms, unconscious biases and power dynamics between generations (Nguyen, 2022).

3.1 Gender dynamics in Family Businesses

Contrary to non-family businesses, that are regulated by professional standards and external governance mechanisms, family businesses are deeply rooted in cultural traditions, values, and norms that shapes leadership pathways (Rodrigues, 2021). Such inherited frameworks have a propensity to reproduce scripts along gendered lines, with men being natural successors and women occupying secondary position (Nguyen, 2022).

Daughters in family firms commonly face what Maseda, Iturralde, Aparicio, and Cooper (2023) call a "double bind". In order to gain legitimacy, they must exhibit strong leadership abilities, but they are also expected to play interpersonal or nurturing roles in the family. This paradox undermines their authority and limits their recognition as potential leaders.

Evidence, however, also points to the unique advantages that women offer to leadership changes. Women successors are associated with participative leadership, long-term orientation and cooperative decision-making (Alvarado-Alvarez & Euwema, 2024). The degree of acceptance of these leadership styles, however, varies and strongly depends on culture context and the predecessor (Calabrò, Bang, Basuthakur, Fedy, & McGinness, 2020).

3.2 Obstacles Faced by Women

Women are still underrepresented as successors in family businesses, despite advancements in gender equality. Regardless of having similar or better qualifications, daughters are less likely than sons to be selected (Nguyen, 2022). This discrepancy is reflective of profoundly embedded stereotypes that connect leadership with masculinity and caregiving with femininity, which affect organizational perceptions as well as family decision-making (Maseda et al., 2023).

Daughters are held back in terms of being incorporated into dominant roles, steered into less central positions such as human resources, and receive fewer opportunities for mentorship and informal networks of influence (Calabrò et al., 2020). For instance, although the number of women in management has increased in Portugal, the majority of top-level leadership is still male (Associação das Empresas Familiares, 2020). It is the same trend across the world, with daughters holding a tiny minority of designated successors (Alvarado-Alvarez & Euwema, 2024).

In addition to the concern of fairness, all these are strategic threats. At a time when family firms are facing increasing pressure to react to world competition and technological change, excluding women from succession of leadership robs the company of possible talent and

limits innovation (Baltazar, Ferreira, & Silva, 2023). Fighting against gender stereotyping and gender discrimination is not only a matter of justice but also of long-term competitiveness and survivability.

3.3 Father-Daughter Dynamics in Power Transition

Recognising the dynamics between fathers and daughters is essential to understand how power is transferred in family business succession. Fathers tend to be the main gatekeepers of leadership opportunities, and how successfully a transition goes depends on how eager they are to accept a daughter as a successor (Polo, 2020).

Power transitions are rarely neutral. They are guided by gendered expectations, emotional relationships and intergenerational power dynamics. As seen before, research suggests that sons are groomed into leadership from an early stage, whereas daughters can be subject to protective or ambivalent attitudes from their fathers. These attitudes may stem from traditional beliefs about gender roles, or from a desire to shield daughters from the risks and pressures of leadership (Maseda, Iturralde, Aparicio, & Cooper, 2023). In practice, such behaviours, though sometimes well intentioned, can delay or limit daughters' access to strategic responsibilities, weakening their visibility as potential leaders.

The ability of the predecessor to let go of control is also critical to the efficacy of succession planning. According to Handler (1989), a lot of transitions are unsuccessful because predecessors find it difficult to give up control, not because successors are unprepared. The founder may question whether stakeholders will accept female leadership or whether his daughter's leadership style fits with the firm's traditional identity, which makes

this challenge particularly difficult during father-daughter transitions (Alvarado-Alvarez & Euwema, 2024).

Cultural context also influences these dynamics. In more patriarchal cultures, the idea of a daughter assuming control can collide with ingrained expectations of male leadership, while in more equalitarian contexts, daughters increasingly gain recognition as legitimate successors (Calabrò, Bang, Basuthakur, Fedy, & McGinness, 2020). In either case, succession is not merely a transfer of ownership or management, but a negotiation of authority, identity, and family legacy.

In sum, father-daughter power transitions highlight how succession is simultaneously an emotional process and a structural shift. The willingness of fathers to endorse daughters as leaders requires overcoming not only organisational and market concerns, but also deep-seated cultural and personal beliefs about gender and authority.

4. Women in Leadership Across Cultures

Succession processes in family businesses are never culturally neutral. Despite being a problem that almost all societies face, gender bias in leadership succession manifests itself differently in different societies based on socioeconomic contexts, institutional frameworks, and cultural traditions. While global trends show increasing female involvement in family firms, the depth and ease of this involvement depend heavily on local cultural, legal and social frameworks. An analysis of Portugal, Japan, and the US reveals how family dynamics and cultural norms interact to influence women's leadership succession prospects.

4.1 Portugal

An estimated 70-80% of all businesses in Portugal are family-owned and they make a substantial contribution to GDP and employment (INE, 2021). Still, leadership is primarily transferred from father to son and succession is still mainly patriarchal. Strong family hierarchies, deeply ingrained gender norms and traditional Catholic values all carry on to affect how daughters are viewed in professional settings.

A striking example is the case of Maria de Fátima Figueiredo, who became CEO at Ferreira de Sá, the oldest and most renowned rug factory in Portugal. Although she had been involved with the company since childhood and demonstrated a strong commitment to its traditions, her promotion was delayed in favour of her brother. Nowadays, under her leadership, the business has modernised and grown globally, demonstrating her abilities and overcoming long-held gender stereotypes.

Despite the public sphere in Portugal, where there is a certain level of progress in gender equality, female successors to family businesses are still exceptions rather than the norm. A research by the Portuguese Family Business Association (Associação das Empresas Familiares, 2020), reveals that only a mere 14% of Portuguese family enterprises are run by women and many of these transitions happened because there were no male heirs or because women had an extensive amount of external business experience.

4.2 Japan

In Japan, family business succession is deeply rooted in Confucian and patriarchal values that historically prioritize male heirs, especially the eldest son. Daughters are typically not considered for succession unless there are no male heirs, in which case Japanese families often adopt a son-in-law (a practice known as mukoyōshi) to maintain the male leadership tradition. The trend is indicative of Japan's wider gender gap in corporate leadership. Studies consistently place Japan at the bottom of global league tables for women business leaders, with women holding fewer than 15% of management positions across industries (Huang, Gates, Sinatra, & Barabási, 2020). In family businesses, daughters who do assume leadership often face legitimacy concerns, requiring them to exceed expectations and demonstrate themselves to be exceptional performers in order to gain acceptance (Nguyen, 2022).

However, change is slowly occurring. One notable example is Yuki Kusumi, a woman who became president of Kusumi Electric, a small to medium-sized family-owned electronics company in Osaka. After years of resistance from her father and board members, she assumed leadership following her brother’s departure from the firm. The case of Kusumi illustrates how a crisis or necessity often forces daughter succession in Japan. However, this is an exception to the rule, as the majority of Japanese family businesses still replicate patriarchal gender hierarchies.

4.3 United States of America

For women in family business succession, the United States provides a somewhat more favorable environment. Compared to Portugal and Japan, daughters in the U.S. are more frequently included in leadership streams and offered the opportunity to demonstrate themselves, this is rooted in the influence of equalitarian laws regarding inheritance.

Nevertheless, barriers persist. Family firms in the U.S. still reflect implicit biases that privilege sons as natural heirs, particularly in more traditional or conservative regions (Nguyen, 2022). Only 24% of U.S. family companies are led by women, and even in most of those cases, daughters only became leaders after a crisis, e.g., the unexpected death or resignation of a male successor (PwC, 2019, Family Business Survey). Sherry Chris, the former CEO of Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate and a descendant of New England business owners, is a compelling and illuminating example. Although deeply involved in her

family real estate business, she was initially overlooked for her brother. She then became a successful leader in the national real estate industry, detached from the family business.

4.4 The comparison

Across Portugal, Japan and the United States, it is evident that gender barriers exist in family business succession regardless of cultural context. What differs, however, is the extent to which these barriers impact daughters' access to leadership and the cultural narratives that sustain them. The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) rankings for all three countries are shown in Table 1 to provide a broader picture of these differences, emphasizing differences in economic participation, political empowerment, and educational attainment (WEF, 2023).

Country	Overall GGGI	Political Empowerment	Economic Participation	Educational Attainment	Global Rank Overall
Portugal	77%	35%	75%	99%	32
Japan	65%	6%	56%	100%	125
USA	75%	25%	78%	99.5%	43

Table 1: Gender Gap index of some selected countries from the E&W (WEF, 2023)

Daughters are becoming more prevalent in family businesses in Portugal, which is indicative of larger social shifts like higher female educational levels and more effective EU equality policies. However, patriarchal customs still exist, and many families still choose their heirs by defaulting to their sons. This is a transition environment where the chances for daughters are improving but where legitimacy still has to be "earned" by exceptional competency.

The most constrictive example is Japan. In this context, Confucian traditions and deeply ingrained patriarchal institutions reproduce the notion of leadership as masculine. Daughters are usually considered successors only in the absence of male heirs and, even then, they face doubts from stakeholders about their authority. This cultural resistance is reinforced by the low number of women in corporate leadership across the country, making succession difficult even in the face of slow reform pressures.

The United States, on the other hand, provides the most supportive environment for women's succession in family businesses. Higher levels of female participation in higher education and professional careers strengthen their visibility and readiness. Still, even in this

more open environment, implicit biases remain, with daughters often needing to prove their long-term commitment more than sons.

A comparison among the three cases illustrates a sharp gradient: Japan has the most inflexible gender boundaries, Portugal reflects a society undergoing change and the United States shows the greatest inclusivity, although not without ongoing struggles. This ranking demonstrates how cultural systems, legal structures and access to higher education intersect to enhance or restrict the experiences of women in succession. Ultimately, while the progress is uneven, the broader trend across contexts indicates that education, generational change and shifting societal attitudes are gradually dismantling traditional barriers and opening new pathways for daughters in family business leadership.

Insights and Future Research

5. Insights from the Literature

The literature on father-daughter succession in family businesses indicates that succession is not a technical or managerial but a negotiated process of power, identity and culture where gender plays a decisive role. Several key considerations can be obtained from the reviewed research literature.

Firstly, definitions of family businesses and succession themselves shape how inclusion is understood. Traditional definitions centre around ownership structure and transferring over control duties, but more recent ones emphasize family values, identity and intergenerational intentions (Rodrigues, 2021). Such broad definition draws into the limelight the affective and cultural dimensions of succession that are prone to disadvantage daughters. In places where succession is viewed as a continuation of family tradition, sons are more easily associated with maintaining tradition, while daughters must overcome deeply rooted assumptions of inadequacy (Nguyen, 2022). Second, across contexts, women encounter stereotypes that associate leadership with masculine traits such as assertiveness and authority, while femininity is linked with caregiving and support (Maseda, Iturralde, Aparicio, & Cooper, 2023). Sons are given preference as natural heirs in succession planning and daughters are expected to "prove themselves" through outstanding performance and advanced degrees or qualifications (Alvarado-Alvarez & Euwema, 2024). The fact that these dynamics continue even when women have universal education, highlights that competency alone cannot overpower bias; cultural legitimacy is just as important. Third, succession results centre around the father–daughter relationship. Fathers are power gatekeepers and their willingness to approve daughters as leaders is often the determining factor in whether succession occurs (Polo, 2020). This willingness is, however, derailed by emotional attachment as well as protective instincts. Many fathers unconsciously shield daughters from the risks of leadership, perceiving this as care rather than exclusion, thereby restricting their exposure to strategic decision-making (Maseda et al., 2023). Handler’s (1989) observation that founders struggle to abdicate power is still relevant: succession delays are usually a sign of the incumbent's reluctance to release control, a factor that is amplified if the future successor challenges anticipated gender role patterns. Fourth, cross-cultural differences affect the intensity and even the type of these challenges. Women's opportunities are expanding in Portugal with higher levels of female education and

EU gender equality models but they are still underpinned by patriarchal family decision-making norms (Associação das Empresas Familiares, 2020). Japan presents a case of strong resistance, whereby Confucian cultures and rigorous gender hierarchies mean that daughters are rarely considered unless no male heir exists, reflecting the country's consistently low performance on global gender equality indices (Huang, Gates, Sinatra, & Barabási, 2020). By contrast, the United States provides comparatively greater openness to daughters as successors, driven by more equalitarian inheritance laws and broader acceptance of women in executive roles. Still, implicit biases remain, with daughters often needing to prove their legitimacy more than sons (Alvarado-Alvarez & Euwema, 2024). This contrast indicates that barriers to women's inheritance prevail everywhere but vary in power, symbolising the dynamic crossroads of cultural models, legal frameworks and generational mentalities.

Finally, an important insight is that greater gender representation in succession is not merely a matter of social justice but also a strategic advantage. It is said that leadership by women is linked to relational intelligence, inclusivity and long-term vision which are qualities that are especially valued in uncertain, innovative and intergenerational contexts (Calabrò, Bang, Basuthakur, Fedy, & McGinness, 2020; Baltazar et al., 2023). Thus, overlooking daughters as successors not only perpetuates inequality and, more importantly, indicates that family businesses lack an opportunity to develop resilience and competitiveness in globalising contexts. All these results illustrate that the study of father-daughter succession must integrate structural, cultural and relational dimensions. Succession is shaped by definitions, constrained by stereotypes, negotiated through family dynamics and embedded in cultural contexts. In addition, inclusivity offers concrete benefits that extend beyond fairness to the strategic and economic well-being of family businesses.

The literature provides a clearer picture of the challenges and opportunities inherent in father-daughter transitions. It becomes evident that daughters are not excluded because of a lack of capability but rather because of prevalent cultural assumptions and implicit biases that question their right to succession. Where educational levels and generational changes challenge these assumptions, daughters are increasingly visible as successors, yet the process remains uneven across societies. These trends begin to answer *RQ1: What insights does the current literature provide regarding father-daughter succession in family businesses?* by revealing that while barriers remain deeply embedded, there is also evidence of gradual transformation and recognition of the strategic value women bring towards leadership succession.

6. Lessons Learned

The literature makes clear that succession is not determined solely by structures or formal rules but is profoundly influenced by culture. One of the major takeaways is that cultural frameworks shape succession outcomes far more significantly than may be immediately apparent. Even though institutional changes and legal frameworks have promoted gender equality, cultural perceptions still favour men as born leaders. This is a revelation that formal equality does not always translate into lived equality and that the greatest barriers are most often in deep-rooted cultural perceptions and collective mindsets rather than in the absence of legislation. Another lesson is that even in contexts where opportunities for women have expanded, the prospect of parity between men and women in succession remains misleading. Daughters must still, in the majority of cases, prove themselves more than sons. This suggests that the route to leadership is not simply professional but symbolic too: legitimacy must be negotiated against traditional expectations of gender roles. Therefore, true equality in family business succession requires a shift not only in policy but also in social attitudes and cultural narratives.

Finally, the literature also points to the company's own role of mentorship and nurturing. While daughters will attempt to legitimise themselves externally and then return to the family business to gain credibility, such a tactic is in fact reflective of the influence of social norms challenging their legitimacy. Studies suggest that more effective succession occurs when daughters are gradually integrated, mentored and empowered within the family firm, rather than being dealt with as outsiders who must fight their way in. This lesson reveals how both personal strategies and organisational practices are shaped by broader gender dynamics and how changing these practices can accelerate cultural change.

Collectively, these findings address to *RQ2: What lessons can be learned from the published literature about gendered power dynamics and cultural influences?* The evidence shows that culture remains the strongest predictor of succession outcomes, that legal gender equality in law does not translate to equality in practice, and that active mentoring within family businesses is essential to breaking down stereotypes and building daughters' legitimacy as leaders.

7. Gaps and Future Research Needs

Although the literature on family business succession has grown substantially in recent years, important gaps remain, particularly when focusing on father-daughter transitions. One of the main gaps is the limited amount of research explicitly centred on daughters as successors. Even though father-daughter power transfers are frequently the most emotionally and symbolically significant transitions in family businesses, few studies specifically look at these dynamics, regardless of the fact that a few address women in leadership in general (Polo, 2020).

The cross-cultural dimension is another area of disparity. There is little understanding of how cultural frameworks outside of Europe and North America influence succession outcomes because a large portion of current research is focused on Western contexts. Research in regions such as Asia, Latin America and Africa remains relatively low despite cultural traditions and institutional practices in these environments having a profound influence in women's as legitimate successors (Maseda, Iturralde, Aparicio, & Cooper, 2023). Therefore, in order to capture the diversity of experiences across various institutional and cultural contexts, future research should take a more comprehensive comparative approach. In terms of methodology, more empirical and longitudinal research that tracks succession processes over time is also needed. Even though case studies and cross-sectional analyses are useful, they are not sufficient to capture the dynamic negotiation of legitimacy and authority that takes place during long-term transitions (Baltazar, Ferreira, & Silva, 2023). Monitoring succession processes in real-time would provide richer understanding about how mentoring, cultural expectations and family dynamics interact during different stages of leadership transfer.

This research gap became especially visible during the development of this dissertation. In order to examine their lived experiences across the themes found in the literature, the original plan was to interview women who had gone through father-daughter power shifts in family businesses. However, the reality is that so few women have experienced this particular transition that a significant empirical study could not be carried out. The only women identifiable were well-known public figures, who are largely inaccessible for academic interviews. This lack of representation reflects both the rarity of father-daughter successions and the pressing need to document and share these experiences. With less exposure, daughters across the globe can't learn from each other's experiences, obstacles and tactics for triumph.

Future research must therefore not only focus on identifying more cases but also on creating platforms for women in family business leadership to exchange knowledge and support, enabling them to thrive across different cultural contexts. In short, these gaps point toward an agenda for future research that is more inclusive, comparative and applied. Addressing *RQ3: What needs to be investigated now to support daughters in leadership transitions across diverse cultural contexts?* Three priorities are suggested by the literature: to place daughters centre stage in succession research, to expand geographic and cultural sampling in studies and to create pragmatic frameworks for inclusive leadership transitions. By addressing these areas, future scholarship can contribute not only to academic debates but can also support long-term sustainability and equitability in family businesses worldwide.

Conclusions

With an emphasis on how gender, culture, and intergenerational relationships affect leadership outcomes, this dissertation aimed to investigate the power dynamics of father-daughter transitions in family business succession. Families are the backbone of economies around the world, and their succession plans determine not only the survival of the company but also the generational transfer of values, identity and legacy. The unique experience of daughters in succession, however, is still little understood and frequently ignored in the larger field of family business research, despite their prevalence.

Through a systematic review of recent scholarship, this study has shown that, despite the growing number of women in executive positions worldwide, daughters still face major obstacles to succession. These obstacles are typically the result of gendered stereotypes and cultural presumptions that portray men as the natural heirs and women as the secondary contributors, rather than explicit acts of exclusion. Even when daughters have the requisite credentials and dedication, they are often expected to prove themselves more than their brothers, and their legitimacy is frequently questioned. One of the most compelling findings to emerge from this study is the father's decisive role in shaping succession outcomes. Fathers are the gatekeepers of leadership, and their willingness (or reluctance) to embrace daughters as successors determines whether transitions succeed or stall. These choices are impacted by cultural norms regarding leadership, emotional ties and protective instincts in addition to logical evaluations of ability. Therefore, succession in family businesses must be viewed as a negotiation of power, identity and tradition in addition to a strategic transfer. The comparative analysis of Portugal, Japan and the United States brings out the importance of cultural context. While barriers exist everywhere, their intensity varies. Portugal is an example of a society in transition, where patriarchal traditions endure despite increased educational attainment and gender policies at the EU level opening up new opportunities. Japan illustrates the strongest resistance, shaped by Confucian traditions and ingrained hierarchies that limit women’s access to authority. In contrast, although implicit biases remain rooted in family expectations, the United States offers a more encouraging atmosphere. These cases demonstrate that gendered succession is not only a private family matter but also a reflection of broader societal norms and values.

In addition to pointing out obstacles, this dissertation has emphasised the tactical benefits of increased inclusivity. Women in leadership often bring collaborative management styles, relational intelligence and long-term orientation, which are traits that promote resilience and adaptability in times of transition. Ignoring or undervaluing daughters as

successors is not only unjust but also strategically shortsighted. Finally, the process of dissertation development revealed a striking research gap: the unavailability of real-life, existing examples of women who have undergone father-daughter successions. The initial plan to conduct interviews with women in this position proved unfeasible, largely because so few have experienced this process and those who have are often public figures beyond reach. This lack of representation demonstrates the rarity of such transitions and highlights the urgent need for greater visibility. Future research should aim to document and amplify these experiences, creating opportunities for daughters across cultures to learn from one another and navigate succession with greater confidence and support.

In conclusion, by addressing cultural biases, fostering mentorship within family firms and legitimising daughters as rightful successors, families can not only preserve their businesses but also contribute to broader social progress. The path toward equity remains long, but as education, generational change and global dialogue advance, daughters are increasingly positioned not as exceptions but as leaders in their own right.

As a daughter preparing to one day succeed in my own family's business, this research is more than an academic exercise but it is a mirror of the challenges I will most probably face and a guide for navigating them. What I have learned is that succession is never just about strategy or ownership; it is about trust, acknowledgment and the courage to challenge traditions that no longer serve us. The lack of women who have experienced father-daughter transitions and the difficulty of reaching them for this study shows how rare these pathways still are. However, it also emphasizes how critical it is to increase their visibility. By sharing experiences across cultures and supporting each other's journeys, daughters in family firms can begin to dismantle stereotypes, claim their legitimacy and thrive as leaders. This dissertation is a step towards that visibility and a reminder that the path forward, while still long, is being built with every daughter who dares to lead.

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8. Annexes

8.1 Annex 1 - Initial List of 50 References

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