

**Intergenerational Succession in African Family Businesses: Navigating the Transition from Founder to Dynasty**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Intergenerational succession in African family businesses represents a critical challenge, with only 30% surviving into the second generation due to inadequate planning, founder reluctance to delegate, family conflicts, and tensions between traditional cultural values and modern governance principles. Despite their substantial contribution to African economies, these businesses lack culturally appropriate frameworks to navigate leadership transitions effectively.

**Objective:** To examine the factors influencing successful intergenerational succession in African family businesses and develop a comprehensive framework for navigating the transition from founder to subsequent generations while preserving business continuity and family harmony.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional mixed-methods study was conducted across five African countries (Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, and Uganda) involving 185 family businesses (62 founders, 68 successors, 55 senior family members) that had undergone or were undergoing succession transitions. Data were collected through structured questionnaires measuring succession planning comprehensiveness, founder delegation, successor preparedness, governance formalization, family conflict, and succession outcomes (business performance, family harmony, leadership legitimacy), and analyzed using descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, hierarchical multiple regression, and independent samples t-tests.

**Results:** Succession planning comprehensiveness ( $\beta=.31, p<.001$ ), founder willingness to delegate ( $\beta=.28, p<.001$ ), and successor preparedness ( $\beta=.24, p<.01$ ) significantly predicted business performance, collectively explaining 64.2% of variance in succession outcomes. Formal governance structures significantly moderated the negative relationship between family conflict and succession success ( $\beta=.16, p<.05$ ), with businesses possessing such structures demonstrating substantially higher succession success rates (82.7% vs. 47.1%,  $p<.001$ ), superior business performance ( $d=1.11$ ), greater family harmony ( $d=0.97$ ), and more than double the revenue growth (23.4% vs. 11.2%,  $p<.001$ ) compared to those without formal governance.

**Conclusion:** Successful intergenerational succession in African family businesses fundamentally depends on comprehensive succession planning, founder delegation behaviors, and formal governance structures that buffer against family conflict while balancing cultural values with professional management practices.

**Recommendation:** African family businesses should establish formal governance mechanisms—including family councils, advisory boards, and documented succession policies—at least 5-10 years before anticipated transitions, while simultaneously implementing structured successor development programs and engaging professional advisory support to facilitate planning processes and mediate family dynamics.

**Keywords:** intergenerational succession, African family businesses, succession planning, governance structures, founder delegation, successor preparedness, family conflict, business continuity, leadership transition, family harmony

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### **Introduction**

Intergenerational succession in African family businesses represents a critical juncture that determines whether entrepreneurial ventures survive beyond their founding generation or succumb to the challenges of leadership transition. Family businesses constitute the backbone of African economies, accounting for a substantial proportion of employment, GDP contribution, and economic activity across the continent (Dao et al., 2023; Zehra & Usmani, 2021). However, these enterprises face unique succession challenges shaped by the intersection of traditional African cultural values, modern corporate governance principles, and the complex dynamics of family relationships in business contexts. The transition from founder to subsequent generations is fraught with emotional, financial, and strategic complexities, including issues of legitimacy, competence, family harmony, and business continuity (Annor & Oudshoorn, 2019). In the African context, succession planning is further complicated by cultural factors such as extended family structures, traditional inheritance systems, generational value differences, and the tension between communal obligations and business imperatives (Boers et al., 2025; Deferne et al., 2023; Johansson et al., 2020). Understanding how African family businesses successfully navigate these transitions is essential for promoting sustainable entrepreneurship, preserving family wealth across generations, and ensuring the continued contribution of these enterprises to economic development (Alves & Gama, 2020; Rachmawati et al., 2022; Somboonvechakarn et al., 2022). This study explores the mechanisms, challenges, and success factors that characterize intergenerational succession in African family businesses, with the aim of providing insights that can guide families, business leaders, and policymakers in facilitating smoother transitions that preserve both business vitality and family cohesion.

### **Background of the Study**

Family businesses have long been recognized as fundamental economic units across Africa, yet their sustainability beyond the founding generation remains a persistent challenge that threatens economic continuity and wealth preservation. Research indicates that globally, only approximately 30% of family businesses survive into the second generation, and merely 12% remain viable by the third generation, with African family businesses facing even steeper odds due to unique contextual factors (Rovelli et al., 2022). The African business landscape is characterized by distinctive features including strong kinship networks, respect for elder authority, communal decision-making traditions, and inheritance practices that often conflict with modern succession planning principles. Many African entrepreneurs who established businesses during the post-independence era are now reaching retirement age, creating an urgent succession crisis as the transfer of leadership to the next generation becomes imminent (Gonzales-Bustos et al., 2020; Randerson & Radu-Lefebvre, 2021). However, succession planning in African family businesses is often informal, delayed, or entirely absent, with many founders reluctant to relinquish control due to concerns about successor competence, fear of mortality, or the belief that no one can manage the business as effectively. The younger generation, often educated abroad or in modern institutions, brings different management philosophies, technological fluency, and business visions that may clash with traditional approaches, creating intergenerational tension. Additionally, African family businesses must navigate complex family dynamics involving multiple wives, numerous children with varying capabilities and interests, extended family expectations, and the challenge of balancing merit-based succession with cultural expectations of age and gender hierarchy (Baltazar et al., 2023; Bargoni et al., 2023; Vazquez, 2018). Despite these challenges, some African family businesses have successfully transitioned across generations, developing hybrid approaches that honor cultural values while embracing professional management

practices, suggesting that successful succession is achievable when appropriately managed.

### **Problem Statement**

The failure of African family businesses to effectively manage intergenerational succession poses a significant threat to economic stability, employment, family wealth preservation, and the entrepreneurial ecosystem across the continent. Despite their critical economic importance, African family businesses experience alarmingly high failure rates during succession transitions, resulting in the loss of jobs, erosion of accumulated capital, family conflicts, and missed opportunities for business growth and innovation (Combs et al., 2020; Yilmaz et al., 2024). The succession challenge is exacerbated by several interrelated problems: founders' reluctance to plan for succession due to cultural taboos around death discussions, emotional attachment to their enterprises, and distrust of successors' capabilities; inadequate preparation of next-generation family members through structured training, mentorship, and gradual responsibility transfer; conflicts among potential successors driven by sibling rivalry, perceived favoritism, disputes over inheritance rights, and disagreements about business direction; the tension between traditional African values emphasizing age, gender, and birth order in leadership selection versus meritocratic principles that prioritize competence and capability; and the absence of formal governance structures, succession policies, and professional advisory support to guide the transition process (Arijs & Michiels, 2021; Sorenson & Milbrandt, 2023; Suess-Reyes, 2017). Furthermore, there is limited empirical research specifically addressing succession dynamics within the African cultural and institutional context, leaving families without evidence-based frameworks to navigate these transitions successfully. The consequences of succession failure extend beyond individual families to affect employees who lose livelihoods, communities that lose economic anchors, and national economies that lose productive enterprises. Without understanding the specific factors that enable or hinder successful succession in African family businesses, and without developing culturally appropriate frameworks for managing these transitions, the continent risks losing a significant portion of its entrepreneurial wealth and economic foundation as the founding generation exits and successor generations struggle to maintain business viability.

### **Main Objective**

To examine the factors influencing successful intergenerational succession in African family businesses and develop a comprehensive framework for navigating the transition from founder to subsequent generations while preserving business continuity and family harmony.

### **Specific Objectives**

1. To identify and analyze the cultural, organizational, and familial factors that facilitate or hinder effective succession planning and implementation in African family businesses.
2. To assess the relationship between founder characteristics, successor preparation, and succession outcomes in terms of business performance, family cohesion, and leadership legitimacy.
3. To explore the role of governance structures, professional advisors, and succession planning processes in mediating successful transitions across generations in African family business contexts.

### **Research Questions**

1. What cultural, organizational, and familial factors significantly influence the success or failure of intergenerational succession processes in African family businesses?
2. How do founder characteristics and successor preparation strategies affect post-succession business

performance, family relationships, and leadership acceptance?

3. To what extent do formal governance structures and professional succession planning processes contribute to successful leadership transitions in African family businesses?

### Research Hypotheses

**H1:** There is a significant positive relationship between comprehensive succession planning (including early preparation, formal processes, and successor training) and successful business transition outcomes in African family businesses.

**H2:** Founder willingness to delegate authority and involve successors in decision-making during the pre-succession phase significantly predicts post-succession business performance and family harmony.

**H3:** The establishment of formal governance structures (family councils, advisory boards, and written succession policies) significantly moderates the relationship between family conflict and succession success in African family businesses.

### Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional mixed-methods research design to examine intergenerational succession in African family businesses across five countries (Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, and Uganda) selected for their diverse economic and cultural contexts. The target population comprised family businesses that had undergone or were undergoing succession transitions, defined as businesses owned and managed by family members where leadership transfer from the founding generation to subsequent generations had been initiated or completed within the previous ten years. Using a stratified random sampling technique, businesses were categorized by sector (manufacturing, services, retail, agriculture) and succession status (completed succession, ongoing succession) to ensure representational diversity. The sample size was determined using G\*Power software version 3.1.9.7, with parameters set at a medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ), significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), statistical power of 80% ( $1 - \beta = 0.80$ ), and accounting for 15 predictors in the multiple regression model, yielding a minimum required sample of 139 participants; adjusting for an anticipated non-response rate of 25%, the final sample comprised 185 family businesses, with respondents including founders ( $n=62$ ), successors ( $n=68$ ), and senior family members involved in business operations ( $n=55$ ).

Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered via face-to-face interviews and online surveys, supplemented by semi-qualitative interviews with 30 purposively selected participants to provide contextual depth. The questionnaire measured succession planning comprehensiveness (12-item scale adapted from Sharma et al., 2003,  $\alpha=0.89$ ), founder willingness to delegate (8-item scale,  $\alpha=0.84$ ), successor preparedness (10-item scale,  $\alpha=0.87$ ), governance structure formalization (9-item checklist), family conflict levels (7-item scale from Jehn's Intragroup Conflict Scale,  $\alpha=0.82$ ), and succession outcomes including business performance (measured through 5-year revenue growth, profitability trends, and market share changes), family harmony (6-item scale,  $\alpha=0.78$ ), and leadership legitimacy (5-item scale,  $\alpha=0.81$ ). Univariate statistical methods were employed to describe the data characteristics, including measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode), dispersion (standard deviation, variance, range), and distribution shape (skewness and kurtosis) for continuous variables, while frequencies and percentages were

calculated for categorical variables; normality assumptions were tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, with Q-Q plots generated for visual assessment (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023).

Bivariate statistical methods included Pearson's correlation coefficients to examine linear relationships between continuous variables (succession planning, founder delegation, successor preparation, and business performance), with correlation strength interpreted using Cohen's guidelines ( $r=0.10-0.29$  weak,  $r=0.30-0.49$  moderate,  $r \geq 0.50$  strong), while point-biserial correlations were computed for relationships between dichotomous and continuous variables; independent samples t-tests compared means between two groups (e.g., completed vs. ongoing successions, presence vs. absence of formal governance), with effect sizes calculated using Cohen's  $d$ , and one-way ANOVA with post-hoc Tukey HSD tests examined differences across multiple groups (countries, sectors), with eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) reported as the effect size measure; chi-square tests of independence assessed associations between categorical variables such as succession success status and governance structure presence. For multivariate analysis, hierarchical multiple regression was the primary statistical model applied to test the three hypotheses while controlling for potential confounders including business size (number of employees), business age, sector, and country context.

The regression analysis followed a sequential model-building approach: Model 1 included only control variables (business size, age, sector, country) to establish baseline variance explained; Model 2 added the main predictors (succession planning comprehensiveness, founder delegation, governance structures) to test direct effects; Model 3 incorporated interaction terms to test moderation hypotheses, specifically examining whether governance structures moderated the relationship between family conflict and succession success. Prior to regression analysis, all assumptions were rigorously tested including linearity (assessed through scatterplots of predictor-outcome relationships), independence of errors (evaluated using Durbin-Watson statistic, with acceptable values between 1.5-2.5), homoscedasticity (examined through plots of standardized residuals against predicted values and confirmed with Breusch-Pagan test), absence of multicollinearity (assessed through tolerance values  $>0.10$  and variance inflation factors  $<10$ ), and normality of residuals (tested via histogram, P-P plots, and Shapiro-Wilk test on standardized residuals). Additionally, structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS version 26 was employed to test the hypothesized relationships simultaneously and examine both direct and indirect effects through mediating variables such as successor legitimacy and family cohesion.

**Results:**

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations (N=185)**

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Succession Planning Comprehensiveness	3.42	1.18	-						
2. Founder Willingness to Delegate	3.28	1.05	.58**	-					
3. Successor Preparedness	3.65	0.98	.62**	.54**	-				
4. Governance Structure Formalization	4.12	2.34	.48**	.41**	.43**	-			

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5. Family Conflict Level	3.81	1.15	-	-	-	-	-		
			.52**	.47**	.39**	.44**			
6. Business Performance	3.71	0.89	.67**	.61**	.64**	.52**	-	-	
							.56**		
7. Family Harmony	3.89	0.94	.59**	.63**	.51**	.46**	-	.68**	-
							.71**		
8. Leadership Legitimacy	3.95	0.87	.55**	.57**	.69**	.43**	-	.65**	.61**
							.48**		

Note: \*\*  $p < .01$ ; Scales ranged from 1-5 except Governance Structure (0-9 checklist)

Table 2: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Business Performance (N=185)

Predictor Variables	Model 1 $\beta$	Model 2 $\beta$	Model 3 $\beta$
<b>Control Variables</b>			
Business Size	.18*	.12	.11
Business Age	.09	.06	.05
Sector (Manufacturing)	.14	.08	.07
Country Context	.11	.07	.06
<b>Main Predictors</b>			
Succession Planning Comprehensiveness		.31***	.29***
Founder Willingness to Delegate		.28***	.26***
Successor Preparedness		.24**	.23**
Governance Structure Formalization		.19**	.18*
Family Conflict Level		-.21**	-.19**
<b>Interaction Terms</b>			
Governance $\times$ Family Conflict			.16*
R <sup>2</sup>	.074	.623	.642
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.053	.601	.618
$\Delta R^2$		.549***	.019*
F-statistic	3.56*	28.47***	26.83***

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ;  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficients

Table 3: Comparison of Succession Outcomes by Governance Structure Presence

Outcome Variable	Formal Governance Present (n=98)	No Formal Governance (n=87)	t-value	Cohen's d	p-value
	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Business Performance	4.12 (0.71)	3.24 (0.87)	7.42	1.11	<.001

Family Harmony	4.28 (0.78)	3.45 (0.94)	6.51	0.97	<.001
Leadership Legitimacy	4.31 (0.69)	3.54 (0.89)	6.38	0.96	<.001
Succession Success Rate*	82.7%	47.1%	$\chi^2=24.86$	$\phi=.37$	<.001
Revenue Growth (5-year)	23.4% (8.9)	11.2% (12.3)	7.58	1.14	<.001
Family Conflict Level	3.21 (1.02)	4.48 (0.98)	-8.54	-1.27	<.001

Note: Success defined as maintaining/improving business performance while preserving family relationships

### Statistical Interpretation and Discussion

#### Table 1 Interpretation

The descriptive statistics and correlation matrix revealed that succession planning comprehensiveness ( $M=3.42$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ) and founder willingness to delegate ( $M=3.28$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ) were moderate in the sample, suggesting considerable room for improvement in African family business succession practices. The correlation analysis demonstrated strong positive associations between succession planning and business performance ( $r=.67$ ,  $p<.01$ ), as well as between founder delegation and family harmony ( $r=.63$ ,  $p<.01$ ), providing preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships. Notably, family conflict exhibited strong negative correlations with all positive outcomes, particularly family harmony ( $r=-.71$ ,  $p<.01$ ), indicating that conflict management was a critical determinant of succession success. The intercorrelations among predictor variables (ranging from  $r=.41$  to  $r=.62$ ) were substantial but below the multicollinearity threshold of  $r=.80$ , suggesting that while related constructs, each captured unique variance. Successor preparedness showed the strongest relationship with leadership legitimacy ( $r=.69$ ,  $p<.01$ ), emphasizing the importance of adequate training and development for gaining stakeholder acceptance, while governance structure formalization correlated moderately with all outcome variables, suggesting its role as a stabilizing mechanism in the succession process.

#### Table 2 Interpretation

The hierarchical regression analysis provided robust support for the research hypotheses, with the full model explaining 64.2% of variance in business performance ( $R^2=.642$ ,  $F(10,174)=26.83$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Model 1, containing only control variables, accounted for a modest 7.4% of variance, indicating that business characteristics alone poorly predicted succession outcomes. The addition of main predictors in Model 2 resulted in a substantial increase ( $\Delta R^2=.549$ ,  $p<.001$ ), with succession planning comprehensiveness emerging as the strongest predictor ( $\beta=.31$ ,  $p<.001$ ), followed by founder willingness to delegate ( $\beta=.28$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and successor preparedness ( $\beta=.24$ ,  $p<.01$ ), thus supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2. The significant negative coefficient for family conflict ( $\beta=-.21$ ,  $p<.01$ ) underscored its detrimental impact on business outcomes. Critically, Model 3 revealed a significant interaction effect between governance structures and family conflict ( $\beta=.16$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $\Delta R^2=.019$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3 by demonstrating that formal governance mechanisms buffered the negative impact of family disputes on succession success. The tolerance values (all  $>.34$ ) and VIF scores (all  $<2.9$ ) confirmed the absence of problematic multicollinearity, while the Durbin-

Watson statistic (2.08) indicated independence of errors, validating the model's statistical integrity.

### **Table 3 Interpretation**

The independent samples t-tests revealed substantial and statistically significant differences in succession outcomes between businesses with and without formal governance structures, with large effect sizes across all measured variables. Businesses with formal governance demonstrated significantly superior business performance ( $M=4.12$  vs.  $M=3.24$ ,  $t(183)=7.42$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $d=1.11$ ), family harmony ( $M=4.28$  vs.  $M=3.45$ ,  $t(183)=6.51$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $d=0.97$ ), and leadership legitimacy ( $M=4.31$  vs.  $M=3.54$ ,  $t(183)=6.38$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $d=0.96$ ), with Cohen's  $d$  values exceeding 0.8 in all cases, indicating large practical significance. The succession success rate was notably higher in businesses with governance structures (82.7% vs. 47.1%,  $\chi^2(1)=24.86$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\phi=.37$ ), representing a 75.7% increase in the odds of successful transition. Perhaps most striking was the revenue growth differential, with governed businesses achieving more than double the five-year growth rate (23.4% vs. 11.2%,  $t(183)=7.58$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $d=1.14$ ), demonstrating tangible economic benefits of formalized succession processes. The significantly lower family conflict levels in governed businesses ( $M=3.21$  vs.  $M=4.48$ ,  $t(183)=-8.54$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $d=-1.27$ ) suggested that formal structures provided clear frameworks for decision-making and dispute resolution, thereby mitigating interpersonal tensions that typically derail succession processes in African family business contexts.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrated that successful intergenerational succession in African family businesses was fundamentally determined by the intersection of comprehensive succession planning, founder willingness to delegate authority, and the establishment of formal governance structures, all of which collectively explained 64.2% of variance in post-succession business performance. The research provided empirical support for all three hypotheses, revealing that early and systematic succession planning ( $\beta=.31$ ,  $p<.001$ ) served as the strongest predictor of positive outcomes, while founder delegation behaviors ( $\beta=.28$ ,  $p<.001$ ) facilitated smoother transitions by building successor competence and legitimacy during the pre-succession phase. Most critically, the findings established that formal governance mechanisms—including family councils, advisory boards, and written succession policies—not only directly enhanced succession outcomes but also significantly moderated the destructive impact of family conflict ( $\beta=.16$ ,  $p<.05$ ), effectively buffering businesses against the interpersonal tensions that typically derail leadership transitions in African family contexts. The comparative analysis revealed that businesses with formal governance structures achieved succession success rates of 82.7% compared to only 47.1% for those without such mechanisms, while simultaneously maintaining superior family harmony and more than doubling their revenue growth trajectories. These findings challenged the prevailing informal approaches to succession in African family businesses and underscored the necessity of integrating culturally sensitive but professionally structured governance frameworks that balance traditional values with modern management imperatives. The study contributed to the limited empirical literature on African family business succession by demonstrating that while cultural factors remain influential, the adoption of formalized planning processes and governance structures represented the most viable pathway to preserving both business continuity and family cohesion across generational transitions, thereby safeguarding the economic contributions of these enterprises to employment, wealth creation, and national development on the African continent.

### Recommendations

African family businesses should prioritize the establishment of formal governance mechanisms—including family councils, advisory boards, and documented succession policies—at least 5-10 years before anticipated leadership transitions. These structures should be designed to accommodate African cultural values while providing clear frameworks for decision-making, conflict resolution, and merit-based successor selection that can withstand the emotional and relational complexities inherent in family business transitions.

Founding generation leaders should initiate systematic successor preparation programs that combine formal education, mentorship, graduated responsibility transfer, and external exposure to best practices, beginning when potential successors are in their early careers. This development process should explicitly involve founder delegation of meaningful authority and decision-making responsibilities, allowing successors to build competence, confidence, and legitimacy among family members and stakeholders before assuming full leadership roles.

Family businesses should engage external professional advisors—including family business consultants, organizational psychologists, and legal experts—to facilitate succession planning processes, mediate family conflicts, and provide objective assessments of successor readiness and governance effectiveness. Professional involvement can depersonalize difficult conversations, introduce evidence-based practices, and help families navigate the tension between traditional inheritance expectations and business sustainability requirements in ways that preserve both enterprise viability and family relationships.

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