



Women in family business succession: a systematic literature review and future research agenda

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Abstract

Although CEO succession literature has witnessed a momentous evolution in the last few decades, research on female succession remains fragmented and limited. This comprehensive study aims to overview the existing knowledge on women in family firm succession. We systematically reviewed 62 papers published in 28 academic peer-reviewed journals from 1990 to 2022 in Scopus database. To begin with, we highlighted theoretical lenses, methodological approaches, and geographical focus investigated in this field. Later, through content analysis, we classified and structured the articles under investigation into four major thematic clusters: (1) Factors influencing women's succession, (2) Female succession process, (3) Women's roles in the business transfer, and (4) Female's identity and legitimacy construction. Beyond that, we provided a comprehensive structured view (thematic map) of the state-of-the-art, including three levels (antecedents, process, and outcomes), to guide next-generation researchers. Finally, we revealed scientific voids in the current literature on female succession and offered prominent insights for future research in this field.

Keywords Women · Gender · Succession · Family business · Systematic review · Thematic map

JEL Classification M14 · M19

1 Introduction

Dominating the economic landscape (Chrisman et al. 2005), family firms are the most ubiquitous business entity worldwide (La Porta et al. 1999; Rovelli et al. 2021). Despite their socio-economic importance, the continuity of family firms beyond the

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third generation remains elusive (Overbeke et al. 2015). In fact, CEO succession is among the most perilous situations in family-owned firms (Ahrens et al. 2015). Besides, it has been, for so long, the most researched topic in family business field (Brockhaus 2004; De Massis et al. 2008). Nevertheless, literature reviews (e.g., Kubíček and Machek 2019; Maseda et al. 2021) reveal a dearth of research on gender and family business succession.

Regarding gender, the growing number of female CEOs tends to change the situation of women in the business area. Women are starting profitable businesses, and daughters are taking over family firms (Martinez Jimenez 2009). In family businesses, women have been acknowledged to be significant contributors both in developed and developing countries (Karataş-Özkan et al. 2011). Recently, the involvement of females in leadership positions has been four times higher in family firms than in non-family firms. These businesses offer better opportunities for women to become leaders (Campopiano et al. 2019). However, daughters still encounter numerous barriers (Vera and Dean 2005), due to gender inequality (Gherardi and Perrotta 2016) and culture-related factors, such as Chinese Confucian families (Xian et al. 2021). Therefore, daughters have to construct their identity to prove that they are legitimate successors (e.g., Xian et al. 2021; McAdam et al. 2021; Hytti et al. 2017).

Lately, succession has become a crucial phase where women gain more visibility and get involved formally in those firms (Xian et al. 2021; Campopiano et al. 2017). Despite the significant gender gap during the succession process (McAdam et al. 2021), daughters are encouraged to run and get involved in the business at a young age. Thus, the successor selection process has become more objective, even in traditional cultures (Deng 2015; Maseda et al. 2021). Nevertheless, to date, predecessors still favor male successors over female successors (Ahrens et al. 2015).

Although succession literature has witnessed a momentous evolution, the existing knowledge on women in business succession remains fragmented and limited. Prior systematic studies have primarily reviewed women in family businesses in general, with only a minor focus on female succession. For instance, Campopiano et al. (2017) analyzed 87 papers focusing on women in family firms and found, up to 2016, only 16 papers specifically addressed women's succession. Similarly, a recent review by Maseda et al. (2021) maps the literature on women's involvement in those firms. Their results revealed five main research lines; one of them studied women in family-firm succession (33 papers). Furthermore, in the succession context, Kubíček and Machek (2019) systematically reviewed 35 articles on gender-related factors in business succession. As a result, they identified three major factors: environment and context, people and processes.

While previous literature reviews have mainly focused on women in the family business (FB) domain in general, a structured review analyzing in-depth gender, specifically in the succession context, is still lacking. In fact, early researchers often studied women in FB and females in FB succession interchangeably, neglecting succession context peculiarities. This might lead to ambiguities regarding the differences between the two subjects. In this sense, making reconciliation is necessary to better understand this topic (Carbone et al. 2022). Furthermore, in recent years, literature has moved from a phase of 'women's exclusion' to 'women's consideration'

in business succession (Maseda et al. 2021; Cesaroni and Sentuti 2018). Thus, conducting a targeted analysis of this transition can be highly interesting.

To address these gaps, we conducted a comprehensive Systematic Literature Review (SLR) which is widely recognized as an efficient and high-quality methodology for identifying and assessing extensive research contributions (Tranfield et al. 2003). As a powerful form of research, this method enables us to synthesize and critically review the existing body of literature, in a transparent and reproducible manner (Kraus et al. 2020), particularly in fragmented fields.

Stemming from this discussion and recognizing the relevance of gender issues and the added value of SLR methodology, our objective is to systematically compile and critically synthesize the current state of knowledge on female succession. Additionally, we aim to offer potential research avenues to advance our understanding in this field. To guide our review, three research questions were formulated:

1. What were the theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and contexts studied in female succession literature?
2. What are the key research themes in this field?
3. What are the future directions suggested by our results?

From a theoretical standpoint, this review contributes to the literature as it builds a bridge between CEO succession research and gender by highlighting how females take over the family firms (antecedents and process), what are the outcomes of this process, and also how they build their identity in the transfer context. Then, it presents theoretical and methodological perspectives adopted to understand this phenomenon and also the contexts explored. In addition, it offers a comprehensive structure (thematic map) that is relevant to guide researchers and help them understand the relationships among different themes (Carbone et al. 2022). Finally, it identified research gaps in the literature and spotlighted promising research avenues.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, the next section provides information about our research methodology. Second, the section “**results**” is dedicated to the results of the descriptive and content analysis. Third, the main findings and future research directions are discussed. Finally, the last section concludes by highlighting the study’s implications and limitations.

2 Research method

This systematic literature review aims to provide a comprehensive knowledge map of female succession, highlighting its main research themes and identifying gaps to expand future studies. The systematic review methodology ensures the quality and validity of the review process, given its replicability and transparency (Tranfield et al. 2003). It also reduces potential errors and bias (Siachou et al. 2021; Tranfield et al. 2003).

To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, we established, in the beginning, a review protocol to develop a transparent, high-quality, and replicable process (Tranfield

et al. 2003). This protocol includes search strings, databases, and inclusion/exclusion criteria (Pittaway et al. 2004).

2.1 Data collection

First, the search was carried out on Scopus database, which is recognized as the largest ‘‘multidisciplinary’’ database in social sciences (Bartol et al. 2014; Donthu et al. 2020). Also, according to Falagas et al.’s (2008) comparative study, it covers more journals than Web of Science. Then, based on a scoping study (Tranfield et al. 2003) and past systematic reviews (e.g., Campopiano et al. 2017 and Maseda et al. 2021), we identified and divided the keywords into three groups (Singh and Walia 2020). Using a relevant search string (see Table 1), we checked their presence in the articles’ titles, abstracts, and keywords (Siachou et al. 2021).

Following previous systematic literature reviews (Rana and Paul 2017), we selected only peer-reviewed articles, since this type is recognized as validated knowledge (Bhatt et al. 2020; Dinh and Calabrò 2019). In addition, we included only articles written in English and published in the ‘‘Business, Management, and Accounting’’ subject area. Also, we did not customize the time range and included all relevant articles regardless of their publication date (Siachou et al. 2021). Thus, the search was opened at any time until the endpoint of our research, 8th January 2022.

Based on the aforementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria, the initial search yielded 92 hits in total. Subsequently, we first eliminated two duplicates (see Fig. 1). The screening process was conducted in two steps (Singh and Walia 2020). In the first step, we evaluated the 90 remaining articles by reading their abstracts and full-text, if necessary, to ensure topic fit. After detailed scrutiny, we retain only articles linked directly to female succession subject (Bartolini 2019). In the end, the review process produced 62 papers. In the second step, all papers were entirely read. In this phase, we manually extracted and summarized data (e.g., objectives, research questions, main findings, theories, contexts, methodologies, sample, and type of interviewees...) in Excel table (El Bairi et al. 2021).

Figure 1 summarizes the step-wise selection process followed in this research.

Table 1 Definition of the search string

Group	Search string
Family business	(“family business*” OR “family firm*” OR “family enterprise*” OR “family owner*” OR “family compan*” AND
Succession	(succession OR transmission OR transfer OR successor* OR incumbent*) AND
Women	(women OR female OR gender OR daughter OR mother OR “wife” OR “sister” OR “spouse”)

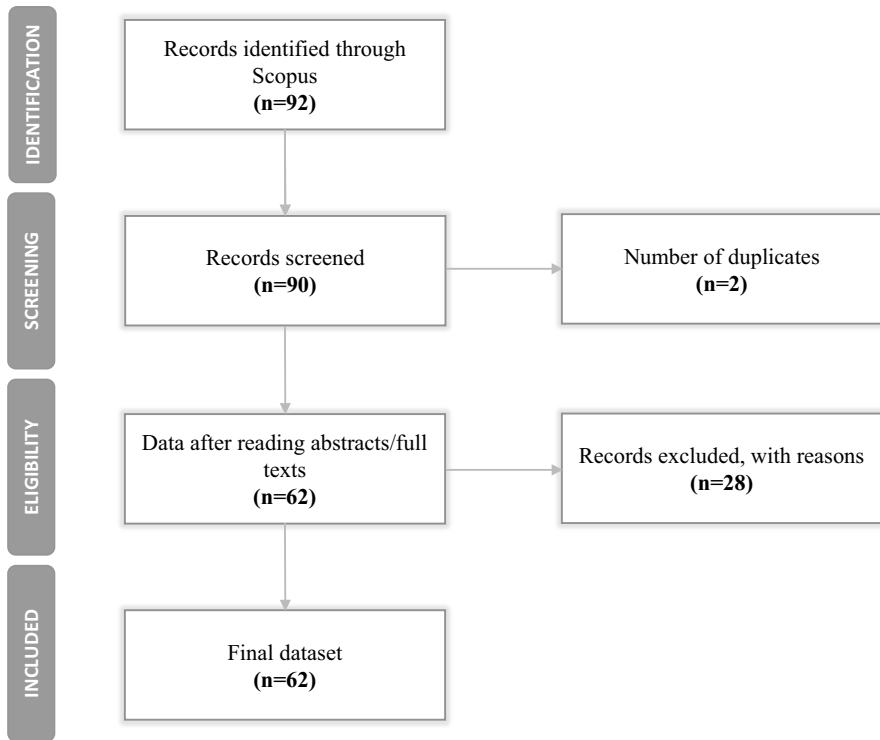


Fig. 1 Flowchart of article selection process

2.2 Data coding and clustering

Following Radu-Lefebvre et al.'s (2021) clustering process, we carefully analyzed and coded the selected articles in three main steps of coding:

- (1) *Thematic categorization of findings* First, we look for commonalities among research findings (Cronin and George 2023). Then, we produced descriptive themes to position each paper within gender and succession literature. Finally, as we went back and forth between conceptual and empirical papers, we refined the existing themes and added additional ones (Radu-Lefebvre et al. 2021).
- (2) *Identification of higher-order themes* At this stage, we examined and clustered lower-order categories into broader frameworks of meaning (Higher-order themes) by focusing on relational structures among descriptive themes (Cronin and George 2023).
- (3) *Integration of higher-order categories into integrative themes* Finally, we systematically examined how higher-order themes fit together and integrated them into “integrative themes,” which construct our clusters. Ultimately, this “big picture” structure allows us to understand each aspect of this topic. Table 2 presents all themes in detail.

Table 2 Data coding and clustering

Descriptive themes	Higher order themes	Integrative themes	
Personal Challenges (e.g. Work-Life Balance) Motivation Personal characteristics Education and experience Female leadership style	Individual factors	CLUSTER 1 FACTORS INFLUENCING FEMALE SUCCESSION	
Incumbent-Successor relationship Mentoring and parental support Early Socialization within the firm Social capital Transfer Communication with Stakeholders Employees Rivalry Family relationships Quality	Relational factors		
Sector Size Corporate governance Shared/full ownership Gendered norms (e.g., Primogeniture)	Business factors		
Discrimination And Stereotypes Society values system (e.g. Patriarchal Norms) Conservative community Cultural Characteristics & Gender Roles Family context	Contextual and Cultural factors		
Offspring's intentions Diverse Options (<i>Succession, Entrepreneurship or, Employment</i>) Sector (e.g., Male-Dominated Industry) Parental Views	Offsprings' Career Choice		CLUSTER 2 SUCCESSION PROCESS
Incumbents' Gender Birth order Primogeniture Organizational factors (size, generation, and sector)	Successor Selection		
Incumbent willingness (or not) to relinquish Emotions' Influence Intentions of Continuity	Succession Planning		
Succession success or failure Post succession performance Family Cohesion And Unity	Post succession		
Role of widows Invisibility Wives' influence and contributions Wives' inclusion or exclusion	Spouses / Widows		CLUSTER 3 WOMEN'S ROLES
Role of mothers Mothers as mediator Mothers' influence	Mothers		

Table 2 (continued)

Descriptive themes	Higher order themes	Integrative themes
Co-construction of identity	Leader Identity	CLUSTER 4 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT
Identity negotiation		
Identity work		
Masculine and feminine identity		
Role identity conflicts		
Mother/founder identities		
Gendered perceptions and biases	Leadership Legitimacy	
Successors' learning and development strategy		
Credibility		

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive analysis

3.1.1 Historical publication evolution

Figure 2 depicts the annual development of articles published between 1990 and 2022, spanning 33 years of research on gender and succession. Globally, we notice that after 2016, this topic has witnessed a growing interest from researchers. Although the first paper appeared in 1990, more than 77% of the studied articles were published between 2010 and 2022. Notably, 2021 counted the most number of articles (15 papers). This significant growth confirms the rising popularity and novelty of this topic.

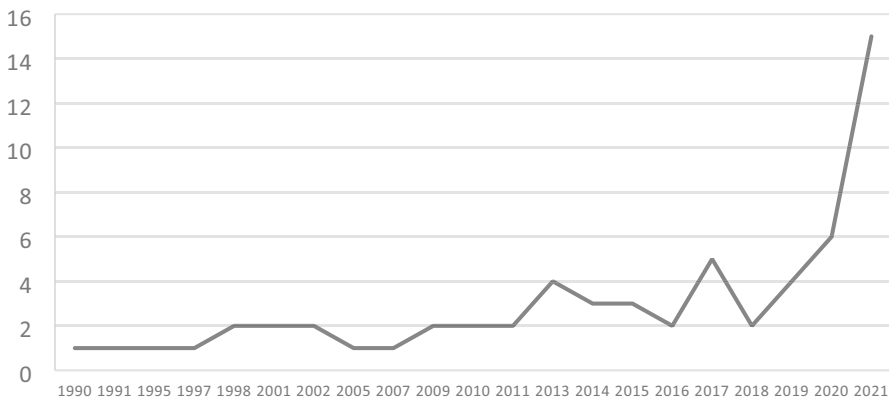


Fig. 2 Annual scientific production

3.1.2 Journal allocation

As regards journals, the 62 articles studied were published in 28 journals. The contribution of the top 5 sources is 57% (35 papers). Family Business Review emerges as the most influential source with 1459 citations and the most prolific journal with 15 articles (24%). Followed by Journal of Family Business Strategy and Journal of Family Business Management, with 261 and 115 citations, respectively. Table 3 includes information about journals with at least two papers.

3.1.3 Gender analysis of authors

Inspired by a recent study by El Bairi et al. (2021) in medical sciences, we conducted a gender analysis of authors, which aims to overview women's authorship in succession and gender research (Bendels et al. 2018). This study reveals an overrepresentation of females as first and co-authors. The gender metrics deposit that among the 167 authors, 110 of them are women scholars.

Table 4 shows that females hold 66% of all authorships and over 73% of first authorships. Those results accentuated the overrepresentation of females in the area studied. Based on this forecast, we predict the integration of men in this field with the emergence of gender equality in the next decade (Bendels et al. 2018).

3.1.4 Theoretical lenses: an overview

There are diverse theoretical perspectives adopted (Table 5). Regarding numbers, 46% of articles use multiple views. Notably, many studies combine theories from social sciences, such as liberal feminist theory and social feminist theory (Soost and Moog 2021). Others combine family and gender theories (e.g., family embeddedness perspective and societal gender norms (Feldmann et al. 2020)). Although, only 16% draw on one single theory as a guiding framework (e.g., Byrne et al. 2019; Cadieux et al. 2002). While almost 28% (17 articles) don't clearly elucidate a specific one.

Table 3 Most productive academic journals with at least two publications

Rank	Sources	Articles	h_index	TC	FP	LP
1	Family Business Review	15	13	1459	1990	2021
2	Journal of Family Business Management	9	6	115	2013	2022
3	Journal of Family Business Strategy	5	5	261	2013	2020
4	International Journal of Entrepreneurship And Small Business	3	1	12	2016	2021
5	International Journal Of Gender and Entrepreneurship	3	3	97	2014	2017
6	International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship	3	3	81	2017	2021
7	European Journal of Family Business	2	2	14	2017	2018
8	Gender in Management	2	1	13	2019	2021

TC: total citation; FP: first publication; LP: last publication

Table 4 Female–male authorship analysis

Years	No. of articles	No. of authors	No. of female authors	% of female authors	No. of female as first author	% of female as first author
[1990–1997]	4	7	4	57%	3	75
[1998–2005]	7	15	9	60%	5	71
[2006–2013]	11	25	17	68%	9	82
[2014–2021]	40	120	81	68%	28	70
Total	62	167	111	66%	45	73

Table 5 Theoretical perspectives adopted in at least two articles on female succession

Theories	No. of articles
Agency theory	3
Identity theory	3
Social constructivist view	3
Anthropological theory	2
Intergenerational solidarity theory	2
Resource-based view	2
Theory of Planned Behavior	2

Most theories found their origins in social and psychological sciences, such as Social Role Theory (Mustafa et al. 2019), Social Constructivist View (e.g., Xian et al. 2021; Byrne et al. 2019; Hytti et al. 2017), and Psychological ownership theory (Almlöf and Sjögren 2021). At the same time, some studies draw on family business perspective (e.g., Intergenerational solidarity theory (e.g., Gimenez-Jimenez et al. 2021); Family FIRO theory (Haberman and Danes 2007).

Furthermore, we distinguish between individual-centric and business-centric theories. Recently, some individual-centric articles employed identity and identity work theories to investigate how daughters construct their identities during the succession process (e.g., Xian et al. 2021; McAdam et al. 2021; Hytti et al. 2017). However, other business-centric research draws on some traditional theories (Teixeira et al. 2020). For instance, Agency Theory (e.g., Urban and Nonkwelo 2020) and Resource-Based View (e.g., Karataş-Özkan et al. 2011).

We provided an overview of the most commonly used theories in Table 6.

3.1.5 Methodological approaches

Regarding methodologies, qualitative studies outnumber quantitative ones. Almost 60% of the selected articles are qualitative works, particularly case studies (16 cases) (e.g., Ferrari 2019; Howorth and Assaraf Ali 2001). In contrast, only 16% followed

Table 6 Overview of main theories used on gender in family business succession

Theoretical lens	Rationale
Agency theory	<p><i>Process</i> For business effectiveness, predecessors prefer “potential” successors with higher ownership stakes (Chrisman et al. 1998). However, when driven by their private benefits, incumbents’ “gender preferences” might constrain the successor selectivity, potentially leading to the choice of a ‘second-best’ successor (Ahrens et al. 2015)</p> <p><i>Outcomes</i> This gender bias might reduce the firm’s efficiency and profitability, post-succession, which may cause costs to the noncontrolling group (Ahrens et al. 2015)</p>
Identity theory	<p><i>Process/Outcomes.</i> An identity is attached to a particular role such as being a wife, daughter, successor. Through a role negotiation process, individuals can learn a new role, thus a new identity. However, performing several identities results in identity conflict (Burke 2006)</p> <p>Moreover, identities are socially constructed (Lewis 2013), based on social interactions and relationships with different people (Stryker and Burke 2000)</p>
Social constructivist view	<p><i>Process/Outcomes</i> Identities of next-generation members are viewed to be a ‘process of becoming’, as they are in constant development and change (McAdam et al. 2021; Cesaroni et al. 2021). In fact, daughters successors engage in an ongoing process of identity construction through interactions and (re)negotiation with different stakeholders (Xian et al. 2021). Her identities are guided by some socially shared identity norms of being both a daughter and a leader (Essers and Benschop 2007; Hytti et al. 2017; Watson 2009)</p>
Anthropological theory	<p><i>Antecedents.</i> This theory combines three types of motivation that shape human decision-making and subsequent actions (López 1991). First, <i>extrinsic motivation</i> encompasses external economic and non-economic rewards. Second, <i>intrinsic motivation</i> stems from the inherent satisfaction after accomplishing a work. Finally, <i>ethical motivation</i> involves a set of motives, such as helping others (e.g. the family and employees), improving the business, and making a social impact. It is when females decide in the best interest of others (Akhmedova et al. 2020, Argandoña 2008)</p>
Intergenerational solidarity theory	<p><i>Process/outcomes</i> Intergenerational solidarity (IS) strengthens intergenerational bonds and family cohesion through early socialization and modern communication, despite the presence of centrifugal social forces that separate family members (Gimenez-Jimenez et al. 2021). In succession context, IS increases children’s self-efficacy (Jaskiewicz et al. 2017) and fosters a sense of loyalty and obligation toward the family business (Vardaman and Montague-Mfuni 2021; Kim 2006). Also, this theory explains how certain families transfer entrepreneurial qualities to their children who then become successors (Gimenez-Jimenez et al. 2021; Jaskiewicz et al. 2017)</p>
Resource-based view	<p><i>Antecedents / Outcomes.</i> New-generation females are often equipped with a high level of experience and skills when joining the family business, which may lead to strengthening firms’ competitive advantages (Karataş-Özkan et al. 2011; Chrisman et al. 2003)</p>
Theory of Planned Behavior	<p><i>Antecedents/process.</i> Behaviors are linked directly to intentions that are informed by salient beliefs. This theory investigates daughters’ beliefs, attitudes, and norms that motivate them, or not, to take over the family business. For instance, their willingness and their perception of succession might be shaped by gender roles, particularly when they believe that assuming leadership roles may be unattractive to men. Also, they may take over if they perceive it as rewarding to a family business continuity</p>

a quantitative approach, particularly regression analysis (e.g., Ahrens et al. 2015; Schröder et al. 2011) and surveys (e.g., Urban and Nonkwelo 2020; Harveston et al. 1997). We observe an unequal distribution between empirical studies (Table 7).

For conceptual works, we found six literature reviews in the data (10%). For instance, a bibliometric analysis (Maseda et al. 2021) and a systematic review (Campopiano et al. 2017) were used to study women in the family business in general.

Regarding clusters, the first cluster includes 18 qualitative works (90% of empirical studies) and only two quantitative studies. In contrast, authors studied female succession process mainly quantitatively (Cluster 2). Indeed, this cluster includes 87% of the quantitative studies identified in this systematic review (13 articles). Finally, all empirical studies in clusters 3 and 4 adopted a qualitative approach.

3.1.6 Leading countries: contextual overview

Through content analysis, we identified countries investigated in empirical studies. Table 8 discloses that Europe, Asia, and America emerged as the dominant continents in terms of publication. The major countries explored are European countries (38%)—especially Spain and Italy, publishing four articles each. Followed by Asian countries (23%) and primarily China with four papers (e.g., Li et al. 2020; Mustafa et al. 2019). In addition, in America, scholars explored mainly U.S. and Canadian contexts. However, there is a dearth of research on Latin America and MENA (Middle East and North Africa) regions. Notably, little research has been conducted in African continent (5 papers); three of them were published more than ten years ago. In a broad sense, U.S. emerged as the most prolific country, with seven articles (13%).

3.2 Content analysis of thematic areas

For a better qualitative assessment, we conducted a content analysis to outline the existing literature on female succession. This analysis aims to determine and understand the nascent and renowned research clusters (Singh et al. 2021). Four research themes were identified and labeled as (1) Factors influencing women's succession, (2) Female succession process, (3) Women's roles during the business transfer, and (4) Females' identity and legitimacy construction.

Cluster 1: Factors influencing women's succession (N = 23)

The first cluster comprises 23 research studies that encompass several factors facilitating and impeding female succession. While Martinez Jimenez (2009) classified women in family business literature into two subthemes: obstacles and positive aspects, we expanded the categorization to study factors across four levels: individual, relational, organizational, and contextual/cultural. This broader classification acknowledges that some factors can act as facilitators or barriers to women's succession depending on various aspects.

Table 7 Methodological approaches adopted in the 62 papers

Methodology	N. articles	%	Example des articles
Qualitative	38	61	Xian et al. (2021), Vardaman and Montague-Mfuni (2021), Mussolino et al. (2019), Ferrari (2019), Byrne et al. (2019), Overbeke et al. (2013), Vera and Dean (2005)
Quantitative	15	24	Soost and Moog (2021), Umans et al. (2021), Remery et al. (2014), Halkias et al. (2010), Ahrens et al. (2015), Chrisman et al. (1998), Harveston et al. (1997)
Conceptual	6	10	Campopiano et al. (2017), Maseda et al. (2021), Nelson and Constantiniadis (2017), Martinez Jimenez (2009), Dumas (1990), Cicellin et al. (2015)
Mix	1	2	Akhmedova et al. (2020)
Other types ^a	2	3	Kaslow (1998), Lansberg (1991)
Total	62	100	

^aInterview with a psychologist (Lansberg 1991) Case discussion – consulting (Kaslow 1998)

Table 8 Contexts explored in the empirical studies

Continents/Example countries	No	%	Example of articles
Europe	21	38	
Spain	4	7	Akhmedova and Cavallotti (2021), Aldamiz-Echevarría et al. (2017)
Italy	4	7	Ferrari (2019), Mussolino et al. (2019), Cesaroni et al. (2021)
Germany	3	5	Ahrens et al. (2015), Otten-Pappas (2013), Schröder et al. (2011)
Asia	13	23	
China	4	7	Li et al. (2020), Mustafa et al. (2019), Deng (2015), Xian et al. (2021)
India	3	5	Joshi et al. (2018a, b), Mathew (2016)
Indonesia	2	4	Ramadani et al. (2017), Anggadwita et al. (2020)
America	12	21	
US	7	13	Vera and Dean (2005), Poza and Messer (2001), Kaslow (1998)
Canada	4	7	Koffi et al. (2014), Cadieux et al. (2002), Chrisman et al. (1998)
Mexico	1	2	Maciel et al. (2021)
Afrique	5	9	
Kenya	1	2	Janjuha-Jivraj and Woods (2002)
South of Africa	4	7	Vardaman and Montague-Mfuni (2021), Van der Merwe (2010)
Oceania	2	4	
Australia	2	4	Cosson and Gilding (2021), Smythe and Sardeshmukh (2013)
Multiple countries (more than two)	3	5	Feldmann et al. (2020), Gimenez-Jimenez et al. (2021)
Total	56 empirical studies		

The texts in bold refer to the continents

Individual factors

Recently, researchers have increasingly focused on the positive aspects of this topic. At an individual level, various factors facilitate female succession, including women's motivation to join the business, their personality traits, education, and experience outside the family firm.

Despite the challenges faced by daughters when taking over, such as work-life balance (Vera and Dean 2005), research indicates that family businesses offer a high degree of schedule flexibility, resulting in a better work-life balance. This aspect serves as a primary motivation for women successors (e.g., Karataş-Özkan et al. 2011; Salganicoff 1990). Additionally, second-generation women are more motivated by internal “pull” factors, including personal fulfillment, achievement, and independence, rather than by external “push” factors such as financial motivation (Li

et al. 2020). Similarly, Humphreys (2013) reports that women are more intrinsically motivated to take over family businesses. Nevertheless, drawing upon theory of planned behavior and gender role theory, daughters often contemplate succeeding their parents until a critical event motivates them to take on the successor role (Overbeke et al. 2013).

In addition to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, borrowing from anthropological theory, there is a third type of motivation, known as ethical motivation. In fact, it plays an essential role in engaging these women in leadership positions. It can manifest in several forms, including the desire to help the family, improve the business, or make social contributions (Akhmedova et al. 2020).

In another vein, studies have shown that female successors tend to have higher education levels and human capital compared to their male counterparts (Remery et al. 2014; Ahrens et al. 2015). However, sons may enter the family business with low education levels and work experience (outside the family business), while daughters are expected to be highly educated (Howorth and Assaraf Ali 2001).

In the same level, personality traits also play a significant role in female succession, as highlighted by Campopiano et al. (2017). Notably, women's leadership styles are often described as more sensitive, collaborative, and relationship-oriented (Overbeke et al. 2013; Martinez Jimenez 2009). These emotional skills have been proven to be crucial qualities for a successor (Humphreys 2013). Nevertheless, their leadership style can become a barrier to succession, when the father doubts the effectiveness of a feminine leadership style (Kubíček and Machek 2019).

Relational factors

Intergenerational relationships, especially father-daughter relationships, are widely studied in the selected articles. Several studies have confirmed that the incumbent-successor relationship is a vital vehicle for women's incorporation into the family business (Humphreys 2013). In fact, daughters often have a close, professional, and high-quality relationship with their fathers, which is crucial for succession success (Deng 2015). Additionally, Smythe and Sardeshmukh (2013) found that good communication, early socialization within the firm, and a deeper comprehension of the father's shadow facilitate the father-daughter transfer process. Similarly, several authors report that early socialization within the business facilitates women's pathways to business leadership (e.g., Martinez Jimenez 2009; Vera and Dean 2005).

Nevertheless, the incumbent-successor relationship can also be a source of problems for successors. In fact, Li et al. (2020) found that daughter successors' main challenges were tense parent relationships, gender role conflicts, and alignment issues (individual interests vs. family expectations). Tense parent relationships might be due to generational and gender differences, which can impede social capital transfer, for instance (Deng 2015). Specifically, in mother-son succession, the successor finds it hard to be in an authoritative relationship with his own mother (Lansberg 1991), due to gender differences. Similarly, in same-gender succession (mother-daughter), the daughter also faces difficulties, as the mother may be reluctant to pass her the baton (Ferrari 2019). Regarding non-family stakeholders,

daughters might experience difficulties due to employee rivalry that could impact negatively their business succession (Vera and Dean 2005).

On another hand, parental support and leadership mentoring seem to smoothen daughters' succession (Overbeke et al. 2013). Indeed, previous research by Galiano and Vinturella (1995) empirically confirmed that women in family businesses are often mentored by men, particularly their fathers or husbands. To sum up, the quality of family relationships is deeply related to the well-being of the family business (Smythe and Sardeshmukh 2013).

Organizational factors

There are several firm-related factors that influence female succession, such as firm size, industry, and governance structure. In a broad sense, while women seem more interested in "family" factors, men favor more "business" factors. Although, both genders want to expand the family business, gain technical knowledge, and eventually become their own bosses (Halkias et al. 2010).

Sector. Several authors demonstrated the difficulties encountered by women in a male-dominated industry. Indeed, it is often stated that women cannot run family businesses in these sectors (Soost and Moog 2021). However, in an earlier study by Galiano and Vinturella (1995), women interviewed emphasized their positive experiences within the family firm, even though they were working in a male-dominated sector.

Corporate Governance. Regarding family firm governance, Remery et al.'s (2014) studied gender differences in ownership structure. They found that men successors aspire more to full ownership, while women opt for shared ownership. The authors explained this by the dominance of the part-time work culture among Dutch women. However, the absence of a corporate governance structure in family transmission can result in conflicts, such as sister rivalry, during female leadership transfer (Joshi et al. 2018a, b).

Size. The company's size is considered an essential factor favoring male succession over female succession. Notably, in large family businesses, there are better career opportunities and choices for men successors than for their women counterparts (Halkias et al. 2010).

Gendered norms. Lastly, at the same level, Campopiano et al.'s (2017) report that the presence of Gendered norms (e.g., primogeniture) can hinder female succession.

Contextual and cultural factors

Wang (2010) reports that female exclusion during business transfer is due to macro factors (societal/cultural attitudes toward women) and micro factors (individual and family). These factors can be a source of discrimination and stereotypes. Initially, due to traditional view, women are rarely family business leaders unless they become second-generation members after their husbands' death (Lansberg 1991).

In addition, culture is frequently considered as a crucial contextual factor affecting women's succession (Overbeke et al. 2013). Although succession and gender literature is primarily based on Western family firms, some researchers have

focused on specific countries. For instance, in Turkey, Karatas-Özkan et al. (2011) emphasize the influence of cultural characteristics and gender roles on women's advancement in family firms. In fact, there is a dearth of female successors, especially "daughters," in traditional family businesses compared to entrepreneurial family firms due to conventional patriarchal orientation in Pakistan, for instance (Chang et al. 2020). Similarly, Indian society/culture confines women's roles and capabilities in the succession context (Joshi et al. 2018a,b). Nevertheless, even in conventional societies, like Lebanon, if a family adopts an open approach, it is more likely to consider female leadership (Fahed-Sreih and Djoundourian 2006). Also, although traditional patriarchal norms are still dominant in China, demographic realities require that many family businesses will soon be passed to women (Xian et al. 2021).

Regarding micro-factors, in our sample, few studies have focused on family context and culture and their influence on female succession. Therefore, Glover (2014) sheds light on the social complexities presents in family farms, including power struggles within the family, which are further exacerbated by perceived gender issues. Such gender norms and beliefs drive *daughters' blindness* to become a successor (Overbeke et al. 2013).

Cluster 2: Female succession process (N = 23)

Over the years, researchers have addressed different parts of the transfer process, starting from the intention and career choice of founders' offspring to the post-succession performance. This Cluster aggregates 23 research works that give particular attention to various areas such as offspring's intentions, successor selection, succession planning, and post-succession outcomes.

Career intentions For founders' offspring, career choice inevitably includes joining or not the family firm (Schröder et al. 2011). Studies have shown differences between daughters and sons in terms of their choices of employment, entrepreneurship, or succession. Girls with a family business background prefer more employment and entrepreneurship than taking over the family firm. In fact, they may seek greater fulfillment in an entrepreneurial career, especially in a less male-dominated sector, then taking over an established business (Schröder et al. 2011). When it comes to employment, females are less likely to be a successor vs. an employee than their male counterparts (Feldmann et al. 2020).

Despite their preferences, in the end, their parents' views play a major role in the succession process. As they are the one deciding whether or not their children join the family business (Schröder et al. 2011).

Successor selection Regarding leadership selection process, early research reports that gender and birth order are not considered essential attributes of a successor (Chrisman et al. 1998). Conversely, later researchers commonly indicate that leadership "contest" is influenced by gender and birth order (Byrne et al. 2021). For instance, Aldamiz-Echevarría et al. (2017) point out that birth order impacts the succession process, particularly when the first offspring is a male than when it is a female. In fact, to date, predecessors still prefer male successors, even if women successors possess a high level of human capital (Ahrens et al. 2015).

Nevertheless, Humphreys (2013) suggests that commitment and skills override the successor's gender during the successor selection. The preference for a female successor is due to various factors such as CEOs gender, business size, generation, and sector (Maciel et al. 2021).

Succession planning Other studies in this cluster tackle female succession planning (SP). In a broader sense, this subject is still fragmented and limited. Each study deals with a critical yet small part of the problem, akin to examining “different parts of the elephant” (Breton-Miller et al. 2004). To begin with, Harveston et al. (1997) shed light on differences and similarities between male and female owners in terms of SP at three levels; *individual* (e.g., age, education, financial stake), *organizational* (e.g., structure, size), and *environmental* (e.g., financial resources). Moreover, Umans et al. (2021) focus on a slightly different *individual* factor, which is emotions and their influence on SP. Their work revealed that the negative influence of CEOs' unwillingness to relinquish is weaker for female CEOs compared to their male counterparts. At the same level, Cadieux et al. (2002) studied, specifically, women business owners. Their results revealed the importance of their “intentions of continuity” in the planning the succession, which means their intentions to continue the business and hand it down to the second generation.

Shifting the focus to the successor side, Urban and Nonkwelo (2020) empirically investigated the factors influencing daughters' SP success. They emphasize the vital role of business context, intra-family cohesion, intra-family adaptability, and parent-daughter relationship in successful daughters' SP.

Succession outcomes In this review, only a few research studies have empirically investigated females' post-succession process. In their study, Soost and Moog (2021) examined differences between female and male successors in terms of organizational and subjective performance after the succession. Their results showed that female successors challenge the business transfer with more employees than male successors. Consequently, they have lower productivity (sales per employee) than their male counterparts. In contrast, there are no gender differences related to satisfaction and growth prospects (subjective performance). However, Ahrens et al. (2015) found that male single family heirs impact negatively the firm performance, leading to an 8% decline, while their female counterparts demonstrate positive impact, with a 7% increase.

At the family level, drawing from intergenerational solidarity theory, a strong cohesion between members from both generation can help the family endure the negative emotions and maintain unity after the succession event (Vardaman and Montague-Mfuni 2021).

Cluster 3: Women's roles in the business transfer (N = 6)

While daughter succession has been the focus of several studies, other women's roles have mostly been overlooked (Almlöf and Sjögren 2021). This cluster comprises six research papers that specifically examine the roles that females play in the leadership transfer process, especially spouses/widows and mothers' roles.

Spouses' roles Regardless of their titles within the family business, CEOs' wives play an important role throughout the firm's life cycle (Poza and Messer 2001). In

succession context, Poza and Messer (2001) examined the spouses' role and influence on family business continuity and proposed a typology of CEOs' wives (e.g., jealous spouse, business partner, and free agent). Whether they have formal or informal roles, wives often strive to strengthen family unity and preserve the business (Poza and Messer 2001). Moreover, from an invisible power perspective, Cosson and Gilding (2021) put forward only wives' remarkable but invisible power and contribution to the succession process. They serve as the "glue" that binds the family firm, the "trust catalyst", the "emotional guardian", and the "hidden power" (Cosson and Gilding 2021).

Furthermore, in farm business context, wives play a crucial role as they are highly involved in tasks, and make decisions jointly with their husbands (Haberman and Danes 2007). Within the same context, in father-daughter succession, women experienced feelings of inclusion, resulting lower family conflicts. In contrast, in a father-son business, they experienced feelings of exclusion, resulting higher conflicts (Haberman and Danes 2007).

In another vein, building on double-loss theory and psychological ownership theory, Almlöf and Sjögren (2021) shed light on spouses' roles after their husband-founders' death; widows. They construct four types of widows based on their decision to take over or sell the company; *exit*eur, entrepreneur, understudy, and bridge-builder.

Mothers' roles Surprisingly, our review reveals only two papers that addressed mothers' role in mediating the incumbent-successor relationship. In fact, the mothers of successors are crucial buffers between the two generations (Janjuha-Jivraj and Woods 2002). This aspect was highlighted by Bell and Pham's (2021), who found that three factors influence the quality of a founder-successor relationship: trust, the successor's age, and the mother's role. However, in a women founder's case, the father does not act as a mediator in the mother-children relationship (Cesaroni et al. 2021).

Cluster 4: Females' identity and legitimacy construction (N = 10)

Cluster 4 encompasses ten research articles, of which seven papers were published after 2016. While the first article in this cluster was published back in 1990, remarkably little research was conducted on this topic until recently. As an emerging line of research, these articles investigate how females construct their identity and establish legitimacy in the succession context.

Identity co-construction Initially, Dumas (1990) emphasizes the role of the father-daughter relationship in building the daughter's identity. In addition, the daughter's legitimacy is also built by the daughter and co-constructed by the father-daughter dyad. This relationship is crucial to co-construct a legitimate female successor identity (McAdam et al. 2021). Therefore, there is a difference in behavioral strategies between women and men owners/predecessors in bringing credibility to their successors (Koffi et al. 2014). In fact, a strong woman predecessor-successor relationship automatically fosters employees' trust in the successor and enhance their credibility (Koffi et al. 2014). In term of successor's strategies, daughters use three strategies to construct their identity: temporary leader, second leader, and independent leader (Xian et al. 2021).

In another vein, to establish their legitimacy, female successors adopt various learning and development strategies to acquire knowledge about their family business, and as a result, build their legitimacy as leaders (Mustafa et al. 2019). However, gendered perceptions and biases influence their learning and development journey (Mustafa et al. 2019), and therefore impact their legitimacy.

Identity work In another research line, scholars have examined how daughters construct and negotiate their identities as family business leaders. Relying on identity work theory, daughters successors need to engage in identity work process to be recognized as a legitimate leaders (McAdam et al. 2021). In their article, Hytti et al., (2017) demonstrated that daughters switch identities in different contexts, sometimes producing a masculinized identity, to gain power and become a legitimate successors. Indeed, female successors enact both masculine and feminine identities to prove to their incumbents and other stakeholders, that they are legitimate (Byrne et al. 2021). Therefore, combining identity theory and social constructivist view, Xian et al. (2021) showed a constant conflict between two role identities; being a filial daughter and a future successor-leader.

Mother's identity Most papers in this cluster focused on the daughter's identity. However, Cesaroni et al. (2021) paid close attention to the identity of the mother/founder. Relying on identity theory, they revealed that women predecessors effectively balanced double identities, entrepreneurial and mother identities. As a consequence, this balance positively affected the succession process.

4 Discussion

The thematic map below (Fig. 3) provides an overview of the literature on female succession and visualizes the relationships between different building blocks, including antecedents, process, outcomes, and other contextual dimensions.

At the map's core, the "antecedents-process-outcomes" perspective highlights the interconnections among various elements, which are both influenced by several "contextual factors" and also may have an influence on "women's identity construction".

Firstly, the figure depicts several antecedents acting as facilitators and barriers to female successors' involvement, at different levels (individual, relational, and organizational). At an individual dimension, female characteristics and background, including experience, education, and motivation, shape their decision to take over (or not) the family business. Additionally, the relational aspect plays a crucial role in influencing female succession. It includes positive aspects such as early socialization with the firm, communication with different stakeholders, quality relationships with family members (e.g., incumbent-successor), which enhance social capital transfer for instance. However, it contains negative factors like employee rivalry can also hinder the process. At a business level, certain factors can either impede or facilitate succession process, such as the sector's gender dynamics (i.e. male dominated industry or not), firm size, and also governance structure (e.g., shared or full ownership aspirations of daughters).

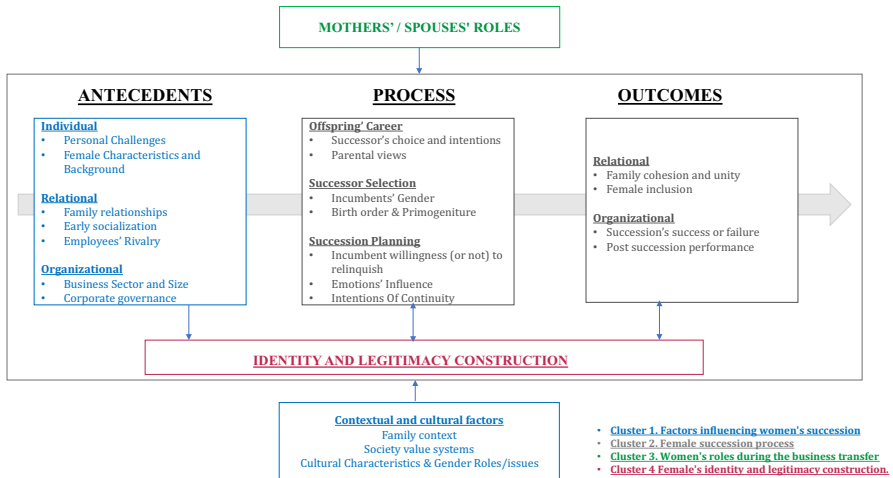


Fig. 3 Thematic map: conceptualization of gender in family firm succession

Secondly, the process of succession involves various elements. First, the offspring's career is influenced by both the successor's intentions and the incumbent's choices (Parental views). When it comes to successor selection, multiple factors come into play, such as incumbent's gender and also primogeniture, as family traditions or cultural practices may favor the eldest child, especially the son. Next, succession planning is primarily influenced by the incumbent transfer-readiness to let go the business and to prepare the new successor.

Thirdly, regarding succession process outcomes, at an organizational level, the succession can be either a success or a failure, which impact the firm's longevity and performance. The impact on performance has been studied in the light of theory of planned behavior and agency theory (Schröder et al. 2011; Ahrens et al. 2015). Nevertheless, the succession success should be complemented by the family well-being, as family cohesion and effective communication between members are crucial to foster family business continuity (Vardaman and Montague-Mfuni 2021). At the same level, women succession can promote inclusiveness and gender diversity within successor teams.

In the "identity and legitimacy construction" block, shaping women's identity starts in childhood and continues throughout their journey as successor-leader. Female successors develop and navigate their sense of identity throughout the entire 'antecedent-process-outcome' perspective. In fact, the multiple antecedents mentioned, the succession process itself, and its outcomes, play a crucial role in shaping their identity and legitimacy. Their identity begins from their early socialization with the firm, which includes the influence of their relationships with both family and non-family members. Also, it progresses through their education and experiences, which contribute to their qualification and readiness to be viable and legitimate leader. During the succession process, the "process of becoming" a leader is a crucial phase for establishing their legitimacy. Also, in turn, daughters can influence the selection process, proving that they are the most competent among

their siblings, or convincing the incumbent to relinquish, due to their strong leader identity. Moreover, regarding the outcomes, their identity is influenced by their inclusion in the family business, and in turn, their identity can also influence the succession outcomes. For instance, their focus on family cohesion as a caring and relationship-oriented successor.

Lastly, this process is moderated by some contextual variables, such as family context, culture, and society value systems. Also, given the mediating role of spouses and mothers, their influence and contribution can take several forms depending on the succession stage. All those dimensions may impact the antecedent-process-outcomes and also their relationships.

5 Agenda for future research

Following previous systematic reviews, we identified research gaps and suggested unexplored research questions. First, based on our descriptive analysis, we provided a general research agenda related to the *methodologies, theories, and contexts*. Secondly, based on our content analysis, we divided our suggestions into three segments: *Antecedent, process, and outcomes*. Table 9 summarizes future research directions, along with suggestions of research questions, possible theoretical lens, and methodological approaches in each area.

5.1 Broad research agenda

Methodologies The empirical research on women and succession has mainly used a qualitative approach, particularly case studies. In contrast, relatively few quantitative researches were conducted. According to Kubíček and Machek (2020), this topic is still unexplored to apply quantitative methodology, which is ill-suited to analyzing complex gender processes. For this reason, we encourage future researchers to adopt mixed methods to complement both approaches and build a solid accumulated knowledge—for instance, Qualitative Comparative Analysis (Akhmedova et al. 2020). Additionally, longitudinal studies would provide evidence of the development of women pre and post-succession, especially in relation to their identity construction (Xian et al. 2021). To advance this field, we encourage researchers to apply also comparative studies to take advantage of the existing literature on father-son succession.

Theories From a theoretical standpoint, given the multidisciplinary of this field, we encourage future researchers to integrate theories from different domains, such as psychological, family, and social sciences. Furthermore, as female succession might be quite a complex phenomenon, multiple theoretical approaches would give a broader and pluralistic perspective to this topic.

Contexts The findings revealed that studies on female succession primarily focus on developed economies (e.g., America and Europe). However, we notice a dearth of works on the African continent. Due to cultural differences, we advocate addressing other geographical areas to explore cultures where the primogeniture issue still

Table 9 Suggested research questions for future studies

Area	Research Gaps	Research questions	Theoretical Lens/ Methodological Approach
ANTECEDENTS	Women Resources and Contribution	What are the unique resources (e.g., human and social capital) women successors bring to the business and their contribution to the succession success?	The Resource-Based View (RBV) Social Capital Theory Method: Appreciative Inquiry Protocol
	Feminine Leadership Style & Behaviors	Do feminine behaviors and leadership style help smoothen the female succession process? Why do females have to behave differently to prove that they are legitimate successors?	Transformational Leadership Theory Identity Work Role Congruity Theory Social Role Theory
	Female Successors' Intentions and Decisions	What are the financial and non-financial (e.g., emotional) factors that shape the decision of women to take over? How do women's emotional attachment to lands shape their decision to assume leadership in a farm family business?	Theory Of Planned Behavior Attachment Theory
	Institutional Factors & Societal Expectation	How do formal and informal institutions affect female succession? How women successors' behaviors, beliefs, and decisions are shaped by societal expectations and gender norms?	Institutional Theory Role Expectation Theory Role Congruity Theory Theory Of Planned Behavior
	Stakeholders' Perception	How does family and non-family stakeholders' perception affect female succession and women's decision to take over?	Stakeholder Theory Legitimacy Theory Self-Positioning Theory Method: Case Studies

Table 9 (continued)

Area	Research Gaps	Research questions	Theoretical Lenses/ Methodological Approach
PROCESS	Cross-gender VS same-gender succession	What are the differences and similarities between cross-gender and same-gender succession processes?	Comparative Analysis
	Female Succession planning	What are the differences between female and male succession planning? How do predecessors and women successors plan and strategize the post-succession phase?	Comparative Analysis Qualitative Research
	Women' roles	What are the key roles of other female family members play and their influence on the female succession process?	Socialization Theory Conflict Theory Family Systems Theory Relational Theory
OUTCOMES	Employees' support	How does the mother-daughter-in-law relationship influence mother-son succession? Why do women challenge the succession process by hiring more employees than male successors?	Qualitative Study
	Non-financial Post-succession performance	Do women successors perform better in terms of non-financial performance than their male counterparts? And what are the factors behind these differences?	Quantitative Study
	Change of Leadership style	How does the change in terms leadership style, particularly in cross-gender successions, influence successors' success or failure?	Qualitative Study
	Family cohesion and harmony	What are the strategies do women successors employ to maintain and foster family cohesion and harmony after the succession process?	Intergenerational Solidarity Theory Relational Theory Social Network Theory

prevails (McAdam et al. 2021). Future researchers could also test the applicability and generalizability of prior research in various contexts.

Shifting the focus to sectors, most papers do not study one specific industry. Therefore, examining female succession in one pivotal sector will certainly enhance our understanding of the peculiarities of that industrial sector. For instance, the agricultural family business has been the focus of only one article by Glover (2014), despite its significant role in emerging economies. Regarding gender, despite women workers' high contributions in the agrarian context, surprisingly, there is a notable gender gap in this sector. Consequently, studying female family succession might be crucial to open the debate about women in leadership positions and women's land ownership, extending beyond women workers. Through emphasizing the uniqueness of this specific setting, including owners' attachment to their land (Quinn and Halfacre 2014), sociocultural specificities, family traditions and heritage, and gender inequality prevalent in rural areas...

5.2 Antecedents

Overall, our analysis clearly reveals that studies focus more on women's invisibility and other negative aspects of female succession (e.g., challenges, unrecognized contribution, informal role...) rather than women's contributions. By turning the attention to the "bright side" of this topic, what women have to offer to the family business. We encourage scholars to dig deeper into women's resources that could help smoothen the succession process, especially resources valued by the family system, such as spousal or parental attention and affection (Poza and Messer 2001). Studies might explore this research question: *What are the unique resources (e.g., human and social capital) women successors bring to the business and their contribution to succession success?* The Resource-Based View and Social Capital theory could be instructive and insightful lenses. Regarding the methodology, we suggest using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) protocol to offer a holistic view of what is creative and positive in this field (Poza and Messer 2001).

In a similar vein, female identity construction is considered a hot topic lately. Specifically, previous researches address how female successors enact masculine identity (and feminine one) to prove that they are legitimate. Therefore, it remains crucial to change this perspective and understand what their feminine behaviors could bring to the family business and also why is it crucial for women, specifically, to switch their behaviors to adjust to the gender expectation role, of being a daughter and a "women" leader. With such premises in mind, the research questions suggested are: *Do feminine behaviors and leadership style help smoothen the female succession process? Why do females have to behave differently to prove that they are legitimate successors?* To answer those questions, researchers could draw upon Transformational Leadership Theory, Identity Work, Social Role Theory, and also Role Congruity Theory.

Furthermore, while scholars have extensively studied predecessors' unwillingness to relinquish, there is limited research on successors' willingness (or not) to take over (Vardaman and Montague-Mfuni 2021), mainly female successors. Thus, future

research may take a step back and examine women successors' intentions to assume leadership roles. Thus, we suggest answering the following research question: *What are the financial and non-financial (e.g., emotional) factors that shape the decision of women to take over?* The Theory of Planned Behavior (Sharma et al. 2003; Stavrou 1998) is, therefore, a suitable theoretical lens to explore those factors.

Turning the attention to a specific context, we suggest studying their willingness to take over agricultural family businesses. According to Quinn and Halfacre (2014), owners often have a strong attachment to their lands. Consequently, investigating this unique aspect could provide a better understanding of the distinction between a regular family business and a farm family business. Researchers could explore the following question: *How do women's emotional attachment to lands shape their decision to assume leadership in a farm family business?* Overall, relying on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Attachment Theory scholars can shed light on the financial, non-financial, and emotional factors that shape women's intentions to take over (or not) farm family businesses.

Shifting the focus to the external level, institutional factors, societal expectations, and gender norms can play a vital role in shaping women's decision to take over, thereby, influencing female succession. To delve deeper into this phenomenon, researchers can explore the following research questions: *How do formal and informal institutions affect female succession? How women successors' behaviors, beliefs, and decisions are shaped by societal expectations and gender norms?* First, by applying institutional theory, scholars can shed light on the role of informal and formal institutions in the participation and ultimate success (or failure) of female succession. Also, by drawing upon theories such as the Role Expectation Theory, Role Congruity Theory, and Theory of Planned Behavior, researchers can provide valuable insights into societal expectations placed on being both a women successor and a daughter and their influence on women's behaviors, beliefs, decisions, and practices in family business.

Lastly, after analyzing the studies' sample, we found that most authors interview mainly incumbents and successors. This confirms the need to shed light on the perceptions of other family and non-family stakeholders (e.g. employees, clients, suppliers, mothers, sisters, and spouses...) and their impact on women's succession. Going deeper, researchers could answer the following research questions: *How does family and non-family stakeholders' perception affect female succession and women's decision to take over?* To answer this question, multiple case studies are suggested, as stakeholders' perceptions should be captured by hearing their 'voices' and getting their perspectives.

5.3 Process

Our review confirms that the succession process is extensively explored empirically, primarily through quantitative approaches. Therefore, there is a methodological gap that needs to be addressed through qualitative studies to gain a finer and more in-depth understanding of the female transfer process. Furthermore, our study highlights that many scholars have considered only male predecessors, specifically father-daughter succession. Although, given the emergence of women entrepreneurship, studying women

Table 10 Cross-gender VS same-gender succession: comparative analysis

Predecessor	Successor	Succession cases
Male	Male	Cas 1 (Father–Son)
	Female	Cas 2 (Father–Daughter)
Female	Female	Cas 3 (Mother–Daughter)
	Male	Cas 4 (Mother–Son)

predecessors' cases is crucial in the near future. Thus, to take advantage of the existing knowledge on male succession process, a comparative analysis seems more appropriate to answer the following research question operatively (See Table 10): *What are the differences and similarities between cross-gender and same-gender succession?*

In another vein, female succession planning literature is still fragmented and limited, despite the importance of planning business transfers. Therefore, we suggest adapting male succession planning and comparing it to female succession. *What are the differences between female and male succession planning?* Comparative studies would provide some valuable and fruitful results.

Also, notably, scholars point out that succession planning often ends once women take over. Thus, we strongly encourage researchers to undertake future research on post-succession planning. Exploring this area could open intriguing research possibilities, such as investigating whether planning after the succession could be a success factor of female succession. In light of this, we propose the following research question: *How do predecessors and women successors plan and strategize the post-succession?* Qualitative studies are recommended to effectively answer this research question and to dig deeper into this area.

Moreover, our review emphasizes that other women's roles are often neglected, and their contributions are still invisible. Thus, future research could study the family behind the family business, primarily female members (e.g., sisters, spouses, mothers...), and their contribution during the succession process. Therefore, we formulated the research question: *What are the key roles other female family members play and their influence on the female succession process?* Socialization theory might be a suitable theoretical lens for responding to this research question.

Finally, studies can also focus on the role of daughters-in-law, specifically in the context of mother-son succession. The mother-daughters-in-law relationship is often seen to be conflictual (Marotz-Baden and Cowan 1987). Thus, drawing from conflict theory, researchers can study the influence of rivalrous dynamics between mothers and daughters-in-law, particularly in cases where potential divorce or conflicts arise. On the other hand, authors can also explore the bright side of this relationship, as mother-daughters-in-law can also have harmonious interactions (Marotz-Baden and Cowan 1987). This can be approached by drawing from family systems theory and relational theory. To examine the complex interplay between both women and the involvement of the third party (the daughter-in-law), considering both the positive and negative aspects, we suggest addressing the following question: *How does the mother-daughter-in-law relationship influence mother-son succession?*

5.4 Outcomes

Only a few studies focus on female post-succession outcomes. A quantitative study by Soost and Moog (2021), analyzing organizational performance, reveals that women successors hire more employees to challenge the succession compared to their male counterparts. To gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind this strategy, we suggest extending Soost and Moog's (2021) study using a qualitative approach, specifically in another context to ensure generalizability: *Why do women challenge the succession process by hiring more employees than male successors?* In another vein, it is essential for researchers to study other types of performance, such as environmental and social performance, as these have become increasingly important both for businesses and societies. To explore this area, we suggest answering this research question: *Do women successors perform better in terms of non-financial performance?* This suggestion could highlight the benefits of gender diversity in the family business, integrating both genders for better performance.

Regarding leadership style, research indicates that women have a more participative and democratic leadership style than men leader (Eagly and Johnson 1990). Thus, in a father-daughter succession, we assume switching from a masculine to a feminine can influence various aspects of the organization, such as management practices and employees' relationships. However, in post-CEO succession, to our better knowledge, no study has addressed the change from a masculine to a feminine leadership style or vice versa (Cross gender succession). Therefore, there is a need for an empirical study, specifically a comparative study, to explore the transition from male to female leadership style and its impact on the firm and also stakeholders. To address this gap, we suggest answering the following question: *How does the change in leadership style influence successions' success/failure?* This question requires a qualitative study to investigate it in depth.

Lastly, with regards to family cohesion, given that women leaders are often perceived as more caring and relationship-oriented, they might employ specific strategies to maintain strong cohesion among family members and navigate the negative emotions that may arise after the succession phase (Vardaman and Montague-Mfuni 2021). Drawing upon theories such as Intergenerational Solidarity Theory, Relational Theory, and Social Network Theory, researchers are encouraged to explore the following question: *What strategies do women successors employ to sustain and enhance family cohesion and harmony following the succession process?*

6 Conclusion

The present work systematizes the current literature on women in family business succession and provides a comprehensive assessment of research in this field. Through a systematic literature method, we reviewed 62 academic articles published between 1990 and 2022. First, we produced a detailed overview of the methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives adopted by researchers to interpret gender in family firm succession. Second, we provided a comprehensive overview of research trends, classifying the extant literature into four major clusters and constructing

a thematic map. Finally, we identified knowledge gaps in this field and outlined prominent future research areas.

Regarding the implications of the study, given the importance of gender equality and family succession issues, the current research could be beneficial to various stakeholders, including family business owners, policymakers, and practitioners. The key practical implications are as follows:

- First, this review synthesizes female succession literature and emphasizes the existing knowledge gaps. By doing so, it will enhance stakeholders' understanding of the unique aspects and difficulties of women's succession. We believe that gaining knowledge about this topic will raise the awareness of stakeholders about the contribution of women to family businesses and the importance of gender diversity and inclusion in leadership positions.
- Second, policymakers might create or adapt support programs and policies, such as Goal 5 of United Nations Social Development about gender equality. These initiatives will give equitable opportunities to both genders, specifically in the family business context. Consequently, we believe it will foster women's inclusiveness and can contribute to economic development. In agricultural context, advancing this field can lead to economic growth, through successful successions, foster rural development, and empower women by promoting women's leadership and diminishing gender inequality, especially in developing countries.
- Third, the evolution of female succession literature may improve owners' decision-making, especially during the successor selection phase. In fact, informing and sensitizing family leaders about the valuable women's contribution, particularly daughters, may lead toward a more objective and merit-based successor selection process; based on capabilities rather than gender preferences. Additionally, this review may raise their awareness about the constraints of gender bias, which can lead to choosing a "second-best" successor. Is it noteworthy that daughters might be the most capable ones among their children (Ahrens et al. 2015).

Despite the objectivity of the systematic review process, this work is not exempt from limitations. First, the documents used were retrieved from one single database, which might omit relevant academic articles. Second, although the selection of keywords was based on a broad scoping study, the list of keywords may not be exhaustive. Hence, future works may include more extensive databases and keywords to generalize our findings (Andrade-Valbuena et al. 2019). Notwithstanding these loopholes, the purpose of this work is to provide an integrative understanding of gender and succession domain and to offer insightful directions for future research in this field. Our hope is that researchers investigate this topic further and fill the research gaps presented in this study.

Appendix

See Table 11.

Table 11 Distribution of papers in each thematic cluster

Cluster 1: Factors influencing women's succession (23 articles)	Cluster 2: Female succession process (23 articles)	Cluster 3: Women's roles during the business transfer (6 articles)	Cluster 4: Females' identity and legitimacy construction (10 articles)
1. Akhmedova and Cavallotti (2021)	1. Ahrens et al. (2015)	1. Almlöf and Sjögren (2021)	1. Byrne et al. (2021)
2. Akhmedova et al. (2020)	2. Aldamiz-Echevarría et al. (2017)	2. Bell and Pham (2021)	2. Cesaroni et al. (2021)
3. Campopiano et al. (2017)	3. Anggadwita et al. (2020)	3. Cosson and Gilding (2021)	3. Dumas (1990)
4. Deng (2015)	4. Byrne et al. (2019)	4. Haberman and Danes (2007)	4. Gherardi and Perrotta (2016)
5. Ferrari (2019)	5. Cadieux et al. (2002)	5. Janjuha-Jivraj and Woods (2002)	5. Hytti et al. (2017)
6. Galiano and Venturella (1995)	6. Chang et al. (2020)	6. Poza and Messer (2001)	6. Koffi et al. (2014)
7. Glover (2014)	7. Chrisman et al. (1998)		7. McAdam et al. (2021)
8. Halkias et al. (2010)	8. Cicellin et al. (2015)		8. Mustafa et al. (2019)
9. Howorth and Ali 2001	9. Edobor et al. (2021)		9. Mussolino et al. (2019)
10. Humphreys (2013)	10. Feldmann et al. (2020)		10. Xian et al. (2021)
11. Joshi et al. (2018a)	11. Gimenez-Jimenez et al. (2021)		
12. Joshi et al. (2018b)	12. Harveston et al. (1997)		
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18. Maseda et al. (2021)	18. Soost and Moog (2021)		
19. Otten-Pappas (2013)	19. Umans et al. (2021)		
20. Overbeke et al. (2013)	20. Urban and Nonkewelo (2020)		
21. Remery et al. (2014)	21. Van Der Merwe (2009)		
22. Smythe and Sardeshmukh (2013)	22. Van der Merwe (2010)		
23. Vera and Dean (2005)	23. Vardaman and Montague-Mfuni (2021)		

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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