GENDER INFLUENCE ON THE SUCCESSION PLANNING IN FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESSES*

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ABSTRACT

This project mainly proposes a research initiative to investigate the succession process in family business, and mainly the factors that may inhibit women from entering their family’s business in a managerial or decision making capacity. To this aim we will examine both obstacles and positive aspects of women's involvement in family firms and her important/unimportant role in the continuity of the family firm. Afterwards, we will compare data from literature review with the information obtained in our qualitative study in order to improve knowledge in this field of research.

Gender has been one of the inputs traditionally used in the succession planning in family-owned businesses. The result of this gender fact used to be that women were excluded from the management of those businesses unless there were no other family members that could be potential successors. In those cases, as it was the only way to keep the business in the family, women became managers. In the last years, things seem to be changing and to demonstrate it we carried out a qualitative research. To this aim we conducted sixty in-depth interviews to managers that are preparing their family business succession or it had already taken place.

We studied the determinant factors to become a successor, the role of mothers in this process, the advantages and disadvantages of women in the family business and the interest showed by women in entering the family business as well as the problems they face to conciliate professional career with family life and children care.

1. INTRODUCTION

The family firm has always been and continues to be an increasingly vital player in the economy. Family businesses provide most of the jobs in developed countries and represent over 80% of businesses in countries such as USA (Vera and Dean, 2005). In 1996 the majority of existing businesses had begun as family businesses, and 80% of all firms were still family owned or controlled (Lee, 2006). Additionally, in 2003, 35% of the companies listed on the Standard and Poor 500 and in the Fortune 500 were family businesses (Lee, 2006: 103).

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For this work, taking into consideration the definition given by the European Group of Family Enterprises” and the “Family Business Network” (FBN) 2008, we define family business as a company whose ownership and management are concentrated in one or more families, with at least one member of the family is at the helm and control of the business and others are being groomed or considered for eventual leadership, what is considered an evidence of its continuity vocation”.

Once the family business is defined, we will analyse the succession process as it is the keystone to survival in family business.

Comparing the succession process in a family owned business to a non family business; Miller et al. (2003) suggest that family businesses are more complex since they involve two complex and often competing systems: the family system and the corporate system.

The complexity of this process is so high that just 30% of American family businesses survive more than one generation; of that only 15% survive to the next; and just an estimated 5% continue into the 4th generation (Birley, Ng & Godfrey, 1999).

Poza (2004:25) describes succession as, simultaneously passing the managerial baton, the torch of family leadership and the ownership control. He explains that the high failure rate of succession is due to the fact that it is extremely difficult to do all three things within a reasonable period of time. Succession is more a process than an event (Handler, 1994). In fact, the results of the empirical study of Brun de Pontet et al. (2007) suggest that the succession is more complex than a simple adjustment of roles and responsibilities from one generation to another in a reasonable period of time, as it could be derived from Poza succession description.

The attitude of the founder/predecessor, the competing interests between family and business, the inherent difficulties in leadership transitions, and the need for the successor to fill three leadership roles simultaneously are just some of the factors in this discussion. As a process, succession ought to be planned in order to increase family business survival. Nevertheless, owners may resist succession planning because they feel threatened, perhaps, by their fear of losing control, their desire to avoid preferential treatment of children, or because a loss of identity and power in the firm may also result in loss of status within the community (Kets de Vries, 1985; Lansberg, 1988). Another key factor for a successful generational transition is to choice the adequate candidate, who can be male or female. However, accordingly to Rosemblatt et al. (1985) female offspring may not receive the same encouragement, opportunity, and education as the
male offspring, what prevents women from moving toward an executive position in family business.

Thus, this paper seeks to integrate gender specificity and family firm succession in a conceptual framework that will highlight this fundamental relationship. A qualitative research is conducted to investigate the succession process in small and medium family business taking into account how gender could influence in the selection of the successor. We will focus, mainly, in the specific factors that may encourage or inhibit women from entering their family’s business. To this aim we will analyse if gender roles that have been traditionally associated to women still persist in the succession process as well as the motives to be out of the family firm and. if they find the family-business as a good way to match professional career with personal life. Thus, we analyse the role of women in the succession process through the design of a qualitative study based on 60 in-depth interviews to predecessors and successors of family firms in Basque Country region (Spain).

Objectives:

- Knowledge of motives to work in family business and whether these are the same for male and female.
- Interest shown by women to enter in family businesses and whether it is a good alternative to reconcile family and professional life.
- Decisive factors to choose successor.
- Identify advantages and disadvantages of women for family business and their role as mediators.

The paper is organized as follows: first, we will explore literature on the succession process especially those works related with gender topics. Next, we describe the methodology used to carry out the qualitative research. Finally, we present the main results and conclusions of our analysis, as well as its limitations.

2. MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1994 only 2% of CEO’s in family businesses were female (Overbeke, 2007). This figure includes women who replaced their husbands due to death or illness and women who started their own businesses (Overbeke, 2007). In 2005, the figure reached 9.5%
(Vera and Dean, 2005), an elevated but still sorry statistic. Yet, statistics again suggest a phenomenological issue that compels investigation.

A few studies have examined women who have entered their family’s business (Barnes, 1988; Cole, 1997; Dumas, 1988, 1992; Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990; Salganicoff, 1990; Vera and Dean, 2005) but we have found just one study (Overbeke, 2007) that includes women who have not. Research suggests that there is an important bias against women in the succession process (Pyromalis, Vozikis, Kalkanteras, Rogdaki and Sigalas, 2004) Thus, there has been insufficient examination of the reasons for this lack of women participation in executive positions in family firms.

According to Martínez (2009), empirical research and theoretical contributions in this area have generally stressed the change occurring in recent years in relation with women’s increasing incorporation and participation in family business. First contributions focussed mainly on analyzing the difficulties or obstacles that women found when joining their family business or on the lack of recognition for their work (e. g. Dumas, 1989; Salganicoff, 1990). However, recent works pay more attention to the positive aspects, such as opportunities and advantages that women can offer to family business (e.g. Vera and Dean, 2005).

Following Martínez work (2009), we group the main contributions of studies about women in family business into two sections: obstacles and positive aspects.

**OBSTACLES:**

**Primogeniture and gender**

According to primogeniture system derived from the Middle Age, but still widely practiced (Barnes, 1988), the eldest son inherits the role of family leader. This criterion free fathers from the disagreeable task of comparing and choosing between their children (Cabrera Suárez, 1997).

A preference for male successors is made explicit in some of the family-business literature (Dumas, 1992; Kealting & Little, 1997; Stavrou, 1999; Miller et al., 2003, regardless of suitability (Miller, et all., 2003). According to literature, daughters historically have not been considered for succession into management positions in the family businesses (Kealting & Little, 1997; Stavrou, 1999). Francis (1999) said in her book, “The Daughter also Rises”: “Primogeniture continues to dominate the value system of family businesses; a son is expected to join the business, but a daughter is
given a choice – or not invited- as a matter of course” In fact, daughters were not considered as managers, despite the strength of their credentials, unless a crisis created a critical need.

Keating and Little (1997) considered gender the main factor in the successor election process, whereas Stavrou (1999) found out that, even if the daughter was the primogenitor, she was not considered to run the family business. Thus, there were some owners that preferred to sell the business instead of allowing their daughters to lead it (Stavrou, 1999).

While sons are grown up for entering in the family business daughters usually lack the opportunity to succeed their fathers (Dumas, 1992; Miller et al., 2003). Fathers tend to have tacit expectations that their sons will take over the family firm and therefore “groom” their sons for the role (Dumas, 1992: 34).

Apart from primogeniture very little research explains why daughters are not successors in family businesses. Hollander and Bukowitz (1990) suggest it is a result of the father’s sense of duty to protect his daughter. Dumas (1992) also found that daughters were primarily brought into the family business to do lower level tasks, maybe because parents want to protect their daughters and they prefer not to make them deal with the problems related to the management of a company. Another explanation for the prevalence of male successors may be that fathers do not see women as having the capacity and experience necessary for running a business (Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990). In a study conducted in 1988, 100% of the fathers interviewed did not consider their daughters viable successors (Dumas, 1992: 39). This view of daughters tends to persist even after daughters enter the family firm and prove a level of competence over a period of years (Dumas, 1992).

To assist in our understanding of why more daughters do not become successors in family firms, it is instructive to look at the experiences of those who have become successors. Studies show that daughters usually enter the business because of a crisis such as an illness in the family (Barnes, 1988; Dumas, 1992; Salganicoff, 1990). Once daughters become participants in the business, they experience some of the same issues that sons face. They both must deal with the ambiguity of family roles combined with business roles. (Dumas, 1992; Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990).
The “Daddy’s Little Girl,” role directs daughters to “please father” and precludes them from acting as tough and independent managers in business (Dumas, 1988). In comparison with sons, this problem of ambiguity is complicated by the fact that daughters are not seen as future successors. Sons have been socialized to expect this position, and while the surrounding nonfamily employees also understand this eventuality (Dumas, 1992: 37) daughters tend to be “invisible successors.” If they try to assert themselves and assume a position of top management, they are seen as violating the family hierarchy. Daughters find this a uniquely difficult position since they view themselves as “protectors of family unity” (Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990: 146). Since daughters avoid conflict, their succession process is impeded.

**Traditional roles and women’s invisibility in family firms**

In family firms, women have traditionally played many subtle roles: spouse, mother, mother-in-law and family leader. These roles are related to the family rather than to the business sphere, what have made women believe they were not suitable for leadership roles (Galiano & Vinturella, 1995). This situation is changing in recent years and women are creating their own firms and joining their family firms pursuing professional careers (Cole, 1997).

Gender roles and stereotypes existing in society have contributed to keep discrimination against women. Women have traditionally been responsible for domestic issues and taking care of their family, so that professional career took a second place for them. And even if they were directly involved in the family firm, they did not receive any recognition for their contribution, in the shape of either a formal position in the company or a salary (Nelton, 1986; Salganicoff, 1990; Ian) and, if they earned it it used to be lower than men’s (Rowe & Hong, 2000).

Women normally take on roles as assistants, informal advisers, or mediators between the members of the family who formally run the company (Francis, 1999).

In a study of couples who are co-owners of family firms, Mashack (1994) found that traditional gender stereotypes were clearly reflected in the type of tasks each partner assumed in the family and the firm. The wives mainly did accounting and secretarial work, as well as most household tasks, whereas their husbands were mainly responsible for equipment maintenance and the negotiation of contracts.
Women are also, in Dugal’s words, the “nurturer of the next generation” because they transmit the values of both the family and the firm to the children. In other words, mothers teach their children to love the company.

Finally, gender may influence all the factors that contribute to attitude. As the literature indicates, males may view themselves as potential successors which can have an impact on their attitude towards working in the family business. On the contrary, females may not see themselves in this manner and, therefore, they may have negative or indifferent attitudes towards joining the family business as an executive.

Despite these barriers some women get around the obstacles and are encouraged to join the firm, developing an interest in the firm and/or in leadership as a consequence of one or more of the following factors: their brothers are not strong leaders, they have no family responsibilities (no husband, no children), or their fathers ask them to join the firm (Iannarelli, 1992).

**Disadvantages of working in family businesses**

Vera and Dean (2005) identified some disadvantages due to the fact of working in the family business: not having a personal life, working long hours, no private life away from your family, having work disagreement among family members continue outside the workplace, hard when parent and daughter do not share the same idea, and being constantly compared with the previous leader’s management style.

**POSITIVE ASPECTS**

**Complementary skills and capacities**

It is also a fact that men and women differ in many attributes and characteristics. As women place more importance in human and social values, their value system partly explains their so called “feminine” style of Management, that is not only based on traditional indicators such as profit, sales, return on investments… but also on social contribution quality of work life, client satisfaction and their own personal growth (Brush, 1992; Lee Gosselin & Grisé, 1990 in Cadieux, L, Lorrain, J., and Hugron, P.; 2002).

Research indicates that females communicate and solve problems differently than males; they prioritize life experiences differently than their male counterparts, and are socialized differently within both families and business systems. (Danes, Haberman
McTavish, 2003; Dumas, 1989). Their communication skills make easier the communication with their fathers as mentors and help to avoid conflicts. They tend to be, not only worried about the business but also about their parents. All these characteristics can make easier the succession process but, on the other hand, the desire to avoid conflict and the fear to upset the parents discussing succession issues can make the process difficult (Hollander & Bukowitz, 1990).

For Alimo-Mealfe (2002) women are more transformational leaders than men, meaning by that, charismatic, persuasive and able to intellectually stimulate others.

Some of the different characteristics found by researchers (Vera and Dean, 2005) appoint that regarding men, women are less distrustful, more conciliatory, less directive, more attentive, more supportive, more flexible, more balance, collaborative, caring, take more time to make decisions, seek more information on other’s opinions and attend to both the well-being of the business and the well-being of the family.

Pyromalis et al. (2004) found out that women seem to outperform men on the “satisfaction with the succession” dimension, while men seem to outperform women on the “effectiveness of the succession” dimension. We support Pyromalis et al. (2004) opinion that these findings justify those who claim that men and women possess complementary competencies and skills.

**Developing a professional career: Source of pride and satisfaction**

The need (due to fatal events, health problems…) tend to increase the likelihood that parents as well as daughters, consider the second ones to work in the family owned business (Dumas, 1992). This situation can not only be an opportunity for women to have more flexible schedules, increase job satisfaction, but also a source of pride when they help the family or fill a position nobody wanted, (Dumas, 1992; Salganicoff, 1990). Regarding this Vera and Dean (2005) found the following advantages of working in family businesses: desire to make their parents´ business grow, pride of carrying on the family tradition, confortability of the workplace, shared family values, more time with your family and work schedule flexibility.

Family business can be an option to develop a professional career for women of the family in childbearing age, taking into account that this variable has been identified as a real obstacle in the processes of selection of personnel in small and medium firms when
the candidate is a woman (Woodhams and Lupton, 2006). Nevertheless, it also can be seen as an obstacle from the predecessor’s point of view.

**Balancing time between work and personal life**

The results of various surveys show that even if 90% of women business owners work full time, they are still responsible for household tasks and bringing up the children (Belcopurt, Burke & Lee-Gosselin, 1991). These women find totally normal to play simultaneously the roles of mother and business manager (Cadieux, and Hugron, 2002).

As Francis (1999) says, no one, female or male, can do it all and women should not have to be superwomen in order to have what men have always had: a career and a family. Specific obstacles that women in family businesses face such as family leave, child care and paper policies (i.e. written policies with no potent practices or implementation, for example, both females and males have access to family leave and very few males and not all females take advantage of it) (Francis, 1999).

### 3. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative data was gathered via in-depth interviews to family business’ owners and successors. 60 in-depth interviews were made to analyse the succession process in 60 family businesses. The average time of each interview was forty-five minutes.

Selection criteria for interview subjects included: small and medium family business, having at least 10 employees and no more than 250 with a recent succession process done or going to have place it in the near future. Respondents were required to belong to the family and work in the family business.

Interview subjects were identified through the researchers’ social network and/or available information. SABI database was used to select some firms and to compliment information of family businesses analyzed. Interviews were conducted face to face in the interviewee’s companies. To arrange the interview, participants were phoned explaining the objectives of the research and asking for an appointment.

The interview questions were designed to stimulate a discussion that help the participants to articulate their sense of the driving forces that led them to join the family firm, challenges they faced, how they felt regarding the succession process, and why
they saw it this way. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire with pertinent demographic information.

With the interviewee participants’ permission, answers were recorded and later transcribed to facilitate coding in an excel file.

Each interview was conducted by two researchers to only one interviewee except in the case of two businesses in which there were two interviewees. Therefore, sixty family firms have been analysed, but the number of people interviewed was sixty two.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents †</th>
<th>Sex of the respondent %</th>
<th>Number of employees</th>
<th>Sex of employees (female) %</th>
<th>Economic sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual or potential successor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42 → 67.7%</td>
<td>&lt;50</td>
<td>36 → 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predecessor and successor together</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20 → 32.3%</td>
<td>50–150</td>
<td>15 → 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>&gt;150</td>
<td>9 → 15%</td>
<td>41–60%</td>
<td>17 → 28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research questions and variables**

The purpose of this study is to increase knowledge about the succession process, and mainly why few daughters of family business owners succeed their parents.

To accomplish this objective, some of our primary questions were focused in the following subjects: motives for working in the family business; interest showed by daughters to enter the firm; measures to reconcile family and professional life for employees and members of the family business; if the owner's daughters were considered just as likely as the sons; decisive factors in the choice of the successor; advantages or disadvantages of being a woman to manage the family business and if there were any family members that mediated in case of conflicts. We also analyse the gender of the successor or successors influence in the succession process. Besides, after the classification of successor’s gender as well as potential successors in the family, we

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† Two members of the family were simultaneously interviewed in two in-depth interviews.
also analyzed the positions held in the family by successors in the 21 cases in which the offspring were both men and women and several of them worked in the business to seek whether there was or not some kind of discrimination.

We show in table 2 the gender of potential successors, whether one or more remains in the family business and the gender of those who remain. In the eight cases where only men are potential successors (because there were no women in the family), five of them have entered the firm as only one successor, and four of these were primogenitor, the other was not. In the other three cases, more than one successor has remained in the family’s firm. In four cases, there were only women in the family and in the four of them, the four primogenitors have remained. In two cases, the gender of successors was not known and in the other forty-eight cases in the families there were men as well as women. In sixteen of their family firms, the male primogenitor has stayed in the firm, in five of them, the female primogenitor, in two of them, a male not primogenitor and in another two firms, a female not primogenitor, in the other twenty-one cases, there are successors of both genders in the company.

Table 2. Gender of potential successor (s), place in the family and in the family business

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential/actual successors</th>
<th>One successor in family firm</th>
<th>More than one successor</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender of the offspring:</td>
<td>Primogenitor?</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both of them:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No identified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see in table 2, in 34 cases out of 60, there was only one successor. Frequently this was related to the fact that there was no place for more members of the family, due to the size of the firm, and it could also be related to the owners’ fear that having several familiar branches in the business could generate problems in future successions (Idígoras et al., 2009). Data suggest that primogeniture is an important factor to become a successor as in 29 out of 60 firms analysed the successor was the primogenitor.

Motives for not working in the family business
There can be several reasons why some family members do not want to work in family businesses. When we asked about these reasons, the interviewees gave us similar answers independently of the gender of the family member who was not working in the family business:

- Vocation out of the family business.
- Desire to develop a professional career out of the company (very slavish job, other interests, search for independence of the family, preference to delegate management to professionals).
- No available positions in the family business because of its size or because the protocol limited the number of family members.
- Not wanting to assume responsibilities.
- Failure to comply with the family requirements to enter the firm (education, experience...).

Only when the respondents referred to women, said that the reason why some of them were out of the family business was their desire to take care of their family. This reason was not offered for any male of the offspring.

**Show daughters the same interest to enter the firm than their brothers?**

Overall, both daughters and sons seem to show the same interest (or disinterest) in the family business. The data show a higher presence of men as successor, there were more daughters that did not want to remain in the family business, even though there were also cases in which the daughters showed more interest than their brothers.

Maybe the reason for men’s prevalence is that, as we have just mentioned, the reasons of both female and male for not working in the family business are the same, but women give one more reason (the desire to spend more time with their families).

**Measures to reconcile family and professional life**

When respondents were asked if they had any conciliatory measures, sometimes did not know what we meant. This was really surprising for us.

Only in five cases, the interviewees recognized there were no measures to conciliate personal and professional lives of employees beyond the strict compliance with the law.
In the other fifty five cases, the interviewees referred that, despite not having written reconciliation measures as such, their enterprises facilitate the conciliation of both members of the professional management team and the other staff. Although they argued to prefer their personnel to work full time, they allowed reduction of working time if somebody asked for it; “if a worker needs time to do something, she/he can take it and recover it later...”.

Conciliation measures are also a way to get staff’s loyalty. In words of one manager interviewed: “Yes, workers and managers have flexible schedule (if they come later, they leave a little later). But we go further, if they have to go to take care of their ill child, they go; if they need one week off, we arrange it so they can, and if Mary needs money to pay her divorce, we anticipate it; by doing this, we get a happy worker for life”.

Anyway, not all businesses can easily allow measures to conciliate personal and professional life. In companies with wide public opening times (i.e. shops, hotels, restaurants...), where everyone would like to work from 8 to 15h from Monday to Friday, conciliation becomes more difficult. The same applies to a company in which there is flexibility for all departments except production (although they can ask for a leave, reduced hours...). The owner of a bakery told us: “As the business is very familiar, we try to make schedules adapted to workers’ preferences. Recently, we negotiated shifts in production and the schedule that came out was different to that proposed by management. Workers would want to be free on weekends, but that is impossible for the type of activity”.

However, what is true for nonfamily members is not that true for family members. Only in one case, the manager, who belonged to the family and was a female, took the maternity leave. In the other cases of family women managers, although other staff had the right to maternity leave provided for by law, family members did not. They said they only can "reconcile when the workload is small".

In the case of a company that even changed the schedule to make conciliation easier, the sister had to go back working without enjoying maternity leave because the person who was replacing her was not good enough and she was needed in the company. A female manager, member of the family firm, referred carrying her baby two months to the office to take care both the baby and the family firm.
Consideration of founder’s daughters to enter the firm

Another question was if the founder’s daughters were considered to enter the firm as well as their bothers. When respondents were over 55 years old or interviewees thought on past generations, they recognized that women did not have the same opportunities to reach senior positions unless there was no other choice (only daughters or a widow with children under age or without capacity to work). If there were male descents capable, girls usually focused on the family and had no chance to study, and, therefore, to join the family firm.

However, for other functions such as working in secretarial tasks, women had the opportunity to work in the family business, especially before marriage. Some interviewees referred regarding this invisibility of women: “at home, it was assumed the role of women was to be in the shade, behind, silent… that women were not able to manage the business, and in that sense, it seems that females did not have the same opportunities”.

In one of the interviews, the respondent said that in the past there was discrimination, assuming that presently there was no discrimination. Nevertheless, he recognized, being 41 years old, that even in his case, the education was different. “In the past, they did not have the same opportunities; they didn’t enter into the company’s plans. In my own family, the way we were grown up was also different. When I was 11 years old, my father used to take me to the atelier on Saturday mornings, but that never happened to my sisters. The mentality of my father was sexist and he always wanted me at his side, but not to my sisters”.

Decisive factors in the choice of successor

The decision to choose successor, as literature relates, is difficult and that is why, as we can see in table 2, many parents decide to place several descendants with directive positions in the family firm or to use the primogeniture as the decisive factor. But those are not the only factors to choice the successor nowadays. Some of the factors that respondents gave us are: compliance requirements for being at the forefront of the business (both written and unwritten), capabilities and skills such as an education adequate for the position, knowledge of languages, experience in the firm, personal entailment with the founder, ability to work and provide value to the organization, time and dedication to the company (implication), knowledge of the natural process business,
being a natural leader assumed by others, experience in the sector outside the family business, involvement in management in times of crisis (including providing capital), the real need for someone, the interest of the descendants or the fact that there were no to other options (only child or others did not want to enter the firm or were not capable).

**Advantages and disadvantages of being woman to manage the family business**

Ten of the interviewees saw no difference between men and women and said that differences laid on the person and not on its gender.

The other fifty interviewees found positive aspects in women that were related to their organizational and management capacity as well as other characteristics that could be positive for managing the business:

- **Organizational and management capacity**: “They do things right the first time” “resolute”, “more systematic”, “contribute to the balance with their reflections”, “they are more emotional, more human”, “more dialogue”, “greater empathy: more left hand (feeling for certain things...)”, “good at staff relations”, “good at negotiating”, “flexible, adapting to new situations”, “loyalty, mutual trust”, “maybe due to their education they see all the picture, they are more aware of everything, workers and also their circumstances”; “they bring the family together, men tend to go more about their business”, “contribution of ideas to renew and innovate”, “more than vision, more initiative”, “more entrepreneurs”, “ability to organize and reconcile work and family life”, “women are capable of organizing the head of a house, care of children and their school tasks, work at home and in family business, and men do not”, they seek a balance between work and family life: “the time for my children and my partner is important and that is less clear to a man. It took me many years to make colleagues understand that after seven in the evening, I do not talk about work, “best management style”, and the last was: “advantages: all”.

- **Personal characteristics that may be good for business**: “Perfectionists”, “meticulous”, “better for contact with the public”, customer focus, "warmth in the workplace, kinder, more attentive”, “peacemakers”, “patience”, “the women of the household are the key for the success of family business. They are very good, always at home, devoted to others”, “Prudence: sometimes is an advantage and sometimes a brake (when you have to invest, they always say “how we will pay?”), “more thorough and constant abiding”, “fighters”, “responsibility”, “they work
more”, “less ambitious than men (seen as an advantage)”. In this sense, one interviewee said, "we are not so ambitious from the material point of view although I am ambitious in objectives, achievement or other intangibles”, “those with a high profile prefer to work in Public Administration or in large firms rather than in SMEs (in fact, when I have looked for managers, women did not send CVs)".

- Most interviewees could only find advantages in women and the only two disadvantages mentioned were maternity leaves and “more quarrels occur among women than among men”.

**Family member(s) that mediates in case of conflict**

It is surprising that in 22 of the companies surveyed the alternative to recur to an intermediate in case of conflict was not considered, mainly because they did not think there would be problems in future, concerning succession process, managing the firm and so on.

In 13 cases, the father (founder) was the one who mediated in case of conflicts. In 11 cases, it was the mother and in 3 of these cases, both of them in a collegial manner intermediated. Besides parents, other people prepared to intermediate in case of conflict were other family members or external consultants.

Although the number of cases in which mothers mediated was not very high, given that the most mentioned person was the father, and he had always been working in the family firm, we can say that mother still have an important role as mediator, even though it might not be as high as in the past.

**Gender of the successor or successors**

Another question we asked was about the gender of the offspring as well as of those that worked in the family firm in order to know whether gender had an influence in the succession process.

When there was only one successor working in the family firm and the predecessor had sons and daughters a certain prevalence of men was detected. However, in the case of several successors working in the family firm there is no prevalence of any gender. This could suggest that gender is losing importance in the succession process with respect to the past.
We analyzed the positions held by people succeeding in the 21 cases in which the offspring were both men and women and several of them worked in the business, to see if we could demonstrate whether there was or not any kind of discrimination.

From our study it appears that overall, the type of position both men and women have, are quite similar, although it is true that there are some more related to male characteristics such as building site supervisor in an enterprise where his sister is CFO‡. In other cases, the differences are due to different skills. In the companies where not all sons and daughters worked, the reasons the others stated not to work there were the same as those mentioned above.

In the case of successors over 55 that analysed their own case or those younger that analysed the past generations, the majority said that women used to stay at home after marriage. However in the last succession or the one that is being prepared, that has not been perceived. The jobs performed by their daughters were similar to those of their sons. Here we stay the positions held by women in these 21 cases: Sales Manager, (her brother was Deputy Director being the only case where brother’s position was clearly superior), Financial Director, CEO, Accounting Manager, Director, Board Secretary, Store Responsible, Head Nurse, Vice-president, Head of International Buying Department and Deputy Director (direction shared by the three siblings in the business: two sons and one daughter).

In general, most of interviewees did not perceive discrimination against their sisters or daughters in the succession process or in the family firm positions occupied by the family women.

CONCLUSIONS

Although clearly, earlier in the succession process of family businesses, there was discrimination based on sex, in this research we have found that there are families that give the same opportunities to their offspring independently of their gender. However, when there is only one successor in the family firm we found a certain prevalence of males. Thus, in the 21 cases were primogenitors were the ones who remained in the firm, sixteen were men and only 5 women. The reason behind this could be, as literature suggests, that when the primogenitor is a woman, the business is sold or disappears more frequently than when the primogenitor is a man.

‡ Chief Financial Officer
In any case, discrimination can be found for family women to enjoy certain benefits as maternity leave because they are considered essential in the firm by their fathers or brothers. However, in the same companies, women who did not belong to the family, even when developed similar roles, had been able to take maternity leaves. The vast majority of business analysed have measures to reconcile family and professional lives for their staff and not so for family members.

The most influential factors when choosing a successor are the primogeniture, followed by the skills, experience in business (often linked with age) and compliance with the requirements established by the family. However, gender is not perceived, in general, as an important factor to become a successor for the respondents.

Although the number of cases in which mothers mediated was not very high, given that the most mentioned was the father, and he had always been working in the family, mothers still are perceived to play an important role as mediators, even though it might not be as important as literature seems to suggest.

LIMITATIONS

Regarding the study limitations, the main one is that these results cannot be extrapolated to the rest of SME family business because we used a convenience sample, which is not necessarily representative of the population studied. Nevertheless, the objective of this research is mainly to explore perceptions of managers of family business about gender and other factors that might influence in the succession process. Furthermore, the companies where the succession has been a failure are not represented in the sample. Another limitation is that the only people interviewed have been family members who are in the company and it is possible that the answers of those who are not currently in the business, do not match the ones of those who remains in the business. Therefore, some more research must be done to clarify the women’s access to family businesses. In this respect, we propose as future investigation lines to make a quantitative research to measure the actual advance in gender topics in the family businesses.

5. REFERENCES


