

## The Impact of Innovation on Leadership Succession in Family Businesses: A Structured Literature Review [2004-2024]

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**Abstract** This study delves into the intricate relationship between innovation and leadership succession in family businesses. To achieve this, we conducted a systematic literature review of 36 articles spanning 2004 to 2024, with the aim of identifying key themes and research gaps. The review revealed a notable lack of integration between leadership succession and innovation. Moreover, the review allowed us to identify five key research areas—entrepreneurship, knowledge management, performance, succession management, and product and process development, providing a structured framework to examine the complex interplay between these two factors. Although innovation is a recurring topic in literature, it is rarely linked explicitly to leadership succession and succession decisions. Consequently, this study underscores the need for further research to elucidate the specific impact of innovation on leadership succession. Future investigations should address issues such as the effect of innovation on succession decisions, gender differences in innovation and succession, and the role of intergenerational knowledge transfer, as these could provide valuable insights for family businesses. Additionally, the study outlines practical recommendations to assist both predecessors and successors in navigating this complex landscape. Key suggestions include promoting robust succession planning, cultivating an innovation-driven culture, and facilitating the transfer of practical knowledge—strategies that can foster a successful leadership transition by enhancing a firm's capacity to innovate and adapt to change.

### CÓDIGO JEL

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### PALABRAS CLAVE

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Succession

**El impacto de la innovación en la sucesión del liderazgo en empresas familiares: una revisión bibliográfica estructurada [2004-2024]**

**Resumen** Este estudio profundiza en la intrincada relación entre innovación y sucesión del liderazgo en las empresas familiares. Para ello, se realizamos una revisión sistemática de la literatura de 36 artículos que abarcan desde 2004 hasta 2024 para identificar temas clave y lagunas en la investigación. Se identificó la falta de una conexión significativa entre la sucesión del liderazgo y la innovación. La revisión de la literatura ha permitido también identificar cinco focos de atención: espíritu empresarial, gestión del conocimiento, rendimiento, gestión de la sucesión y desarrollo de productos y procesos. Este novedoso marco proporciona un enfoque estructurado para analizar la compleja y crítica relación entre estos dos factores. Aunque la innovación es un tema recurrente en la literatura, rara vez se vincula explícitamente a la sucesión y a las decisiones de sucesión. Este estudio pone de relieve la necesidad de seguir investigando en este ámbito para arrojar luz sobre el impacto específico de la innovación en la sucesión del liderazgo. Abordar en el futuro cuestiones que determinen el impacto de la innovación en las decisiones de sucesión, las diferencias de género en innovación y sucesión, o la transferencia de conocimiento intergeneracional, puede proporcionar información valiosa para las empresas familiares. En el estudio, se esbozan también recomendaciones prácticas para ayudar a los predecesores y sucesores de las empresas familiares a navegar por este complejo panorama. Entre ellas, el fomento de la planificación de la sucesión, la cultura de innovación y la transferencia de conocimientos prácticos, que puede facilitar una transición del liderazgo exitosa al mejorar la capacidad de innovación y adaptación al cambio.

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## 1. Introduction

Family businesses serve as the economic engine for many countries, and leadership succession is a critical yet challenging aspect of family businesses (Baranyai & Kozma, 2019; Bennedsen et al., 2007; Birley, 1986; Burkart et al., 2003). At the same time, succession has evolved from unplanned events to a multi-stage process (Churchill & Hatten, 1987; Gabarro, 1979; Gordon & Rosen, 1981; Handler, 1992; Vancil, 1987) and today to a more planned one (Sharma et al., 2003; Shen & Cannella, 2002). This process should ideally occur only if the founder is willing to retire (Corona, 2021) and a successor has been identified. Therefore, another significant challenge is the decreasing willingness of family successors (Suchankova et al., 2023).

Innovation is also crucial for family business success (Cioca et al., 2020; Kraus et al., 2011), with research exploring its theoretical underpinnings (De Massis et al., 2022), the obstacles faced by family firms (Lorenzo et al., 2021), the benefits of technological collaborations (Garcés-Galdeano & Beaumont-Miqueleiz, 2024), and its connections to business renewal (Hernández-Linares & Arias-Abelaira, 2022). This expanding body of research highlights the significance of both succession and innovation in family businesses (Cabrera-Suárez, 2005; Farah et al., 2019; Härtel et al., 2010; Lefebvre & Lefebvre, 2016; McAdam et al., 2020; Umans et al., 2019; Umans et al., 2018).

The present work addresses the research gap at the intersection of leadership succession and innovation in family businesses through a structured literature review. While the existing literature examines succession and innovation separately, it lacks an adequate analysis of their interplay, hindering the understanding and resolution of future challenges. Specifically, the crucial role of innovation in family business succession remains underexplored, even when innovation is one of the keywords that has gained increasing relevance in the years 2015-2020 and was in 2020 the fourth most used keyword in family business research (Aparicio et al., 2021). This research aims to highlight this critical area, summarize the existing literature, and provide theoretical and practical recommendations to address the gap.

This study helps researchers in family businesses, innovation, entrepreneurship, and succession identify and address future research paths. In addition, family business owners can gain valuable insights into addressing succession and succession planning alongside innovation. It contributes to family business literature by systematically clustering research on leadership succession and innovation, using cluster analysis to identify their

interplay and key commonalities. The Research Questions (RQ) for this review are the following:  
*RQ1: To what extent is innovation part of the family business leadership succession literature?*  
*RQ2: To what extent is innovation a decisive factor in leadership succession?*

*RQ3: To what extent has the capacity for innovation impacted the decision regarding leadership succession?*

The documents were analyzed using a structured methodology guided by the previously formulated research questions. To address this issue, specific salient points within the research context must be addressed.

Innovation, while lacking a single definition (Adams et al., 2006), is classically defined as “the doing of new things or the doing of things that are already being done in a new way (innovation).” (Schumpeter, 1947, p. 151), often combined with “its innermost essence [...] *the New*.” (Faix et al., 2015, p. 45) and transforming ideas into improved offerings (Baregheh et al., 2009). This definition links innovation and entrepreneurship in a business context, highlighting that innovation occurs when new products, services, and processes are created, or existing ones are transformed in new ways. Leadership involves ethical actions (Faix et al., 2021), and leadership support has a positive impact on innovation (Demircioglu & Van der Wal, 2021; González-Mohino et al., 2024; Khalili, 2016; Lee et al., 2019), while the management of innovation can affect leadership (Flocco et al., 2021; Głód, 2018).

Recent family business succession research addresses socioemotional wealth (Marques et al., 2023; Umans et al., 2023), leadership succession of non-family members (Li et al., 2024), and innovation-related topics like digital transformation or reinvention (Istipliler et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2023).

While searching current literature on family businesses and innovation, the authors found a notable amount of research on transgenerational entrepreneurship. A search in the Web of Science database yielded 75 sources, including 44 published since 2020. Studies focus on generational knowledge transfer (Bagherian et al., 2024; Capolupo et al., 2023; Dou et al., 2020), transgenerational survival and firm performance (Calabrò et al., 2022), and how critical incidents trigger learning (Clinton et al., 2020). Research also examines the negative impact of a predecessor's continued presence on innovation (Querbach et al., 2020), the connection between pre-succession innovation behaviors and transgenerational entrepreneurship (Dorsch et al., 2023), and the link between transgenerational intentions to increased innovation expenditure (Bammens

et al., 2021). Other studies highlight multiple factors supporting entrepreneurial behavior in subsequent generations (Canovi et al., 2022), the dimensions of transgenerational entrepreneurship, including the role of social capital (De Groot et al., 2021), and potential negative impacts on entrepreneurial spirit in successors (Wang & Zhang, 2021). A comprehensive investigation into transgenerational entrepreneurship is warranted to assess the field's scope and complexities comprehensively. However, it must be acknowledged that such an analysis is beyond the current study's scope.

## 2. Methodology

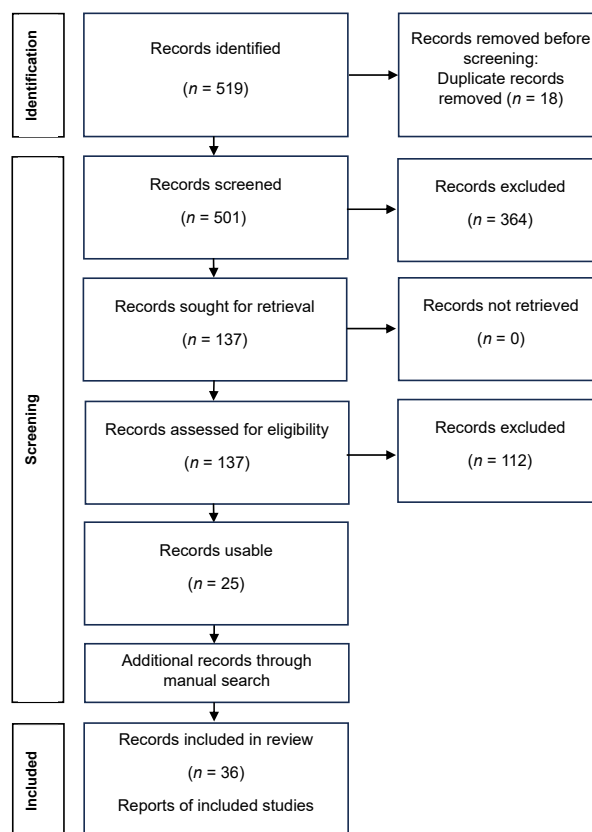
This review employs a structured literature review (SLR) approach to address the research questions, approximately following the guidelines of Massaro et al. (2016). Additionally, it incorporates recommendations from Tranfield et al. (2003), which are foundational to literature reviews on family businesses, such as those by Sageder et al. (2016) or Machek and Kubíček (2019). We followed the path of an SLR to analyze existing literature on succession in family businesses concerning innovation. An SLR offers valuable opportunities to gain an overview of the literature, highlight existing research efforts, and suggest future research directions.

The initial search was conducted in the Web of Science database, which includes the Science Citation Index Expanded (1900-2024), Social Sciences Citation Index (1900-2024), Arts & Humanities Citation Index (1975-2024), Emerging Sources Citation Index (2005-2024), Conference Proceedings Citation Index (1990-2024), Book Citation Index (2005-2024), and Compounds (1993-2024). The search was performed with no time restrictions. Additionally, the research portal EconBiz was used to ensure coverage of current research. EconBiz, a research portal operated by the ZBW - Leibniz Information Center for Economics (*Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft*), provides an additional economic perspective. Finally, a manual search was conducted to view available references comprehensively.

The search strategy employed in this systematic review is illustrated in Figure 1 according to the PRISMA guidelines. The PRISMA protocol provides a flow diagram that helps with the steps of the SLR process. The diagram details the number of papers identified, included, and excluded according to the exclusion criteria.

**Figure 1.** PRISMA diagram used in the literature review

### Identification of studies via databases and journals



The initial search yielded 519 records, 18 of which were excluded due to duplication. The first step involved screening these references, excluding 364 based on titles or abstracts. For example, a study on corporate social responsibility in franchises by Fernandez-Muñoz et al. (2022); one from Chen et al. (2019) about the financialization of assets; about the impact of CEOs on boards from a political perspective by Dinh et al. (2021); tax evasion by Eddleston and Mulki (2020); digital product innovation by Capolupo et al. (2024); why some leaders succeed, and others do not by Goodall et al. (2011). Based on relevance to our review, 112 references were excluded due to a scope mismatch. Precisely, studies addressing topics such as gender, family dynamics, or conflict management within family businesses, while related, did not align with the review's delimited focus on leadership succession and innovation. For example, Cesaroni et al. (2021) studied women entrepreneurs, Gimenez-Jimenez et al. (2020) explored the understanding between family and family business, and Ensley (2006) examined conflict management's impact on strategy. These studies, while relevant to the broader field of

family business research, do not directly address the specific intersection of leadership succession and innovation. The manual search added 11 relevant references, resulting in a final sample

of 36 references for the literature review. Table 1 presents a list of the search criteria used in the review process to ensure the replicability of the research.

**Table 1.** Search protocol used for the review process

Search Criteria	Web of Science & EconBiz
“succession” AND “family business” OR “family company” OR “family firm” AND “leadership” AND “innovation”	Search in: All Fields  Research area: All  Language: All  Document type: All  Years: All
Search date	02 Feb 2025
Number of references	519
Double references	18
Excluded references	476
References in the review	25
References by manual search	11
<b>The final dataset of references</b>	<b>36</b>

### 3. Findings

This section presents a thorough analysis of the selected articles. We begin by offering an overview of these studies, including the journal of publication, the annual distribution of papers, and the number of citations of the most influential papers. Then, we will proceed with a detailed examination to identify prevalent themes and patterns regarding innovation in leadership succession in family businesses. Finally, we outline the opportunities and challenges of the field and construct a roadmap for future research.

#### 3.1 Overview of selected studies

Most search references are from the *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* journal (13). In total, references from 18 journals and three conference papers were found. [Table 2](#) provides a brief overview of all journals and conferences with their corresponding number of references.

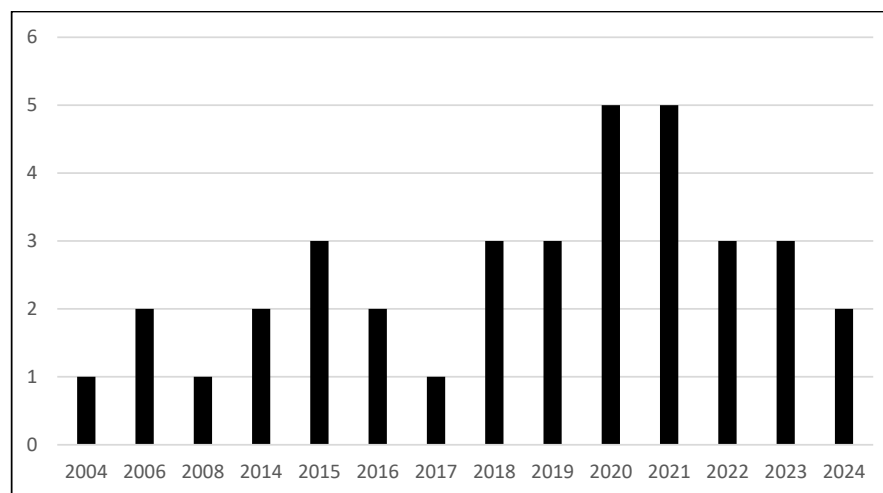
**Table 2.** Identified journals and conferences

Journal or Conference	AJG 2021 Ranking	Acronym	Papers
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	4	ETP	13
Journal of Family Business Strategy	2	JFBS	4
Sustainability	***	SUS**	1
Family Business Review	3	FBR	1
Journal of Cleaner Production	2	JCP	1
Journal of Innovation & Knowledge	1	JIK	1
Kybernetes	1	KYB**	1
Management and Organization Review	3	MOR	1
Technology in Society	***	TIS	1
International Small Business Journal	3	ISBJ	1
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research	3	IJEBR	1
Futures	2	FUT**	1
Organization Studies	4	OS	1
Strategic Management Journal	4*	SMJ	1
Administrative Sciences	***	AS**	1
Journal of Family Business Management	1	JFBM	1
Review of Managerial Science	2	RMS	1
European Journal of Family Business	***	EJFB	1
<b>Total articles</b>			<b>33</b>
3rd International Conference on Leadership, Technology and Innovation Management		CLTIM**	1
5th AIB-CEE Chapter Annual Conference		AIB-CEE**	1
2nd Workshop on Family Firm Management Research		WFFMR**	1
<b>Total references</b>			<b>36</b>

\*Journal of Distinction, \*\*Acronym used by the authors, \*\*\*Not included in the AJG

As shown in Figure 2, there was a significant increase in the publication of papers from 2020 to 2021, with five papers published annually. Three papers are from previous years (2015, 2018, and 2019) and subsequent years (2022

and 2023). The number of publications was less frequent before 2015. Over 83% of the references were published within the last 10 years, with only six predating 2015, indicating that this field of research focusing on succession and innovation within family businesses is still in its infancy.

**Figure 2.** Distribution of papers per year

The number of citations (Garfield, 1989) identifies influential work, enabling the authors to evaluate the results, considering their strengths and weaknesses critically. At the end of the list is the paper by Aragón-Amonarriz et al. (2024) with zero citations, likely because it is one of the

most recent papers in this review. Table 3 lists the top 10 most-cited references for the citation classics, with Kellermanns and Eddelston (2006) leading significantly with over 70 citations more than the second most-cited work and standing as the second oldest reference in this review.

**Table 3.** Citations ordered by decreasing citation rates

Citations	Title	Author(s) and year	Journal
273	Corporate Entrepreneurship in Family Firms: A Family Perspective	Kellermanns, and Eddelston (2006)	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice
201	Managing the Tradition and Innovation Paradox in Family Firms: A Family Imprinting Perspective	Erdogan et al. (2020)	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice
167	Innovation activities during intra-family leadership succession in family firms: An empirical study from a socio-emotional wealth perspective	Hauck and Prügl (2015)	Journal of Family Business Strategy
100	Succession Narratives in Family Business: The Case of Alessi	Dalpiaz et al. (2014)	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice
93	Innovation Motives in Family Firms: A Transgenerational View	Diaz-Moriana et al. (2020)	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice
78	Paradoxes and Innovation in Family Firms: The Role of Paradoxical Thinking	Ingram et al. (2016)	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice
70	Succession Planning in Family-owned Businesses: Evidence from Turkey	Tatoglu et al. (2008)	International Small Business Journal
69	Entrepreneurial Management and Governance in Family Firms: An Introduction	Steier et al. (2004)	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice
69	A Dynamic Network Model of the Successor's Knowledge Construction From the Resource- and Knowledge-Based View of the Family Firm	Cabrera-Suárez et al. (2018)	Family Business Review
67	How familiness affects innovation outcomes via absorptive capacity: A dynamic capability perspective of the family firm	Daspit et al. (2019)	Journal of Family Business Strategy



As seen in Figure 2, the increasing number of references indicates a significant increase in research within this field. Another indicator of this emerging field is that those publications in the citation classics from 2020 now rank second with 201 citations. Six of the top 10 most-cited papers were published after 2014. Thus, the insights from these papers on leadership succession and innovation within family businesses are becoming increasingly relevant.

### 3.2. Themes and patterns

To synthesize and group the diversity of studies found in the literature, a detailed review of the final dataset of 36 papers was performed. The agglomerative (bottom-up) clustering method was used to identify common themes among them. Specifically, we employed the elbow method to determine the optimal number of clusters ( $k$ ). Although the elbow method did not yield a clear result, in conjunction with our expertise, it strongly indicated  $k=5$ . The five clusters were meaningful and interpretable in the context of leadership succession in family businesses and innovation, and our domain knowledge further validated this decision regarding the five clusters. We derived the clusters from the similarity of the theme addressed by the papers, and they were grouped based on the contribution of each focus of analysis to the understanding of the field.

The identified clusters are presented below. A detailed list of the 36 papers assigned to each of the five clusters can be found in Table 4.

**Entrepreneurship.** This cluster ( $n=11$ ) focuses on the interplay between entrepreneurial orientation, innovation activities, and family business dynamics. Publications in this cluster explore topics such as transgenerational entrepreneurship, innovation motives, and the impact of family involvement on innovation.

**Succession management.** This cluster ( $n=8$ ) emphasizes the challenges and best practices of succession planning in family businesses, including the influence of socioemotional wealth, gender dynamics, and intergenerational knowledge transfer on succession outcomes.

**Knowledge Management.** This cluster ( $n=8$ ) examines the role of knowledge creation, transfer, and absorptive capacity in driving innovation within family firms.

**Performance.** This cluster ( $n=5$ ) investigates the impact of succession and innovation on various performance metrics in family businesses, such as financial performance, Research and Development investment, and firm survival.

**Product and process development.** This cluster ( $n=4$ ) focuses specifically on product and process innovation within family firms, exploring how succession influences these types of innovation and the role of leadership in driving them.

**Table 4.** Distribution of papers per cluster

Cluster	Title	Author(s) and year	Journal	Country of research
Entrepreneurship	Corporate Entrepreneurship in Family Firms: A Family Perspective	Kellermanns, and Eddleston (2006)	ETP	-
	Innovation Motives in Family Firms: A Transgenerational View	Diaz-Moriana et al. (2020)	ETP	-
	Entrepreneurial Management and Governance in Family Firms: An Introduction	Steier et al. (2004)	ETP	-
	Beyond the Firm: Business Families as Entrepreneurs	Le Breton-Miller, and Miller (2018)	ETP	-
	Temporal Change Patterns of Entrepreneurial Orientation: A Longitudinal Investigation of CEO Successions	Gröhn et al. (2017)	ETP	USA
	Different Strokes for Different Folks: The Roles of Religion and Tradition for Transgenerational Entrepreneurship in Family Businesses	Eze et al. (2021)	ETP	Nigeria
	Venturing Motives and Venturing Types in Entrepreneurial Families: A Corporate Entrepreneurship Perspective	Riar et al. (2022)	ETP	Germany
	Intra-family succession motivating eco-innovation: A study of family firms in the German and Italian wine sector	Ferri et al. (2024)	JCP	Italy & Germany
	Family firms and innovation from founder to successor	Cesaroni et al. (2021)	AS	Italy
	Leadership Succession and Transgenerational Entrepreneurship in Family Firms: An Evolutionary Perspective of Familiness	Aragón-Amonarriz et al. (2024)	EJFB	Spain
	Entrepreneurial thinking as a key factor of family business success	Hnátek (2015)	CLTIM	-

Cluster	Title	Author(s) and year	Journal	Country of research
Succession management	Innovation activities during intra-family leadership succession in family firms: An empirical study from a socio-emotional wealth perspective	<a href="#">Hauck and Prügl (2015)</a>	JFBS	Austria
	Paradoxes and Innovation in Family Firms: The Role of Paradoxical Thinking	<a href="#">Ingram et al. (2016)</a>	ETP	-
	Succession Planning in Family-owned Businesses: Evidence from Turkey	<a href="#">Tatoglu et al. (2008)</a>	ISBJ	Turkey
	Gender gymnastics in CEO succession: Masculinities, Femininities and Legitimacy	<a href="#">Byrne et al. (2021)</a>	OS	France
	Anticipating intergenerational management transfer of family firms: A typology of next generation's future leadership projections	<a href="#">Lefebvre, and Lefebvre (2016)</a>	FUT	France
	Context as a provider of key resources for succession: A case study of sustainable family firms	<a href="#">Botella-Carrubi, and Gonzalez-Cruz (2019)</a>	SUS	Spain
	Predecessors' competency framework for nurturing successors in family firms	<a href="#">Samei, and Feyzbakhsh (2015)</a>	IJEER	Iran
	Identification of success factors for sustainability in family businesses Case study method and exploratory research in Japan	<a href="#">Chirapanda (2020)</a>	JSBM	Japan
Knowledge management	A Dynamic Network Model of the Successor's Knowledge Construction From the Resource- and Knowledge-Based View of the Family Firm	<a href="#">Cabrera-Suárez et al. (2018)</a>	FBR	-
	How familiness affects innovation outcomes via absorptive capacity: A dynamic capability perspective of the family firm	<a href="#">Daspit et al. (2019)</a>	JFBS	-
	To patent or not to patent: That is the question. Intellectual property protection in family firms	<a href="#">Chirico et al. (2020)</a>	ETP	Italy
	Family Firm Behavior From a Psychological Perspective	<a href="#">Sharma et al. (2020)</a>	ETP	-
	Family businesses successors knowledge and willingness on sustainable innovation: The moderating role of leader's approval	<a href="#">Wang et al. (2019)</a>	JK	Taiwan
	Family business succession as knowledge creation process	<a href="#">Duh (2014)</a>	KYB	-
	Modeling the effect of continuity and change as paradoxical forces in the inter-generational transition process of family businesses	<a href="#">Serhan et al. (2023)</a>	JFBS	Lebanon
	Family business succession and innovation: a systematic literature review	<a href="#">Baltazar et al. (2023)</a>	RMS	-
Performance	Back to the Future: The effect of returning family successions on firm performance	<a href="#">Amore et al. (2021)</a>	SMJ	Italy
	Transgenerational Succession and R&D Investment: A Myopic Loss Aversion Perspective	<a href="#">Li et al. (2022)</a>	ETP	China
	A Far-Reaching Parental Love? Co-Governance of Intergenerational Succession and Innovation Activities in Chinese Family Firms	<a href="#">Zhu and Kang (2022)</a>	MOR	China
	When successor becomes the leader of an international family business? - a case study from Poland	<a href="#">Hadrys-Nowak (2018)</a>	AIB-CEE	Poland
	Does Business Succession Enhance Firms' Innovation Capacity? Results from an Exploratory Analysis in Italian Smes	<a href="#">Ganzaroli et al. (2006)</a>	WFFMR	Italy
Product and process development	Managing the Tradition and Innovation Paradox in Family Firms: A Family Imprinting Perspective	<a href="#">Erdogan et al. (2020)</a>	ETP	Turkey
	Succession Narratives in Family Business: The Case of Alessi	<a href="#">Dalpiaz et al. (2014)</a>	ETP	Italy
	Innovation in the post-succession phase of family firms: Family CEO successors and leadership constellations as resources	<a href="#">Zybura et al. (2021)</a>	JFBS	Germany
	Intergenerational dynamics of digital transformation in family firms	<a href="#">Ren et al. (2023)</a>	TIS	China

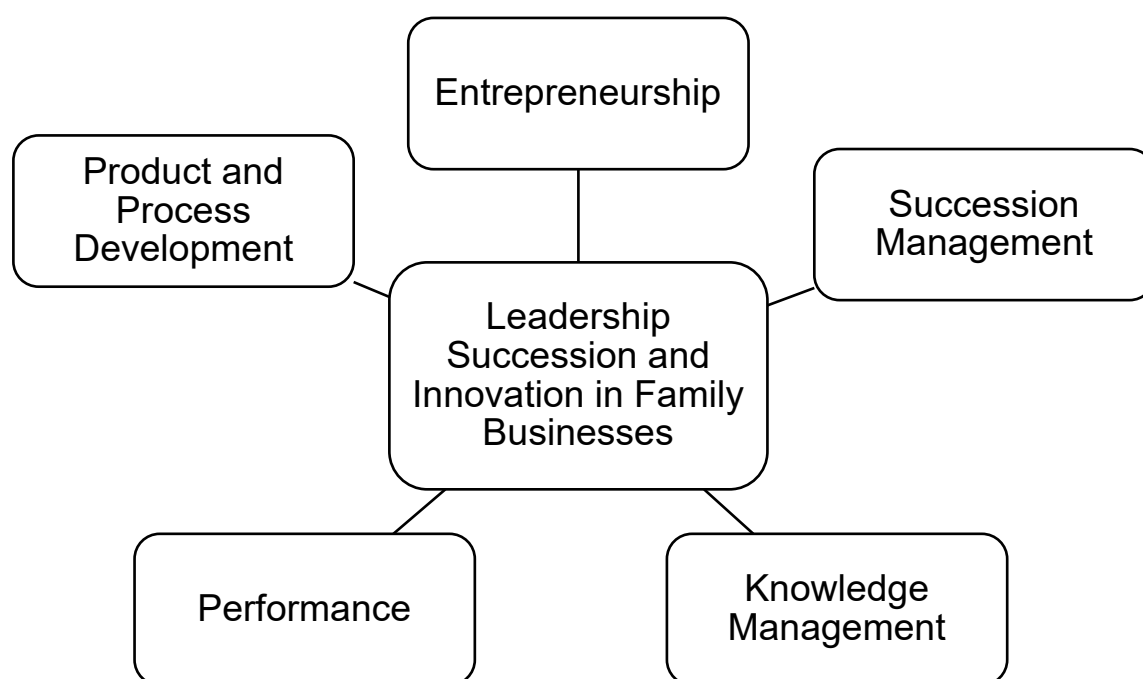


#### 4. Principal topics and analysis of research trends

This section presents the findings of the SLR conducted in the field. The SLR involved an extensive content analysis of the selected studies. The 36 papers in the target sample were separated into five thematic groups (clusters) according to the approached subject and its contribution to understanding innovation's impact

on leadership succession in family businesses (see Figure 3). Assigning papers to individual clusters is generally straightforward, although a paper could be assigned to multiple clusters in some cases. In this paper, the authors opted for a clear assignment based on the respective focus of each reference. The following Subsections further explain the clusters shown in Table 4, describing the content of the corresponding papers.

**Figure 3.** Thematic clusters



##### Cluster 1. Entrepreneurship

The first Cluster Entrepreneurship includes 11 references, as shown in Table 4. Compared to the other four clusters, most references matched the Entrepreneurship cluster. The assigned references found content corresponding to entrepreneurship in various forms. [Steier et al. \(2004\)](#) discussed how succession provides opportunities for organizational renewal, entrepreneurship, and innovation. They also referred to entrepreneurship as fundamentally relevant for creating new ventures and fostering innovation essential for the business's survival ([Diaz-Moriana et al., 2020](#); [Riar et al., 2022](#)). [Kellermanns and Eddelston \(2006\)](#) arrived at conclusions like those of [Steier et al. \(2004\)](#), suggesting that succession significantly impacts entrepreneurship, which directly impacts innovation, among other things. [Aragón-Amonarriz et al. \(2024\)](#) support

this perspective by stating that all the leaders, following the succession, ventured into new business areas and initiated radical changes.

[Grühn et al. \(2017\)](#) also concluded that, following succession, the successor is more concerned with innovation and adopting an entrepreneurial approach than the predecessor. The same opinion is shared by [Le Breton-Miller and Miller \(2018\)](#), who viewed family business members as entrepreneurs. After succession, it is common for the successor to start a new business instead of merely taking over the existing one. However, [Cesaroni et al. \(2021\)](#) offered a different perspective, contending that attitudes, actions, and behaviors shape innovation in the next generation.

[Eze et al. \(2021\)](#) state that succession is sometimes filled with conflicts, which may hinder entrepreneurial activities and innovation. Similarly, [Ferri et al. \(2024\)](#) pointed out that

the successors' motivation also significantly influences innovation and entrepreneurial thinking, analogous to disputes. [Hnátek \(2015\)](#) argued that the most significant difference in innovation capacity exists between a traditional entrepreneur and a hired manager, asserting that entrepreneurial thinking is a crucial factor in the success of family businesses and is, therefore, connected to succession.

## Cluster 2. Succession Management

Eight papers focused on Cluster Succession Management in family businesses, and it is one of the leading clusters in this work, as it plays a significant role in succession.

[Tatoglu et al. \(2008\)](#) examined succession planning in Turkey, emphasizing that successful succession is highly achievable with effective succession planning. They identified the three most influential criteria for the successor: competency, interest in the business, and education. During the succession phase, the predecessor will be introduced to the successor's innovation. This notion is supported by [Hauck and Prügl \(2015\)](#), who state that planning results in a successor who engages in innovation.

However, innovation from the successor is quickly diminished if the predecessor remains too involved in the business ([Ingram et al., 2016](#)). Likewise, the drive for innovation diminishes during succession when the predecessor lacks an open mind, as they play a crucial role in laying the foundation for innovations ([Samei & Feyzbakhsh, 2015](#)).

Succession management is a highly personalized process for each business; no standard model exists. That also means that, in some cases, innovation may only occur in incremental change ([Botella-Carrubi & Gonzalez-Cruz, 2019](#)). However, achieving a successful family business succession requires a few key factors, including innovation, competitive advantage, leadership, team management, and good relationships with the local community—innovation being a critical component ([Chirapanda, 2020](#)). Additionally, succession management is often strongly influenced by external factors such as environmental issues, longer life expectancy, or specific gender issues. Modern issues, such as the work-life balance, make succession management increasingly complex due to a lack of commitment from potential successors to assume leadership ([Lefebvre & Lefebvre, 2016](#)). In such cases, succession management becomes particularly challenging in the context of gender-related factors. However, a successor adopting an entrepreneurial masculinity mindset can foster a strong sense of innovation in every case ([Byrne et al., 2021](#)).

## Cluster 3. Knowledge management

The third Cluster, Knowledge Management, encompasses eight papers on knowledge management, creation, transfer, and other aspects. [Duh \(2014\)](#) emphasized knowledge as a critical factor in the succession process for business survival and as a source of innovation, stating that knowledge (company and industry knowledge) is the first element successors must learn for a successful succession. [Chirico et al. \(2020\)](#) support this view, asserting that creating new knowledge provides a tactical advantage during the succession process. [Daspit et al. \(2019\)](#) also suggest that knowledge must be gathered, particularly from outside the business, to support the development of leadership skills during succession.

[Cabrera-Suárez et al. \(2018\)](#) observed that knowledge, in the form of the transfer of best practices combined with new generational input, leads to innovation. [Wang et al. \(2019\)](#) further emphasized that the successor's knowledge has a significant impact on innovation and thus an essential factor in the successor selection process. Both viewpoints highlight the importance of knowledge management as a factor in succession concerning innovation.

[Sharma et al. \(2020\)](#) suggest that tradition and innovation can only flourish in the business if the family educates the next generation. This means that the next generation must be involved in developing traditional routines. [Serhan et al. \(2023\)](#) support this argument by stating that the past, whether through rituals or knowledge, must be passed down to the next generation. Thus, the next generation must uphold traditional rituals while embracing modern change to remain relevant and competitive. [Baltazar et al. \(2023\)](#) present an alternative perspective, arguing that it is unclear how knowledge sharing and succession affect innovation. However, they agree that innovation influences the success of a family business.

## Cluster 4. Performance

Five papers are related to performance and discuss the company's performance after succession. [Hadrys-Nowak \(2018\)](#) argued that abrupt changes could negatively impact the company. Instead, a successor must implement innovation gradually while maintaining continuity. Succession leads to increased performance once the successor has gained a strong desire to lead the business. This is supported by [Ganzaroli et al. \(2006\)](#), who found that a weak commitment from the successor reduces the innovation capacity of the family business and leads to poorer performance.

Li et al. (2022) found that while a desire to lead the business can hinder innovation in early generations, it does not significantly affect later generations.

On the one hand, Amore et al. (2021) found that having a family successor leads to better company performance post-succession. However, they also discovered that good performance could limit innovative inputs during the succession process. Li et al. (2022) also agreed that succession limits innovation in contrast to others. On the other hand, Zhu and Kang (2022) pointed out that the potential for significant strategic changes, such as co-governance, can foster innovation, contributing to future company growth.

### Cluster 5. Product and process development

Four papers in the last cluster generally refer to product and process development. Dalpiaz et al. (2014) clarified that innovation during the succession process involves developing new products and changing business processes and organizational structures to create new products. Erdogan et al. (2020) further explained that successors feel more comfortable with products developed under their leadership than those before their tenure. Zybura et al. (2021) argued that the successor's innovative output increases when the predecessor withdraws. An internal family successor generally creates more innovation than an external successor, likely because of the reasons mentioned by Erdogan et al. (2020). Finally, Ren et al.'s (2023) research is noteworthy. They emphasize that the simple desire to transfer a company affects both product and process development, including the digital transformation process.

## 5. Discussion of Findings, Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research

### 5.1. Synthesis and interpretation of findings

After a thorough SLR process, specific parameters were established for the literature search to identify relevant papers on family businesses, succession, leadership, and innovation. The clusters were used to organize the literature on family business leadership succession. The clusters –Entrepreneurship, Knowledge management, Performance, Succession management, and Product and process development– are all related to innovation, though the focus of each paper within its corresponding cluster varies. The focus should now be on addressing the first research question in more detail. RQ1: *To what extent is innovation part of the family business*

*leadership succession literature?* The literature on succession in family businesses is extensive and diverse. Combining the search terms, we identified 36 papers over 21 years that matched the criteria and contributed meaningfully to the content. This means that only close to 7.2% of the initial search results (501 results without duplications) contributed to understanding the connection between leadership succession in family businesses and innovation.

The distribution of papers in Figure 2 reveals a limited annual output, suggesting a scarcity of scholarly attention to the intersection of innovation and leadership succession in family businesses. Based on the present review and an analysis of existing methodological approaches, this underrepresentation may be attributed to a dearth of robust empirical investigations in this domain. Furthermore, considering succession and innovation within one research framework presents a significant challenge. While succession can be regarded and is extensively studied, this review indicates that establishing a causal relationship between innovation and succession remains elusive. The multifaceted nature of family business dynamics, coupled with the complexities of innovation processes, makes it challenging to isolate the individual contributions of these factors and their reciprocal effects influence.

Addressing RQ1, the cluster analysis demonstrates that innovation is part of the broader family business leadership succession literature. However, the relatively low yield of pertinent publications highlights the necessity for additional research. The observation that fewer than 8% of the search results for the combined keywords “succession” and “innovation” specifically address their relationship highlights the significant gap in current scholarship. It suggests that this area's potential for future investigation is still considerable.

The authors identified a significant intersection with innovation in all 36 papers concerning the second research question, RQ2: *To what extent is innovation a decisive factor in leadership succession?* In the Cluster Performance, innovation focuses on the family business's post-succession performance and how different factors influence it. The Cluster Entrepreneurship primarily addresses the impact of succession on entrepreneurship, both after and during the succession process. The Cluster, Knowledge Management, focuses on knowledge transfer and how knowledge is passed down from predecessor to successor, including business, industry, and family knowledge. One of the larger clusters, Succession Management, addresses innovation in various contexts, primarily concerning how

succession should occur and the consequences of different succession plans. Finally, the Cluster Product and Process Development focuses directly on new product innovations or the company's modification, adaptation, or redesign of processes. Thus, to answer RQ2, the results of this review show that innovation, among previous studies, has not been a decisive factor in leadership succession in family businesses. This is also because children or other relatives are the preferred successors in family businesses.

Like RQ2, the discoveries made regarding the individual clusters also apply to the third research question, RQ3: *To what extent has the capacity for innovation impacted the decision about leadership succession?* Therefore, direct conclusions can be drawn from RQ2 to RQ3. While none of the papers specifically mention innovation as a decisive factor in the decision concerning the potential successor, the results in the clusters suggest that innovation can indirectly influence succession. The cluster Product and process development states that innovation is essential for achieving a thriving business in the future. Therefore, a successor with a proven record of driving innovation may be favored. Consequently, the findings do not yield a definitive answer to RQ3. At this stage, no research illustrates how the ability to innovate explicitly impacts the choice of a successor.

## 5.2. Discussion

The authors argue that leadership succession in family businesses, along with innovation, is a topic of significant importance that remains under-researched, a view shared by Aparicio et al. (2021). This review followed Massaro et al.'s (2016) structured literature review approach. Examining relevant publications on succession in family businesses allowed for a more detailed literature review. This review's findings indicate that innovation does not directly affect the family business succession literature. The content related to innovation already presents results that are partially connected to succession. However, as mentioned in the introduction, they fail to respond substantially to the numerous questions surrounding succession and innovation. They do not help solve future problems and challenges for family businesses. With the future research paths and managerial implications outlined here, the authors aim to help bridge this gap and offer concrete recommendations for theory and practice.

Innovation appears frequently in the 36 papers referenced, though in entirely different contexts. For example, Cluster Entrepreneurship investigates how entrepreneurship sustains family

businesses across generations (Kellermanns & Eddelston, 2006) and how successors can maintain an entrepreneurial mindset (Riar et al., 2022). Product and process development was also highlighted in a paper, emphasizing how innovation drives product improvement as the next generation becomes comfortable with it (Erdogan et al., 2020). Furthermore, Alessi evolved from a metalworking company into a design firm (Dalpiaz et al., 2014). The results across each cluster indicated that topics related to succession and innovation vary significantly, adding to the complexity of the research field.

Concerning the research questions of this paper, none of the records explicitly mentioned innovation as a criterion for determining the successor in the family business. However, as this review indicates, a few records indirectly reference innovation as influencing decision-making. For instance, Botella-Carrubi and Gonzalez-Cruz (2019) argue that achieving a business with a high level of innovation benefits from a managerial style that differs from that of the predecessor to the successor. Furthermore, Zybura et al. (2021) describe a family member as a successor and an individual with a greater capacity for innovation. In contrast, Hnátek (2015) identifies entrepreneurial thinking as a critical factor in the decision-making process, suggesting that a hired manager may not possess the same entrepreneurial spirit as the entrepreneur, indicating that this is a key aspect of the decision process.

## 5.3. Implications for theory and practice

The research contributes to the literature by offering a rigorous, systematic approach to literature review that searches, screens, and clusters numerous papers, thus providing a comprehensive overview of the existing literature. It introduces a new framework for analyzing innovation and succession in family businesses. Future researchers can utilize this framework and the five clusters to better understand this problematic relationship. The results enhance the understanding of the role of innovation in leadership succession within family businesses, emphasizing how innovation can impact the leadership succession process—from selecting a successor to the performance of the family business. They also reveal that, depending on a predecessor's focus, these insights can provide the necessary inputs for fostering innovation, ensuring a smooth transition, or aiding in adopting innovation as a fundamental aspect of change and long-term performance.

The results illustrate a significant research gap regarding the relationship between innovation



and succession or the choice of a successor in family businesses. Further scientific research is needed to better comprehend succession and innovation within family businesses. Qualitative and quantitative research are essential for understanding innovation influencing leadership

succession in family businesses. As indicated in Table 5, the authors have identified three unexamined areas. These areas demonstrate how succession affects strategic business decisions such as innovation (Aparicio et al., 2021).

**Table 5.** Future research paths

Future research paths	
The impact of innovation on succession decisions	How does a successor's capacity for innovation influence the decision-making process regarding a successor? This may involve understanding industry dynamics, family values, risks, and specific characteristics of innovation. The research could include case studies of successful family business successions, identifying the elements of success that contributed to the choice of an innovative successor. It could also involve input regarding how the predecessor decides about a successor. What values and decision criteria underpin the choice?
Gender differences in innovation and succession	Investigating the differences between succession and innovation could provide valuable insights. This could focus on how gender roles, cultural norms, or societal expectations influence the ability of successors of varied genders to innovate. It could also involve comparing the innovative behaviors of successors of varied genders and how gender influences the decision-making process. Another aspect here could be whether the innovative ability of different genders is perceived differently by their predecessors.
Intergenerational knowledge transfer	Intergenerational knowledge transfer could address the real effects of changes in the innovative abilities of different generations. Research could explore further how knowledge transfer fosters innovation during a succession. In addition, researchers could look at whether knowledge transfer is still crucial today, as we have access to an incredible amount of knowledge via AI and other media. One effect worth considering more closely is the question of what content, skills, and values should be passed on to foster innovation from one generation to the next.

#### 5.4. Managerial implications

Family businesses must adapt to the evolving business landscape to ensure long-term sustainability. Generational change presents a unique opportunity to embrace innovation and drive growth. An advantage is a successor with a correspondingly high capacity for innovation (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2018). However, to maximize the positive impact of innovation in leadership succession, the predecessor (but also potential successors) must prioritize the following:

##### *Succession Planning*

- Succession planning should commence early to guarantee a smooth transition. Even if the predecessor is not yet contemplating retirement or succession, the initial steps in succession planning should begin as soon as a potential successor is of the right age.
- If there are already multiple Generations in the business family, include all of them to promote understanding of the business, succession planning, and the need for innovation.

- Establish a timeline for leadership succession. This should involve identifying potential successors, creating a plan for transferring knowledge, skills, and values, and an emergency plan if something unforeseen happens.

##### *Innovation and Growth*

- Agree to cultivate an open framework for innovation. Create a culture that values creativity, experimentation, risk-taking without negative consequences, and continuous improvement.
- Invest in the training and development of employees, enhance their innovation skills and knowledge, and reallocate resources to research and development.
- Encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing between employees and management, as well as between generations, to foster innovation and continuity. Contact external partners such as universities, research institutions, or other businesses to exchange new knowledge and technologies.

### Leadership Development

- Invest in potential successors by implementing leadership development programs, coaching, and mentoring to support them.
- Encourage innovation through an entrepreneurial mindset in the whole family.
- Maintain the founder's or family traditions and values, but do not forget to adapt them to the changing environment.
- Succession in a family business is already complicated but becomes even more complex by emphasizing innovation. However, by implementing effective strategies, family businesses can ensure their future success and facilitate a smooth and sustainable transition across generations.

### Author contribution statement

**Benjamin Bahmann:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Writing - original draft. **Claus-Christian Carbon:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing - review & editing

### Conflict of interest statement

Declaration of interest: none

### Ethical statement

The authors declare that the ideas, concepts, and theoretical contributions of other researchers have been duly referenced and that intellectual property rights have properly been attributed to them.

### Declaration on the use of generative AI in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the authors did not use generative AI.

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### Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the author, [B.B.], upon reasonable request.

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