

# Integrating Succession and Gender Issues from the Perspective of the Daughter of Family Enterprise: A Cross-National Investigation

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L'entrepreneuriat familial, un champ en devenir  
Family entrepreneurship: a constantly evolving field  
El empresariado familiar, un campo en desarrollo

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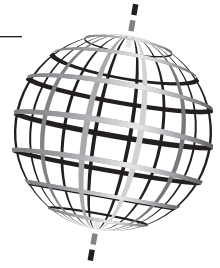
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Article abstract

We engage a gender analysis, including consideration of the social phenomena of separation and hierarchy, to consider the role, condition and aspirations of daughters of family enterprise as they consider the option of family entrepreneurship. From this perspective we examine the extant literature and present findings from two exploratory empirical research efforts, one in Belgium and one in the U.S., to better understand internationally how daughters perceive their leadership paths in the family business. We take into consideration growing social acceptance of women's leadership, and women's own career-mindedness, which influence traditional views of the opportunities for daughters inside and outside of the family business. Research avenues and practical recommendations to support successful succession of daughters are discussed.

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# Integrating Succession and Gender Issues from the Perspective of the Daughter of Family Enterprise: A Cross-National Investigation



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## RÉSUMÉ

Nous menons une analyse en termes de genre, en tenant compte des phénomènes de séparation et de hiérarchie, pour explorer le rôle, la condition et les aspirations des filles dans l'entreprise familiale, au moment de considérer l'option de l'entrepreneuriat familial. De ce point de vue, nous examinons la littérature existante et présentons les résultats de deux efforts de recherche empirique exploratoire, un en Belgique et un aux Etats-Unis, pour mieux comprendre, internationalement, la manière dont les filles perçoivent leurs trajectoires de gestionnaire dans l'entreprise familiale. Nous prenons en compte l'acceptation sociale grandissante du leadership des femmes et leurs propres aspirations en termes de carrière professionnelle, qui influencent la vision traditionnelle des opportunités dans et hors de l'entreprise familiale pour les filles. Des pistes de recherche et des recommandations pratiques sont discutées, afin d'assurer le succès de la succession chez les filles.

Mots clés : Entreprise familiale, Femmes, Entrepreneuriat, Genre, Succession, Filles

## ABSTRACT

We engage a gender analysis, including consideration of the social phenomena of separation and hierarchy, to consider the role, condition and aspirations of daughters of family enterprise as they consider the option of family entrepreneurship. From this perspective we examine the extant literature and present findings from two exploratory empirical research efforts, one in Belgium and one in the U.S., to better understand internationally how daughters perceive their leadership paths in the family business. We take into consideration growing social acceptance of women's leadership, and women's own career-mindedness, which influence traditional views of the opportunities for daughters inside and outside of the family business. Research avenues and practical recommendations to support successful succession of daughters are discussed.

Keywords: Family Business, Women, Entrepreneurship, Gender, Succession, Daughters

## RESUMEN

Lanzamos un análisis de género, incluyendo consideración del fenómeno social de separación y de jerarquía, para considerar el papel, la condición y las aspiraciones de las hijas de las empresas familiares cuando consideran la opción de la familia empresarial. Desde esta perspectiva, examinamos la literatura existente y los acontecimientos presentes a partir de investigaciones empíricas de exploración, una en Bélgica y otra en Estados Unidos, para entender mejor, y internacionalmente, como las hijas perciben sus especificaciones de liderazgo en la empresa familiar. Tomamos en consideración la creciente aceptación social del liderazgo de las mujeres y la representación de como las mujeres conciben sus carreras profesionales, examinando la influencia de los puntos de vista tradicionales sobre las oportunidades de las hijas a dentro y a fuera de la empresa familiar. Argumentamos los análisis de las investigaciones y las recomendaciones prácticas para garantizar sucesiones exitosas.

Palabras claves: Empresa familiar, Mujeres, Entrepreneurship, Género, Sucesión, Hijas

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A complicated set of issues face the daughters of family enterprise as they consider the development of their business careers. Traditionally, there are particular and extraordinary challenges for daughters aspiring to the top leadership position in their own family's enterprise. There is a sex-based preference that favors sons over daughters as managerial heirs (Allen & Langowitz, 2003; Miller et al. 2003), regardless of experience or temperament to lead. As a result, daughters have been relatively disadvantaged in acquiring key experience, training, and social support to assume the top role as they mature (Astrachan & Whiteside, 1990; Cromie & O'Sullivan, 1999; Estess, 2001; Haberman & Danes, 2007; Martin, 2001; Nelton, 1997 and Sherman, 2002). Still, most daughters have probably had intimate and

valuable engagement of the family business management process, either directly as an employee or indirectly as a family member, and they are also likely to be equity heirs or owners themselves, therefore enjoying key stakeholder status in their parents' business endeavors.

The role of daughters in family enterprise is also heavily influenced by the societal context that relates to the role and expectations of women in business, and in the family. Since the 1970s in North America and Western Europe, there has been an increasing cultural acceptance of women in top leadership roles, developed concomitantly with the rise in the percentage of organizations expecting females to succeed as leaders of family firms -- from 25% in 1998 to 34% in 2003 in the United States, for example (MassMutual

and the Raymond Institute, 2003). Notable companies with daughters in top management roles include, for example: (United States) S.C. Johnson, Carlson Companies, Mars, LA Lakers, Marriott, Fidelity Investments, L.L. Bean, The Schaeffler Group, Playboy Enterprises, Jockey International and (Europe) Monodor S.A., The Ronveaux group, L'Oréal, The A. Lagrou Companies, Detry S.A., Bister Mustard factories, Tri Thy Needlecraft Centre, and Brian McMahon & Daughters.

Family business is of particular interest for research as it represents a dominant form of business structure and contributes substantially to economic development worldwide. Statistics show that more than 95% of U.S. businesses are family controlled, contributing to 40%-45% of the Gross National Product and in the EU, family businesses represent more than half of all registered firms (PriceWaterHouseCoopers, Family Business Survey 2007-2008). In Belgium this proportion amounts to 70%, where family businesses represent 55% of the Gross National Product (International Family Enterprise Research Academy, 2003). At the same time, only one third of family businesses worldwide successfully manage the transition from one generation to the next, though generational succession is recognized as a top priority issue by family firm organizations including the Family Firm Institute (<http://www.ffi.org/>) and The Family Business Network (<http://www.fbn-i.org/fbn/web.nsf>). The majority of family firms are either sold or dismantled after the founder's death, for different reasons including a lack of business viability, the failure to engage succession planning, the founder's resistance to "let go" and/or the offspring's reluctance to join the firm (PriceWaterHouseCoopers, Family Business Survey 2007-2008).

The aim of this research is to take an innovative approach to the topic of succession by adopting the career daughter's point of view as she considers her professional options, including entrepreneurship in her family's enterprise. Most research on succession is developed from the viewpoint of the organization, or its ruling generation. Our conceptual contribution is to engage a gender analysis, including consideration of the social phenomena of separation and hierarchy, in terms of the career-minded daughters' career development interest, with the intention of encouraging continued research that moves the academy to a more robust and international understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, we take into account the changing role of women in society, and in business, that may cause changes in assumptions or aspiration regarding the role of early career stage daughters in family business leadership.

In addition to the conceptual development, we also present and discuss data collected from surveys in the United States and structured interviews conducted in Belgium. Our empirical inquiry was designed to explore the issues of daughters of family enterprise, and to determine how gender issues might be salient. With this grounding, and

drawing from results obtained through our data sets, we discuss our views for fruitful investigation on this topic moving forward. Such work provides value to a range of stakeholders including the daughters of family firms, business families, the global system of professional advisors in the family business and family wealth fields, colleges and universities training women in entrepreneurship and business, and policy makers interested in promoting success of the family enterprise.

## Conceptual Grounding

### FAMILY ENTERPRISE DYNAMICS AND THE SUCCESSION PROCESS

Cadieux et al. (2000) identify a four-stage process in family business succession – initiation, integration, joint management and withdrawal – based on a legacy of research including Barnes and Hershon (1976), Churchill and Hatten (1987), Handler (1990), Hugron and Dumas (1993), Longenecker and Schoen (1978); Morris et al. (1997), and Sharma et al. (1998). Through the stages of succession the new leaders are identified, integrated and trained, leading to the eventual withdrawal of the original leader to an absent or supporting role. Cadieux et al. (2000) put a particular emphasis on the dynamic nature of the succession process, and on the mutually dependent evolution of the roles and functions of predecessor and successor players.

This active process is integral to family firm longevity as it stands at the heart of family enterprise dynamics, consisting of a set of indivisible systems and subsystems (Cadieux et al. 2000): the family, the enterprise (Fattoum & Fayolle, 2005), the predecessor and successor, and the external environment. Sharma (2004) identifies relevant levels of analysis of the process to include the individual level (the study of certain categories of stakeholders), the interpersonal level (including intergenerational transmission), the organizational level (including strategic decision-making and corporate culture) and the societal level (the study of family businesses in link with their environment). Different sources of resistance or influence on the succession process in family firms are documented at each level (Cadieux et al. 2000; De Freyman et al. 2006; Fattoum & Fayolle, 2005).

From Sharma's work (2004), and with an orientation to daughters of family enterprise, we see two distinct yet interconnected sets of issues that are suggested by the literature, but they have not yet been expounded or integrated. First, there is the influence of gender dynamics on family dynamics and family business dynamics. This view is brought into focus when the role of daughters of enterprise is considered in light of a socially constructed environment which shapes individuals' attitudes, behaviors, choices and interactions leading to pre-existing contexts in which women, and therefore daughters, operate. This orientation can be used to examine the existing literature on successor choice, ascen-

sion and success factors (Bayad & Barbot, 2002; Dumas, 1989, 1990; Keating & Little, 1997). Second, there is the daughter's point of view, as a key stakeholder of the family firm: of her career aspirations and motivation to engage her talents in the family enterprise. Her vision of the family business and the potential of a role for her in its leadership develops gradually, over her lifetime, as a result of her experience and social relations with entities inside and outside of the business, including her family members (Bayad & Barbot, 2002; Dumas, 1998).

#### THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER DYNAMICS ON THE FAMILY ENTERPRISE

The GLOBE framework (House et al. 2004), and specifically its cultural dimension of Gender Egalitarianism, provides a grounding point to consider the issue of women's entrepreneurship in family enterprise (Moore & Gupta, 2007). The House et al. study (2004), a collaborative global research effort, collected survey data from 17,300 managers in 951 organizations in 62 countries. The survey items concern nine culturally varying, society level constructs that were then related to dominant theories of business leadership. The Gender Egalitarianism measure in the framework evaluates the level of gender-dependent divisions of roles, expectations, evaluations, and power within cultural groupings including Nordic Europe, Latin America, Germanic Europe, Confucian Asian, Latin Europe and Anglo, among others. In gender egalitarian cultures, men and women have more freedom to participate in the workplace and in the family, and this translates into an enhanced role for women in earned income and business leadership positions.

Of particular importance to this study, the GLOBE framework considers both actual and aspirational levels of *Gender Egalitarianism* within cultures. Both Anglo and Latin European cultures exhibit a wide score gap between the (lower) assessment of the actual society practice of gender egalitarianism and the (higher) assessment of the aspirational society value of gender egalitarianism (House et al. 2004) than other cultural groups. In other words, while there is a very strong belief in gender egalitarianism in principle in the U.S. and Latin Europe, the societal value is not realized at its full intention in practice.

Work by Ahl (2004, 2006), de Bruin et al. (2007), Ely and Padavic (2007), Fletcher (2001), Fletcher (2004), Kolb et al. (1998), and others, helps to explain this gap in part as it puts forth a conception of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon, expressed with and without malice, and structured around separation (what is considered to be masculine or feminine) and hierarchy (the valorization of the masculine, considered as the norm). This theoretical perspective is based on the idea that men's and women's realities are shaped differently by society, through embedded systems, structures, rituals, and power dynamics resulting in an environment that can be ineffective and inequitable.

This perspective concerns daughters' self-perceptions and cognitions --"How women entrepreneurs construct their lives and their businesses; how they do gender" (Ahl, 2006, p.611) -- as well as society values and norms that create those perceptions and cognitions-- "How social orders are gendered, and the mechanisms by which this gendering is reconstructed" (Ahl, 2006, p.611). Moving responsibility for failure to reach gender egalitarian goals beyond the individual solely, one can better conceptualize and consider the conflict within business families regarding the simultaneous role of daughters as family members, and as potential and actual family enterprise leaders.

Psychological barriers to the participation of daughters in leadership have been identified, including the family's own perception that the daughter, due to her biological sex, is not a legitimate heir candidate (Astrachan & Whiteside, 1990; Bayad & Barbot, 2002; Cromie & O'Sullivan, 1999; Dumas, 1989, 1992; Estess, 2001; Haberman & Danes, 2007; Martin, 2001; Nelton, 1997; Sherman, 2002; Vera & Dean, 2005). Daughters are seen as "invisible", "non-natural" successors (Cole, 1997; Dumas, 1989; Salganicoff, 1990; St-Cyr & Inoussa, 2000) and they are considered for promotion during crises (economic or health problems, brother's refusal to take over the business, etc.) when the incumbent leader has no other choice to preserve the family enterprise. The daughter may then be positioned as the family firm savior (Dumas, 1989, 1992; Dumas et al. 1995; St-Cyr et al. 1998). Furthermore, the failure of vision of the daughter as leader exists in the daughter as well. Daughters often fail to consider themselves as potential successors, seeing their work within the family business as a job rather than a career, especially if the brother has already been officially or unofficially sanctioned as successor (Dumas, 1989, 1998; Dumas et al. 1995; Vera & Dean, 2005). We suggest that these psychological barriers are fruitfully seen through the lens of gender dynamics, rather than as particular, idiosyncratic positions of individuals. Players in the social network adopt attitudes and behavior in line with the indivisible systems and subsystems in which they exist.

Other scholars (Astrachan & Whiteside, 1990; Cromie & O'Sullivan, 1999; Estess, 2001; Haberman & Danes, 2007; Martin, 2001; Nelton, 1997; and Sherman, 2002) highlight the impact of being female on access to resources including mentoring and training. Bayad and Barbot (2002) discuss how daughters may be required to acquire some professional experience outside the company in order to gain enough legitimacy to be considered a successor. Bayad and Barbot (2002), Salganicoff (1990), and Vera and Dean (2005) stress the influence of the girls' age and the family hierarchy as variables influencing the role daughters are given in the business.

Finally, the literature addresses the difficulties faced by daughters in terms of relations with firm stakeholders. Studies reveal employee rivalry, especially with senior executives, employees in key positions and/or workers



with important responsibilities (Cadieux et al. 2000, 2002; Dumas, 1989, 1992; Vera & Dean, 2005). Suppliers and customers also make the daughters road tougher (Cole, 1997; Dumas, 1998; Salganicoff, 1990; Vera & Dean, 2005). Daughters perceive that they have to work harder than their male counterparts in order to be accepted as leaders (Vera & Dean, 2005). To the positive, Dumas (1992) and Haberman and Danes (2007), in focusing on the father-daughter transition specifically, see both benefits and challenges for the daughter at the family and business level as they discuss how daughter-father dyads may serve transmission of management more smoothly than father-son dyads.

When we consider this research in light of the succession process, we see important gender impacts on each of the stages of initiation, integration, joint management, and withdrawal. Links with family dynamics and power relations influence consideration of the daughter as a successor and her ease and success in assuming the leadership role. Daughters may also face particular challenges in management, especially in terms of leader legitimacy, that may be explained by the gendered relations within the family, the family business system, and society, including interactions and perceptions of parents, employees, suppliers and customers. Paraphrasing Ahl (2006), "the family does gender", from all sides, activating and engaging in expectations that position the daughter for a role in the enterprise that may or may not be appropriate or attractive to her.

#### CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF FAMILY BUSINESS DAUGHTERS

How women conceive of, and actualize their professional lives has seen substantial transformation in industrialized democracies over the last 50 years. According to Shapiro et al. (2007), four major forces drive women's careers: organizational upheaval, changing demographics, technology, and shifting family and work values. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook, for example, reports that today's college student in the U.S. will likely hold 10 different jobs between the ages of 18 and 38 (2008-09) and 60% of all women now work outside the home (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999) in an increasingly wide set of industries and positions (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). In Europe, data from the EU Labour Force Survey show that the employment rate of women in the EU25 amounts to 58%, and it has been consistently growing in recent years (Romans & Preclin, 2008).

Shapiro et al. (2007) discuss how these major forces have fed a new career paradigm that stages the individual as "self-employed" and self-directed over time through a series of engagements with term and contract employers. While this new attitude can be seen in women moving between employers, it may also be expressed in a women's choice to launch businesses of their own. The Center for Women's Business Research (2008) notes that women in the U.S. are founding businesses at almost two times

the average rate in recent years, though women still lag men substantially in absolute numbers as firm founders. Trends in the EU are different. For the EU25 there is not the narrowing over time in the entrepreneurial gap between men and women: women's participation as firm founders has remained at a relatively low, steady level (Franco, 2007). However, substantial commitments on the part of the European Commission to promote women's business launch have been made as highlighted in key sections of the Entrepreneurship Action Plan of the European Union (Commission of the European Communities, 2006), for example. In Belgium in particular, the number of self-employed women over these last 35 years has grown three times more than that of men (48.60% of increase, compared with 16.61% for self-employed men).

Movement away from traditional employment and toward an individually defined lifetime career path is also highly sympathetic with the positions of women born in the last three decades who are much more oriented to independence, fluidly created and maintained social networks and a strong sense of self confidence, relative to their mothers and grandmothers (Gorman et al. 2004). These shifts in women's opportunities in the business world influence the posture and position of daughters of family enterprise today as never before, particularly young daughters considering career development.

Research on gender dynamics in the family firm when intersected with Gatewood et al.'s (2003) "pull" and "push" motivations for engagement with the family enterprise, move us toward some interesting realizations. Daughters who have grown up to perceive the family business as their own, with a desire to play an active role, to contribute to the necessary changes and to ensure the continuity of the family firm, exhibit "pull motivations" to the family firm. Other daughters faced with more difficult contexts may form a "reactive vision" of the family business, not considering themselves "true" potential successors (Dumas, 1998); these women experience "push motivations" in regard to the family firm.

The motivations of daughters of entrepreneurs are thus built in relation to their environmental cues and positioning, their own perceptions and aspirations, and their family's attitudes and predilections. This confluence of input, perhaps aligned or perhaps unaligned, bypasses women not occupying the daughters' familial role. The potential conflicts of acting on the ambition of embracing entrepreneurship within the family, given a socially constructed environment that challenges female participation at the highest level, may lead daughters to question their role in the family business regardless of their interest in entrepreneurship, or their support of the family, *per se*.

For the daughters of family firms then, at the individual level, these major social shifts in the role of women in society and in the conceptualization and actualization of career offers more opportunities and a greater ability to define

and choose among alternate constructions of professional life. Daughters have observed and probably participated in their family business in some capacity growing up, and this exposure likely relates to a heightened propensity of the children of entrepreneurs to become entrepreneurs themselves (Krueger, 1993; Scott & Twomey, 1988).

It is this view of the modern women's career choices, in the context of family enterprise realities, and within a gendered environment, that engaged our interest particularly. As a result we defined two exploratory data gathering and analysis exercises so as to better formulate a broad research agenda in this topic area. We were particularly interested in investigating how the daughters of family enterprise consider their business development options in light of their opportunities within the family firm. We turn to a discussion of our empirical research next.

### Exploratory Empirical Research

Two exploratory empirical research projects were undertaken in Belgium and in the United States to investigate the perceptions and intentions of daughters of family business. In Belgium, a set of structured interviews with daughters of family enterprise focused on daughters' perceptions of the gendered environment during the succession stages. In the United States, a survey process with undergraduate college women daughters of family business investigated the career intentions of young, career-minded daughters in relation to their entrepreneurial opportunities. These two complementary sets of data offer important insights into the field of women and family entrepreneurship from the daughters' perspective, which are discussed after the presentation of the two empirical studies.

#### QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS: BELGIUM

The qualitative, in-depth interviews were undertaken with eleven daughters of family enterprise<sup>1</sup>. Some intended to take a leadership position within the family business, and others did not. Given the absence of a database on daughters taking over a family business, we built a "snowball" sample, using different types of actors, including women's networks and entrepreneurship training and support intermediaries, to locate the initial interviewees. This sampling resulted in diversified cases on the basis of individual and organizational characteristics. The interviewees lived in the French-speaking part of Belgium and they were already engaged in the family business, at different stages of the succession process. Their family's businesses were located in Belgium (French-speaking part), in different types of industries. A detailed description of the sample characteristics is presented in Appendix 1.

The two hour interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data analysis was carried out in parallel and independently by two researchers using two techniques: a by-hand thematic analysis and via the qualitative analysis software, *Cassandre*. The qualitative data were coded and classified by sub-theme by the researchers, using a vertical and horizontal thematic qualitative analysis approach. Using the software, we were able to automate the coding and to regroup the data by themes, by sets of words or phrases, according to grammatical category, and by their synonymy and relevance to theory (Lejeune, 2007). The use of this software helped to identify with greater precision, all co-occurrences in our body of interviews. This qualitative methodology allows for analyzing the actions and reactions of individuals as well as their perceptions and representations, with a special attention to the environmental context and to the processes. It therefore corresponds to our objectives for this research.

#### Gender impacts on the different stages of daughters' succession process

Our results identify several gender effects, linked to the separation and hierarchy of the masculine and the feminine, and impacting the daughters' succession process at its different stages. Concerning the first stage, in all cases, the daughter appears to be naturally initiated into the family business life, in one way or another. However, gender effects influence how and when the initiation takes place. The choice in terms of successor is linked to gender-related factors, especially the presence or absence of a son in the family, rather than an assessment of the child's potential to lead.

For daughters without brothers (cases 1, 4, 6, 7, 9 and 11), the integration stage is used to acquire on-the-job training, with a perspective of future succession. Entering the family business as an employee, to gain experience, seems "natural" to all members of the family and parents give important practical and psychological support. Moving to joint management, daughters without brothers are brought along easily to take their leadership place "logically," as a way to gain experience at the head of the company. These daughters are legitimate successors in the eyes of their parents from the beginning, and the initiation takes place with this perspective. The context has an influence on the daughters' training, as the daughters without brothers are more likely encouraged to engage in business and management studies. "My father always encouraged me to work with him; he was very enthusiastic about this idea and I made my studies for this specific purpose" (case 9). For this set of daughters, the succession has been planned for a long time and takes place at the parents' retreat. While the daughter has been well prepared, difficulties of conciliation between work and private life may however be observed,

1. Full description and results available from the authors and via Constantinidis & Santin (2008).

particularly when a sudden succession due to the death of the patriarch occurs. If their situation gives them more flexibility, daughters stress the importance of developing time management competences.

In contrast, when daughters of family enterprise have one or more brothers (cases 2, 3, 5, 8 and 10), the son is preferred as a potential successor from the beginning; therefore daughters' initiation takes place without any intention of succession, and is different than in the other case. Explicitly or implicitly the son is identified as the successor, and his sister is relieved directly or indirectly from pressure regarding management of the firm. Some of our subjects in this category choose to take up training and/or work experience outside the family business, others engaged within.

Daughters with brothers working for the family firm exhibited both push and pull motivations. Those with pull motivations enjoyed working in the family firm, wished to work with their parents, and/or wanted to have flexible working hours and to reconcile the demands of their personal and professional lives. Those with push motivations, on the other hand, were responding to family pressures to engage, including the father's insistence, generated by a labor need and/or the family tradition. Entering the family business by obligation happens, according to daughters of our sample, when there is a strong family hierarchy and a relationship of authority between the father and the daughter: "At that time, I had no choice; it was not possible for me to discuss the choice of my parents" (case 8). Women in this situation, because they are not perceived to have leadership potential when the original succession decision was made, do not receive special training or support for leadership development.

Any leadership role daughters with brothers eventually play is done because their brother is too young, indicates his lack of interest in the firm and/or has chosen to leave the family firm. In that case, the daughters are ill prepared to lead as they have not been given successor training or job experience. This situation entails several difficulties toward stakeholders, especially when daughters feel "forced" to occupy this position by their father, who wants to keep the business within the family and who finds himself with no other choice (push motivations): "Dad did everything in order that I continue, because he was angry that my brothers did not want to take over the business" (case 3). Women in these circumstances also underlined the difficulties of conciliation between work and private life, especially at the point of the parents' withdrawal.

### **Daughters' challenges in management and relationships with stakeholders**

The entrepreneur daughters in leadership positions highlight several problems in terms of legitimacy toward family, staff, customers and suppliers during the joint management stage and at the parents' withdrawal. From the daughters' perspective, these difficulties are exacerbated when the

woman leader is young, and in male-dominated sectors of activity. As one respondent noted, "This is a male-dominated sector; therefore it is more difficult to be accepted as a woman leader" (case 10). Having known the woman leader as a child may present additional difficulties: "[...] at the beginning, some [workers] wanted to test me as a young woman and also because they had known me as a child" (case 10). In such cases, the women felt that they had to prove their competence *before* they received the respect and confidence of stakeholders, in higher measure due to their sex. Training and experience outside the family business were seen as factors increasing their legitimacy.

Daughters who were positioned early as successors generally benefited from good long-lasting relations and important support from the company's staff. One interviewed woman had established a "mentoring" relationship with a former employee of her father, for example. Daughters in this situation of planned succession receive reflected respect due to their fathers' support. They located resource persons within the family firm and developed a network of contacts to help them in case of difficulty, including their father's former consultants. "Regarding my father's contacts, these are people I have known for a very long time, and the fact that he [my father] is behind me, makes things easier for me" (case 1).

In contrast, the entrepreneur's daughters who took over the family business after their brother's departure experience difficulties with personnel management and in relation to customers and suppliers. Daughters in a relationship of authority with their father (push motivations) may encounter greater difficulties in this regard. They meet skepticism in their role as "the boss' daughter", which appears different than the attitude formed for the chosen successor daughter. The tense relationship between father and daughter in such situations, linked to a strong family hierarchy, prevented the daughter from gaining self-confidence, holding reflected authority (from the father), and therefore standing with stakeholders.

When daughters took action to build legitimacy, they brought in resource persons, experts and consultants. They participated in multiple and complementary networks, to increase their social capital: women's networks for moral support and mixed networks for contacts, especially when they work in traditionally male sectors. They also took up training courses in various topics related to management and/or to their sector of activity, in order to heighten their competencies as leaders and entrepreneurs.

### **The impact of family dynamics and power relations on daughters' aspirations**

A complicated set of challenges face the daughters of family enterprise as they consider the development of their own business careers. Our research suggests that a son in the family has a profound impact on the daughter's potential succession route, and that the daughter in this case posi-



tions herself, and is positioned, accordingly. Without the role of heir apparent, she may be free to develop her own choices. "He [my father] was putting more pressure on my older brothers, but not really on me" (case 2). Alternatively, she may be pressured to play an ongoing supporting role in the family firm, "filling in" for the sons when they are not available to lead. Without preparation or support, the latter case is one that may be associated with less than stellar leadership performance.

Without brothers, the daughter may be the natural successor from the beginning. In that case, parents may transmit their business, initiate their daughter with this perspective and encourage her to train in business and management. A desire builds on the part of the daughters to take over their parents' firm. Their career choices, particularly in terms of training, are taken with this objective in mind. For the set of women interviewed, this position of taking over the family business was desirable and natural.

#### SURVEY RESEARCH: UNITED STATES

The intent of the survey in the U.S. was to build our understanding of the daughters of family enterprise at a younger age before major career decisions had been made, and to engage a non-European yet Western nation set of subjects. In a context where entrepreneurial behavior is valued, and where business training of women is common, we wondered how daughters would perceive their career options in light of, and extending from, their family business opportunities.

The survey was conducted at a women's college in the northeastern United States in the fall of 2007<sup>2</sup>. The school offers a business major and an entrepreneurship program as well as a full complement of liberal arts majors. All respondents to the survey, which was administered online, were asked eight questions about entrepreneurial intentions and demographics. Daughters of family businesses were asked an additional eight questions about their experience and perceptions of building a career in the family business. The propositions of the study for daughters of family business were: are you interested in being an entrepreneur? and, are you interested in being an entrepreneur in your family's business, if your family owns a business? Given the tensions related to gender dynamics discussed in the earlier sections (e.g., expected role and power dynamics for daughter in the family, difficulties for women leaders in male-oriented industrial sectors, role of the daughters and sons in family business), we were interested in determining to what extent young women aspire to entrepreneurial careers, within or outside of the family system.

The full population receiving the request to participate in the survey was N=2072. Five hundred and forty-one students responded for a response rate of 26%; three quarters

of these (75%) reported majoring in the College of Arts of Sciences; 16% in Management, and 9% were undecided. N=138 (26%) of respondents self-identified as daughters of a family business. Respondents were fairly evenly distributed by expected year of graduation; just over half (56%) were juniors and seniors. Most of the respondents were from the New England states (78%).

An analysis of the descriptive statistics shows 60% of the full set of respondents somewhat or very interested in starting a business during their career life. Respondents saw the outstanding benefits of starting a business as 1) being their own boss, and 2) following an exciting career path. Of the daughters of family business sub-sample (N=138), 84% were interested in starting their own business and 68% had worked for their family's business, 69% of those on a paid basis. A Pearson's correlation showed a .11 positive relationship between being a member of a family owning a business and a propensity to want to be an entrepreneur (significant at the 0.01 level, 2-tailed).

Survey responses show that daughters identify challenges working in the family business including a lack of interest in the industry of their family business; 25% identified the family business as being in a male-oriented industry, and therefore uninteresting or unfriendly. They also expressed a lack of knowledge and/or skills to perform the work required (19%). Job security (21%) in the family business was another concern; brought on by their personal view of the economic ups and downs of business ownership. Daughters also expressed the desire to keep their family and professional lives separate, and work-life balance was a concern for 16%. Twenty-three percent of the surveyed daughters said it is too hard to work for relatives.

Yet daughters also see advantages to working in the family business; 36% care about their family's business, and they want it to be run successfully and 30% enjoy working with their families. Twenty-seven percent recognize opportunity for growth potential and career advancement in the family business. Finally, 36% see their family's business as a good learning environment and a place where they can gain experience.

Regression analysis (Nelson et al. 2008) supported the contention that daughters of family business, versus those without familial business relationships, were more interested in being an entrepreneur. Of particular interest, only 12% of the surveyed daughters of family business were sure that they wanted to build their careers in the family business while 87% stated their intention to launch their own business separate from the family enterprise (note: some respondents answered yes to both questions).

2. Full description and results available from the authors and via Nelson et al. (2008).



## Discussion: Gender and the Daughter's Position

Research suggests, and both these U.S. and Belgium empirical findings support the contention that daughters of family business face a range of special challenges in considering their career opportunities both within and outside of the family enterprise due to gender based dynamics in the family, in the organization, and in society. The challenges we've considered appear, in the interview discourses, to develop irrespective of the talent of the daughter to undertake a leadership role in the family business. Within the family the daughter may be positioned for leadership success, or as a supporting or even extraneous player, based on the wishes of the parents and the presence or absence of a male heir apparent, whose role as the leader of the business is valorized. Within the organization, and among stakeholders, the daughter is more or less suspect, due to her sex, based on the attitude and posture of the incumbent leader, though she may work to increase her legitimacy by acquiring expertise and endorsement from senior insiders and outsiders.

The conceptual lens of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon helps us understand both our statistical and qualitative results; women find it especially difficult to participate in industries that are "male-oriented" and "unfriendly". This conception of business segments is structured around separation (masculine or feminine) and hierarchy (the valorization of the masculine) in a way that leaves women with fewer opportunities or with a starting position that places her at a disadvantage. In these cases the characteristics perceived as more masculine, such as managerial qualities or technical competence, may align with entrepreneurs' characteristics (separation process) and further, the expected role of a female in the family business. This may lead to increased lack of legitimacy of daughters with employees, customers and suppliers in male-dominated sectors. This makes women less welcome and less interested.

We also identify those cases where daughters ascend to leadership unexpectedly have served in the role of "invisible" successor candidates (Bayad & Barbot, 2002; Dumas, 1989, 1990; Keating & Little, 1997). When this is the case, the daughter, having had lower access to different resources including professional training, experience and social support, is likely to be less well prepared for the job, given the stages of successful family business succession that have been identified. Her lack of success may feed system expectations about women as less able than men to lead.

From the perspective of the daughter, her propensity to engage in the family firm appears related to the interest of her family in having her play a leadership role, and for this engagement to build through the stages of family succession. We did not speak to women who were offered, and who rejected, the role of family firm leader, so our perspective is lacking in this comparison. We do take away from this exploratory data the supposition that daughters rely for success, to a much heavier degree than their brothers, on

the signaling of stakeholders throughout the family firm structure.

We acknowledge the strength of the findings in the U.S. survey sample of college going daughters of family business who intend to be an entrepreneur, but not in the family enterprise. Citing a lack of interest or welcome in the industry, a lack of skills to do the job, concerns with job security and a reluctance to work with family, the quantitative results provide support towards generalizability of a range of issues raised in the Belgian interviews. To some degree these issues potentially relate to conditions from without, such as the comparative gender dynamics across industries. For others, such as lack of skills and reluctance to work with family, dynamics within the family appear to be more at play.

We also note the positive aspects of family business engagement for daughters. When signaled or interested in a leadership role, both the Belgian and U.S. data suggests that daughters may enjoy access to a leadership position that would not be available outside the family firm. Women in both samples felt an emotional attachment to the family venture and they saw the potential of contributing to be satisfying. Even for the young women in the U.S., while they might not envision a route to the top in the family firm, they still saw work there offering a good learning opportunity. This relates to our theoretical orientation on daughters' self-perceptions and cognitions --"How women entrepreneurs construct their lives and their businesses; how they do gender" (Ahl, 2006, p.611). We conclude believing that specific actions on the part of the family, and particularly the incumbent leader, can have a great impact on the succession process of the daughter.

## A Research Agenda

This study raises interesting questions and opens avenues for future research. As a first observation, we see merit in investigating the sequencing of daughters' engagement with the family enterprise. This approach puts forth the evolving and socially constructed nature of the daughters' aspirations and representations and sheds light on the gendered dynamics at play throughout the process. We have found that the daughter's perspective is an under-researched and under-theorized area in succession planning and that gender assumptions across multiple levels of analysis may have an impact. Consideration of sequencing of succession of daughters within a social construction framework also shows the phenomena of interest as contextual: the age of the daughter (e.g., 4 years old versus 50 years old) and the year of consideration of succession (e.g., 1985 versus 2005) may deliver varied situations for the individual, family, and organization to manage.

Adopting a daughter's career perspective, the family business may be a place to acquire skills and experience rather easily, but whether she engages inside or outside of

the family firm as a long-term career aspiration will depend on a variety of factors related to the pull and configuration of family, the family enterprise, and her other career options. The gendered environment may come to position daughters at a disadvantage with regard to family business succession or succession within the family business may come to seem a less attractive alternative given the variety of business and family issues at play.

Alternatively, gendered assumptions that put women at a disadvantage as a business leader may be de-constructed, and men's and women's realities re-shaped in such a way as to facilitate the daughter's leadership role. Thus we stress the importance to study the degree to which the daughters and other family members may deconstruct and counteract the existing gender dynamics. In this sense, we are particularly interested in the strong response to entrepreneurship in the young respondents generally, as well as in today's social shifts in the role of women in business and society in North America and Western Europe. We therefore see the intersection of generational issues, gender dynamics and women's entrepreneurship as a very fruitful line of research inquiry.

In particular, societal attitudes linked with the career aspirations of today's 20-30 years olds may result in a new vision of women emerging within the family firm milieu. However, in light of our findings, a gender egalitarian approach to succession may take place most readily when the family acknowledges and strategizes around existing gender stereotypes and their influence on the roles of daughters and sons in the family firm context.

Additionally, approaches and attitudes toward facilitating a leadership role for women in the family business may vary by culture. The House et al. study (2004), for example, shows differences among world cultural clusters in terms of aspirations for gender egalitarianism (in order of aspirational support for gender egalitarianism: Anglo, Germanic Europe, Nordic Europe, Latin America, Latin Europe, Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Confucian Asia, Southern Asia, Middle East). Women's and men's roles as well as gender representations in the family business context will be different in the world. Therefore, to build a full understanding of the role of women and men heirs to family business it would be advised to extend research to other countries and cultures.

As for limitations of the research, we see our study as one of Caucasian and relatively economically privileged women. Study of other social sectors may develop alternative or complementary views. Additionally, factors such as age, ethnicity, nationality, birth order and social status would add to understanding. There is also an emerging body of work on immigrant entrepreneurship that may give interesting intersections. Future studies could also explore gendered roles and interactions within the family business involving more members of the families – both women and men. It seems of particular interest to analyse the mother's

role as well as the relations between sisters, along with the father's and brothers' roles. This would offer an interesting systemic analysis perspective into the family entrepreneurship research field.

We believe this research agenda is very practical and useful as it directs attention to the career interest of daughters of family business in being entrepreneurs, and in being engaged in a family enterprise. These topics have implications for public and private initiatives aimed at supporting enterprise development and in providing for the generational success of family business. Education and training programs for daughters, their families, and interested stakeholders, particularly ones that directly address the institutionalized gender assumptions for daughters, could move a family to a successful succession process. The nature of gender dynamics is such that those participating in the system may be unlikely to perceive the impact, or ways to address it. Helping daughters to realize their business opportunities in the family firm would not only increase their professional options but would also enhance the family business' leadership resource pool.

## Conclusion

We believe that gender dynamics shape a woman's career participation within her family's enterprise, often in profound ways. Our effort here to investigate the literature and provide exploratory empirical data to illuminate the role of gender dynamics in the process of family business succession has been developed in consideration of both the organization's and the daughter's perspective. We recommend the family business setting as excellent one for the study of gender dynamics because it engages the individual, the family, the organization and society views of the role of women in business, and because this investigation may result in knowledge and recommendations that could provide economic and social value across those stakeholder groups.

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**APPENDIX 1**  
**Description of the qualitative sample characteristics**

N°	Individual characteristics				Business characteristics		Process
	Age	Education	Experience	Family composition	Sector of activity	Number of employees	
1	22	BAC+2, optics	Only within the family enterprise	1 older brother	Optician	0 to 5	Joint management
2	37	2 university degrees: pharmacology & communication studies	Out of the family enterprise, in the same & in another sector	2 older brothers	Pharmacy	5 to 10	Succession complete
3	35	Secondary school	Only within the family enterprise	2 older brothers	Trade: building materials	10-50	Joint management
4	52	Secondary school	Out of the family enterprise, in the same sector	1 little sister	Industrial sector (furnitures)	0 to 5	Succession complete
5	43	Secondary school	Out of the family enterprise, in another sector	2 little brothers	Building	10-50	Succession process complete
6	45	University degree : history of art	Only within the family enterprise	1 older sister	Interior decorator	0 to 5	Succession complete
7	44	Secondary school	Only within the family enterprise	Sole daughter	Car dealer	10-50	Succession complete
8	60	University degree : engineering	Only within the family enterprise	1 older brother	Electricity, building	>100	Succession complete
9	38	BAC+3, industrial design and building	Only within the family enterprise	Sole daughter	Joinery, woodwork	50-100	Succession complete
10	26	BAC+3, marketing & entrepreneurship	Only within the family enterprise	1 older brother	Public works	50-100	Integration
11	25	BAC+3, accounting & entrepreneurship	Only within the family enterprise	Sole daughter	Public works	50-100	Joint management