A SEAT AT THE TABLE:
Inviting Women to the Board Rooms of Family-Owned Business in Canada

Dawn Schooler | RRU DBA 2021 Cohort

What role does gender play in decisions made across leadership, succession, and transition processes in family-owned business in Canada?

Importance of this Research

Family enterprise is a significant, integral component of the economy in Canada, contributing almost 50% of the private sector GDP and employing more than seven million people across the country (FEX, 2019).

The vast majority of family-owned businesses do not make it through the first transition from founder to the next generation and even fewer make the successful transition to a third generation or beyond (Family Firm Institute, 2014; Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003).

Primogeniture, the typical assumption that the eldest son will be the most likely to take over control of the family business, remains alive and thriving as a normative part of the transition culture (McAdam, 2016; Nelson & Constantinidis, 2017).

Women continue to be under-represented in senior leadership roles and succession strategies of family-owned businesses (Byrne et al., 2020; Soost & Moog, 2021).

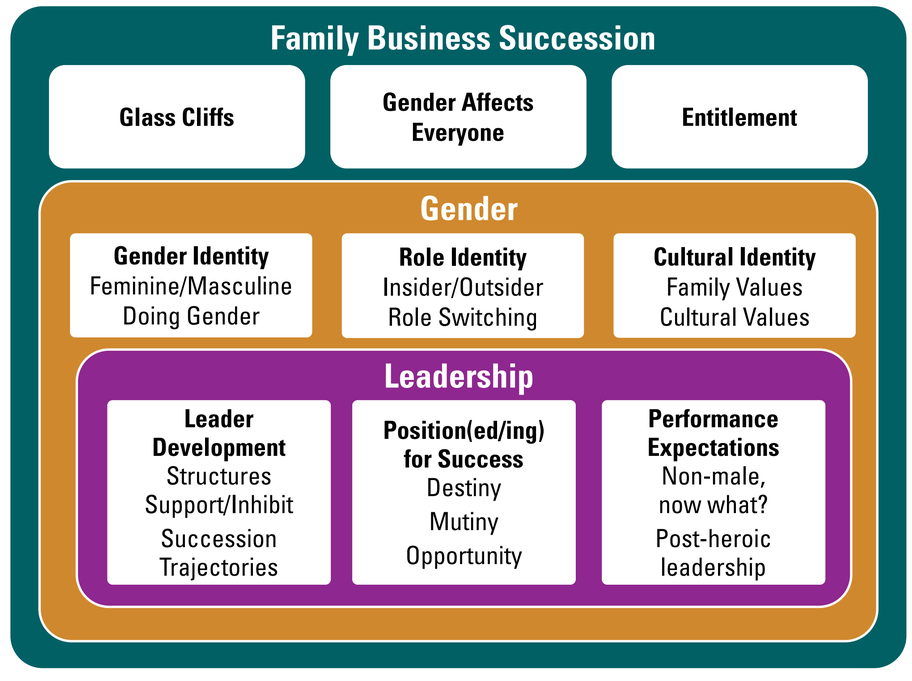
Women are typically seen as potentially viable leadership candidates in cases where the family firm is in transition as part of an exigent crisis or where no viable male heirs are to be found elsewhere in the family system (McAdam, 2016).

Recent questions about leadership development (Aldamiz-Echevarria et al., 2017) and qualities of leadership (Byrne, et al., 2020; Cuadrado et al., 2010; Mayer & Van Zyl, 2013) are opening additional avenues of research to be explored.

THEORETICAL PREMISES

Succession and transition decisions in FOB are still substantially influenced by unacknowledged biases regarding gender (Byrne et al., 2020; McAdam et al., 2021) & leadership ideas rooted in family and organizational culture (Byrne et al., 2020; Cuadrado et al., 2010; DeRue et al., 2015; Figueroa-Domecq, 2020; Gipson et al., 2017; Greyvenstein & Cilliers, 2012; Liu et al., 2015;

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS



Mayer & Van Zyl, 2013; Murray & Southey, 2019; Nelson & Constantinidis, 2017; Vial et al., 2016), as well as identities assigned or assumed by individuals within these systems (Akhmedova et al., 2020; McAdam et al., 2021; Vial et al., 2016; Xian et al., 2021).

In analyzing more than 700 studies on family-owned businesses, in 75 journals, between the years 1961-2008, only 26 articles focused on gender as a primary factor (Benavides-Velasco et al, 2013).

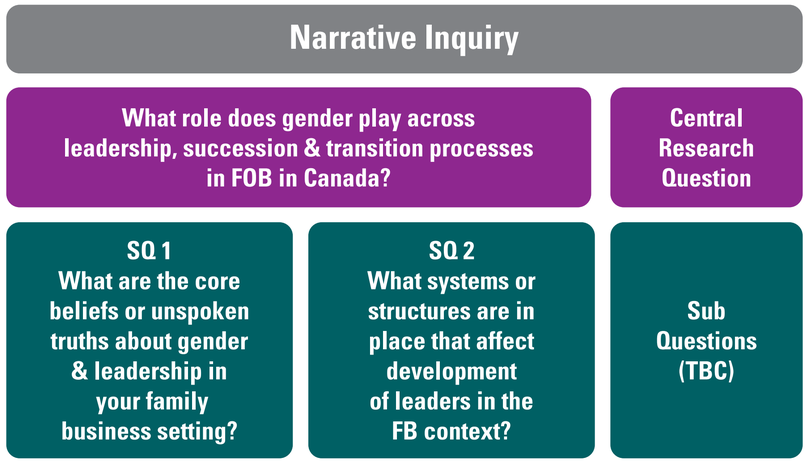
Kubicek & Machek (2019) note that there has been relatively little research focused on the role of women within family-business succession planning.

Women play very important roles within family enterprise systems, most notably that of Chief Emotional Officer aka the other CEO (Ward, 2011), although they are often almost invisible (Soost & Moog, 2021) in the process.

Jiminez (2009) points out that daughters have many obstacles to overcome if they are to be considered for leadership positions within their family businesses.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry allows for exploration without a need to control for the high degree of heterogeneity (Block & Wagner, 2014; Marques et al., 2014; Nordqvist et al., 2009) or gender issues present in most FOB systems (Byrne et al., 2020; McAdam et al., 2021), as well as the extra attention paid to researcher ethics and reflexivity needed within family business research (Hamilton et al., 2017; McAdam et al., 2021; Nordqvist et al., 2009).



Anticipated Outcomes

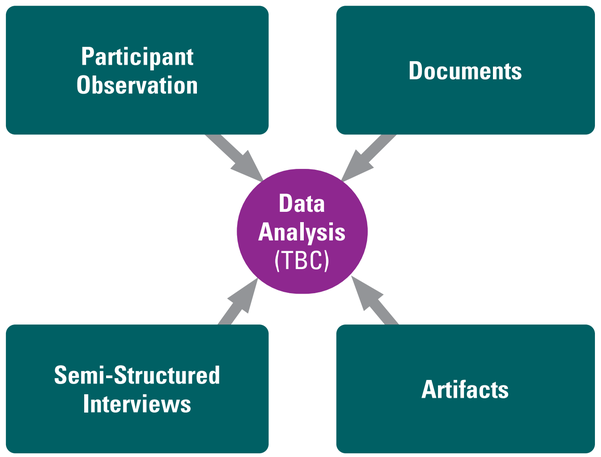
TO THE LITERATURE:

- **Provide a current, in-depth, Canadian-focused perspective on this long-standing and nuanced challenge for families who are in business together.**
- **Reinforce the idea that gender is an irrelevant data point from which to make key decisions about leadership and succession in FOB.**

TO PRACTICE:

- **Encouraging more women to consider the family business as a positive & productive career option.**
- **Provide an HR² solution (human resources & human rights) that will potentially turbo-charge the Canadian economy with up to 50% more options for successful transition of Family-Owned businesses**

DATA COLLECTION & METHODS



EPISTEMOLOGICAL PREMISES:

With a background as a therapist and consultant with FOB systems, I believe that clients are the experts of these systems, and one must be 'invited in' if we are to learn enough to be helpful.

The researcher must be aware of the relational nature (Caine et al., 2019; Clandinin, 2013) of these engagements and acknowledge that both investigator and participant will therefore change as a result of the research (Caine et al., 2019; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Qualitative research methods are ideal to understand these complex systems (Fletcher et al., 2016).

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