

Succession planning in family firms: family governance practices, board of directors, and emotions

Peer-reviewed author version

UMANS, Ine; LYBAERT, Nadine; STEIJVERS, Tensie & VOORDECKERS, Wim  
(2020) Succession planning in family firms: family governance practices, board of directors, and emotions. In: SMALL BUSINESS ECONOMICS, 54 (1), p. 189 -207.

DOI: 10.1007/s11187-018-0078-5

Handle: <http://hdl.handle.net/1942/30756>

**Succession planning in family firms:  
Family governance practices, board of directors, and emotions**

**Abstract** This study builds on implementation intention theory to indicate that both business and family governance practices influence the succession planning process in family firms. In addition, this study draws on goal adjustment theory to explore whether the family CEO's emotions, being his or her inability to let go of the family firm, hamper the governance decisions of the board of directors concerning that succession planning process. Applying a moderated mediation analysis on a sample of 225 family firms, results show that board involvement in the succession process mediates the positive relationship between the use of family governance practices and the level of succession planning. In addition, the family CEO's inability to let go negatively moderates this mediating relationship which signifies that emotions influence governance outcomes in family firms.

**Keywords** Family firms • Succession planning • Family governance practices • Board of directors • Emotions

**JEL** C31 • G30 • M10

## 1 Introduction

The majority of family firm owners express a strong preference for the renewal of family bonds through dynastic succession (Berrone et al. 2012; Lefebvre and Lefebvre 2016). These dynastic succession intentions are assumed to be an important point of reference driving family business behavior including the execution of the succession process itself (Berrone et al. 2012). Therefore, in theory, one would expect that family firms will invest in an effectively executed succession process in order to ensure successful longevity of the family firm. Nevertheless, abundant evidence worldwide tells another story. In general, less than one third of the family firm population seems to succeed in managing an effective succession process and reaching intergenerational transition, making succession one of the most important challenges for family firms (Mathews and Blumentritt 2015; Le Breton-Miller et al. 2004; Lefebvre and Lefebvre 2016).

This puzzling discrepancy between theoretical expectations and evidence has intrigued family business scholars for years and initiated a research stream looking for the antecedents of a successful succession process. To date, research established that *planning the leadership succession* is a key factor in a successful succession process (Le Breton-Miller et al. 2004; Sharma et al. 2001; Marshall et al. 2006; Eddleston and Powell 2008). Succession planning refers to “the process that facilitates the transfer of management control from one family member to another” (Sharma et al. 2001) and entails the degree to which the family business is engaged in selecting and training the successor, communicating succession decisions to family members, and deciding on the post-succession strategy and the post-succession role of the incumbent CEO (Sharma et al. 2003; Marshall et al. 2006).

Despite the importance of a well-developed succession plan, many family businesses do not even seem to start planning their succession (Sharma et al. 2003). In order to understand the obstacles and encouraging factors of succession planning, prior studies investigated with mixed success a wide range of antecedents including demographic (e.g. Marshall et al. 2006), attitudinal (e.g. Sharma et al. 2003), behavioral (e.g. Venter et al. 2005), and board variables (e.g. Blumentritt 2006). Although these studies substantially enhanced our understanding of succession planning in family firms, several important structural and emotional determinants remain largely unexplored. Indeed, recent studies pointed to the importance of governance systems of the family taking a leading facilitating role as succession support systems (Arteaga and Menéndez-Requejo 2017; Gnan et al. 2013), and emotions as potential obstacles (Berrone et al. 2012; Shepherd 2016; Holt and Popp 2013). However, a formal examination of family governance and the incumbent’s emotions as determining factors of succession planning is still missing.

Family governance practices (FGP), being the voluntary practices that facilitate the relationships between the family and the business (Berent-Braun and Uhlaner 2012), enhance the cohesiveness and collective goal orientation of the family especially towards the goal of creating firm value and renewing family bonds through dynastic succession (Suess 2014). Hence, FGP aggregate the different views of family members with regard to the succession process and set up terms for incorporating family members in the firm (Mustakallio et al. 2002). FGP thus address leadership succession and also the planning thereof (Arteaga and Menéndez-Requejo 2017; Suess-Reyes 2017). After that, the collective vision of the family is communicated to the board of directors (BOD) whose legal duty is to deal effectively with the planning of leadership succession (Lane 2006; Van den

Heuvel et al. 2006). Therefore, we posit that board involvement in the succession process mediates the relationship between FGP and succession planning. Prior literature builds on agency arguments to explain this role of governance mechanisms with regard to succession as these mechanisms facilitate the communication and transparency throughout the organization with regard to the succession (planning) process which mitigates potential conflicts that arise from the relationships among members of the family (Arteaga and Menéndez-Requejo 2017). We contribute by building on implementation intention theory (Gollwitzer 1999) by arguing that FGP and the BOD have the collective goal intention of ensuring the continuity of the family firm (Berrone et al. 2012). This collective goal intention needs to be implemented in order to secure the attainment of that goal, i.e. the collective implementation intention of planning the succession process. This collective implementation intention is the ratification of the initiation of the succession planning process by the BOD which will finally lead to a planned succession. Still, although in many family businesses these governance mechanisms support the intention to ensure the continuity of the family business and would like to initiate the succession planning process, succession planning remains absent.

Prior studies indicated that board processes affect firm outcomes (Payne et al. 2009; Zattoni et al. 2015). However, board processes can have varying effects on outcomes contingent upon the family CEO's emotions (Zona 2016). In order to explain the interruptions that occur on the road to succession planning, we introduce an emotional obstacle into our model namely the *family CEO's inability to let go of the business*. Therefore, we reconcile implementation intention theory with goal adjustment theory. We posit that the influence of board involvement in the succession process on the outcome of succession planning is dependent on the family CEO's emotions. The emotion of being unable to let go is the outcome of an approaching succession event and results in a resistance to retire because of poor goal disengagement capacities of the family CEO (Filser et al. 2013; Gagnè et al. 2011). According to goal adjustment theory, people have difficulties to reduce effort and psychological commitment from a goal they have to stop pursuing (Wrosch et al. 2003). So, it is rational to say that a family CEO who has been committed permanently to the family business would like to keep control of the business and has difficulties with letting go (Gagnè et al. 2011; Uhlaner et al. 2007). The family CEO's inability to let go reflects negative emotions (Lefebvre and Lefebvre 2016), e.g. feelings of fear and sadness, the fear of retiring and facing one's own mortality (Filser et al. 2013) and the sadness of losing status in the family and the firm (Angie et al. 2011). The prominence of these negative emotions may prevent the governance decisions with regard to succession planning to be effected according to plan (Brundin and Härtel 2014). Thus, bridging insights from the implementation intentions of governance mechanisms and goal adjustment theory, we argue that the family CEO's inability to let go reduces the impact of the board's decisive involvement in the succession process on the level of succession planning.

This article contributes to the family firm literature in four ways. First of all, the study advances behavioral research on FGP by formally investigating the proposed positive relationship between FGP and succession planning. A number of studies already used statistical approaches to investigate the relationship between aspects of business governance and succession planning including the presence of the board of directors (e.g. Blumentritt 2006). Yet, for research on FGP in relation to the succession context, the extant research is primarily anecdotal (Suess 2014). Second, by drawing on implementation intention theory, this study advances governance research by showing that both FGP and the BOD are important contributors to the succession planning process and in that

way also to the longevity of family businesses. In particular, we show that FGP document the shared vision of all family members on the succession process to the BOD whose formal task is to decide on the planning of this process. Third, we draw on goal adjustment theory to explain why in some family businesses the intentions and decisions of the BOD do not necessarily lead to the desired outcome, being a well-thought-out succession planning process, thereby providing an answer to the puzzling discrepancy between theoretical expectations and practical evidence. The study illuminates the often neglected influence of emotional obstacles borne by the family CEO on board outcomes pertaining to succession planning. Accordingly, this study advances succession literature and both implementation intention and goal adjustment theory by combining both theories into the succession planning context. Fourth, as we obtained a unique set of data, we were able to answer the call for more in-depth measures of succession planning, the role of the BOD (Blumentritt 2006), and FGP (Mustakallio et al. 2002; Arteaga and Menéndez-Requejo 2017).

## **2 Literature review and hypotheses development**

### **2.1 The succession planning process**

Prior family business studies gave considerable thought to leadership succession (Mathews and Blumentritt 2015). In this stream of research, anticipating succession and managing it as a planned process emerged as one of the key factors ensuring the continuity of family firms (Le Breton-Miller et al. 2004; Michel and Kammerlander 2015; Sharma et al. 2003). However, despite the evident contribution of succession planning, family firms often endlessly postpone it (Gilding et al. 2015). Accordingly, scholars explored which demographic (e.g. Marshall et al. 2006), attitudinal (e.g. Sharma et al. 2003), and environmental (e.g. Lussier and Sonfield 2012) factors prevent or stimulate succession planning. Whilst we acknowledge the contributions of these studies, it is the intersection between the family, the business, and key individuals that creates challenges for the succession process (Brun De Pontet et al. 2007). Hence, the focus of this study is the effect of *family governance, business governance, and emotions of a key individual – the family CEO* – on the level of succession planning in a family firm, which is an unexplored area in succession literature.

### **2.2 Family governance practices**

The uniqueness of family involvement in a family firm induces the view that business governance such as the BOD is only one part of the family firm's governance structure (Basco and Rodríguez 2009). That is, alongside the governance of the business, the governance of the family takes on a prominent role in family firms (Gnan et al. 2013; Berent-Braun and Uhlaner 2012). The group of voluntary practices that facilitate the relationships between the family and the business are called family governance practices (FGP) (Berent-Braun and Uhlaner 2012; Suess 2014).

Research on FGP is increasing (Siebels and zu Knyphausen-Aufseß 2012; Suess 2014) and in this growing field of research, researchers agree that FGP can take a leading facilitating role as succession support systems (Arteaga and Menéndez-Requejo 2017; Gnan et al. 2013). In order to capture the use of FGP, we distinguish between formal FGP such as the family council and the family charter (also referred to as family constitution, family plan, or family code of conduct (Michiels et al. 2014)), and informal FGP such as informal family meetings. A family council is a regular gathering of family members (Neubauer and Lank 1998) which serves as a platform for communication and sharing information (Brenes et al. 2011) where consensus around key issues

can be reached (Le Breton-Miller et al. 2004). A family charter is a normative agreement in which fundamental principles and guidelines are stated on which the relationship between the family and the business is based (Berent-Braun and Uhlaner 2012).

FGP can play an important role in the succession process for several reasons. First, in addition to the required abilities to run a firm, potential successors need to meet social criteria. If a potential successor has the right capabilities but has unresolved conflicts with influential family members, he or she may not be the best suitable candidate for the CEO position (Le Breton-Miller et al. 2004). Accordingly, FGP can assist the successor in developing the necessary competences and mastering the values and interests of the family (Berent-Braun and Uhlaner 2012; Suess 2014). Second, FGP create opportunities to meet and discuss which lead to increased interaction among family members. FGP thus stimulate the exchange of information in order to create trust and minimize manipulation by family members. In addition, FGP are important in handling family disputes and providing advice (Lansberg 1988; Le Breton-Miller et al. 2004). All this face-to-face communication is effective in reducing tension and conflicts among family members (Berent-Braun and Uhlaner 2012; Sundaramurthy 2008). Third, family members can discuss their working relationship in the family council or during informal meetings and family charters can include guidelines on family members' involvement in the business (Ibrahim et al. 2001; Arteaga and Menéndez-Requejo 2017). In that way, clear career expectations are set and anger and jealousy among family members will be reduced to a certain extent (Martin 2001). Last, FGP encourage the family to feel one with the business (Gersick and Feliu 2014; Berent-Braun and Uhlaner 2012). Family members are allowed to express their feelings and to communicate their points of view, which develops a common sense of stewardship. Altogether, FGP will increase family harmony and generate commitment from family members to protect the continuity of the business (Gnan et al. 2013; Suess 2014).

The family's commitment to protect the continuity of the business can be framed within implementation intention theory. This theory distinguishes between two types of intentions: goal intentions and implementation intentions (Wieber et al. 2012). Goal intentions relate to a desired outcome or behavior, e.g. "I want to attain outcome X" (Gollwitzer 1999). The strength of one's commitment to the goal determines the effort he or she will carry out to attain that goal (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010). The concept of goal intention is also applicable to groups, e.g. "We want to attain outcome X". That is, collective goal intentions disclose a desired outcome or behavior for the group (Locke and Latham 2006). Individuals acting as part of that group are expected to act toward the collective goal because they can identify with that group (Wieber et al. 2012; Tajfel and Turner 1986). FGP are composed of groups of individuals that are expected to commit deeply to the family firm (Miller and Le Breton-Miller 2005; Gomez-Mejia et al. 2007). They want to attain the goal of continuity, i.e. they want to ensure the sustainability of the family firm in the long run (Berrone et al. 2012). Thus, the collective goal intention for FGP is: "We want to attain family firm continuity". Next, FGP are expected to act toward the collective goal of continuity and to initiate the necessary actions which is rooted in the second intention: the implementation intention. According to implementation intention theory on the group level, groups will plan when, where, and how they will strive to attain their goal, e.g. "If we encounter situation Y, then we will perform goal-directed response Z" (Gollwitzer 1999; Wieber et al. 2012). That is, if FGP encounter the oncoming of a leadership succession, then they will initiate the planning of this leadership succession process (i.e. the

implementation intention) in order to reduce the discrepancy between the actual and the desired state (Wieber et al. 2012). This leads to our baseline hypothesis (H1):

*Hypothesis 1. The use of family governance practices is positively related to the level of succession planning in family firms.*

### **2.3 FGP and the board of directors**

The BOD is a key governance mechanism within the business system (Gnan et al. 2013). The primary functions of a BOD are management oversight, i.e. the exercise of control, and the provision of resources and advice (Mustakallio et al. 2002). One of the legal duties within the control role of the BOD is to take care of leadership succession (Gallo and Kenyon-Rouvinez 2005; Van den Heuvel et al. 2006). The performance of this task can also be framed within implementation intention theory (Wieber et al. 2012). A collective goal intention of the BOD is to attain family firm continuity and in order to pursue this goal, the BOD has the intention to implement succession planning activities (Lane 2006). The BOD has the ability to convince the family CEO of the advantages of a timely succession planning and board members may have the expertise and objectivity required during the succession planning process (Lansberg 1988; Blumentritt 2006; Poza and Daugherty 2014). This relationship between the BOD and succession planning has already been established in prior studies (e.g. Motwani et al. 2006; Blumentritt 2006). Nonetheless, these studies overlooked the unique governance structure of a family firm. In family firms, the family system shapes the decisions, practices and processes of the business system (Melin and Nordqvist 2007; Mustakallio et al. 2002). Applied to the succession context, this means that the miscellaneous views of family members concerning the succession topic are discussed in FGP. Then, when the family comes to consensus and shares a point of view, they communicate their position on that matter to the BOD in which the discussion can continue (Aronoff and Ward 2011). Indeed, it is the task of the board to translate the family policy into a firm policy. The board will benefit by hearing directly from family members about their values, goals, and expectations (Lansberg 1988). In that way, board members can ensure that their meetings cover matters of particular importance to the family for instance the timely preparation of the succession event in order to ensure the continuity of the firm (Gallo and Kenyon-Rouvinez 2005). Thus, through the alignment of the interests of family members and the creation of mutual trust, FGP can foster board monitoring and counseling activities (Mustakallio et al. 2002; Peterson and Distelberg 2011). Altogether, the rules of the game are defined by the family members in the FGP. Then, FGP are expected to report on these matters to the BOD and thereby influence the decisions the board will make with regard to leadership succession planning (Lansberg 1999; Gallo and Kenyon-Rouvinez 2005). This suggests a mediating relationship in which board involvement in the succession process mediates the relationship between the use of FGP and the level of succession planning. We therefore propose the following hypothesis (H2):

*Hypothesis 2. Board involvement in the succession process mediates the positive relationship between the use of family governance practices and the level of succession planning in family firms.*

### **2.4 Emotions: the family CEO's inability to let go**

Despite the existence of the implementation intention of succession planning activities of the BOD, the attainment of the goal of family firm continuity cannot be taken for granted as interruptions can occur (Wieber et al. 2012). Prior studies indicated that board processes can have varying effects on outcomes contingent upon the

family CEO's emotions (Zona 2016; Maglio et al. 2014). Emotions are an integral part of family firms because of the relatively vague boundaries between the family and the firm (Berrone et al. 2012; Brundin and Sharma 2011). Emotions are feelings that are the outcome of a stimulus event. These feelings result in behavioral output (Angie et al. 2011; Bee and Neubaum 2014; Shepherd 2016). In particular, when succession approaches (i.e. a stimulus event), emotions evolve and are likely to play a role in distracting the firm from attaining a successful succession process (i.e. behavioral output) (Shepherd 2016). Whilst it is well-acknowledged that emotions play a viable role in family firms, recent studies put forward the need to include specific emotions of key decision makers in research on family firms as this area remains largely unexplored (Brundin and Härtel 2014; Berrone et al. 2012; Filser et al. 2013).

One recurrent emotion in succession literature concerns the family CEO's inability to let go of his or her leadership role (Filser et al. 2013). This emotion is rooted in goal adjustment theory, more specific in goal disengagement. Goal disengagement involves the tendency to reduce effort and psychological commitment from a goal that a person has to stop pursuing (Wrosch et al. 2003). In this line of research, it became clear that some people have an easier time than others to disengage from goals that cannot longer be pursued. When a family CEO has poor goal disengagement capacities, it is more likely that he or she will resist the normative pressure to retire and would like to keep control over the business. This is expressed by the difficulties a family CEO may have with letting go of the family firm (Gagnè et al. 2011; Brun De Pontet et al. 2007). It is widely known that family CEOs are strongly attached to their firm (Brun De Pontet et al. 2007; Ibrahim et al. 2001). The extent to which an object that is owned, expected to be owned, or was previously owned by an individual is used by that individual to maintain his or her self-concept (i.e. possession attachment). The sense that an object is theirs (i.e. psychological ownership) is sufficient to be attached to an object (Pierce et al. 2001; Zellweger and Astrachan 2008). These feelings of psychological ownership and the active involvement of family CEOs in their family firm lead to a high emotional connection between the CEO and the firm (Zellweger and Astrachan 2008). These emotional ties between the CEO and the family business can translate into significant barriers for the CEO to leave daily operations (Zellweger and Astrachan 2008). That is, the decision to retire and hand over control to the next generation is difficult for many CEOs (De Massis et al. 2016; Gagnè et al. 2011), as they are unwilling to release previously acquired psychological possessions to which they are attached.

When the succession draws near and the BOD starts to make collective implementation intentions to plan the succession process, the family CEO is confronted with the idea of a life without a significant leadership role in the family firm (Sharma et al. 2001). He or she often fears retirement, worries about losing status in the family, and envisions his or her mortality (Kets de Vries 2003) thereby experiencing emotions of fear and sadness (Angie et al. 2011). These emotions can shape decision making and affect the broader firm dynamics in a family firm (Rafaeli 2013), especially sadness has emerged as one of the most influential emotions for decision making (Angie et al. 2011). As the family CEO's emotions permeate the family firm during the succession process (Baron 2008), it follows that the family CEO's emotion of being unable to let go is likely to affect the decision making process in the BOD (Barsade 2002; Daspit et al. 2015). Family CEOs are often in the position to defer decisions made by the BOD. Due to their status, family CEOs have the ability to jeopardize the succession planning process by stalling or hampering it (Lansberg 1988). Prior research assumes that this is the result of their amount of voting control in the firm (Miller and Le Breton-Miller 2006; Schulze et al. 2001). However, we



argue that the influence arises from the permeation of emotions in the family firm especially during the succession process (Baron 2008). So, whether the BOD succeeds in the performance of its succession tasks depends on the willingness of the family CEO to be receptive to the board's involvement in the succession process (Le Breton-Miller et al. 2004; Lansberg 1988). This willingness will be far off when the family CEO has poor goal disengagement capacities and thus a high inability to let go of his or her family firm.

In sum, although the family CEO agrees with the rational decision of the BOD to initiate the succession planning process, emotionally the family CEO can experience an inability to let go which makes it hard to take concrete measures in the succession planning process. That is, the actions undertaken by the BOD concerning succession planning may be undermined when the CEO refuses to slacken the reins. This leads to the following hypothesis (H3):

*Hypothesis 3. The family CEO's inability to let go negatively moderates the positive relationship between board involvement in the succession process and the level of succession planning in family firms in a way that the positive effect of board involvement in the succession process on the level of succession planning is reduced when the family CEO's feelings of being unable to let go increase.*

The research model is illustrated in figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE I HERE

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Sample**

The empirical data presented in this study are derived from a cross-sectional survey conducted in 2015. The survey explored general firm characteristics as well as succession and governance issues in Belgian family firms. Although the family firms in our sample are subject to Belgian legal requirements on governance structure, governance systems in other countries show similarities. The one-tier board structure, which is common in Belgium, in which a single board of directors may delegate duties to managers is also common in other Latin countries such as Belgium (e.g. France, Italy, Spain), Anglo-Saxon countries (e.g. the USA, the UK), and Japan. We classify a firm as a family firm when the firm is family-managed and they identify themselves as a family firm (Westhead and Cowling 1998) and/or when at least 50% of the shares are owned by a single family (Chua et al. 1999). The survey was mailed to CEOs of 4,100 small and medium-sized firms (i.e. number of employees lower than 250). We focus on SMEs as they make up for the largest part of the GNP in the Belgian economy (Vandorpe and Tchinda 2016). In addition, we only selected firms that exist at least 20 years since succession planning can be more relevant for older firms (Sharma et al. 2003). Next, in line with prior studies (e.g. Gagnè et al. 2011; Brun De Pontet et al. 2007), we only selected firms with a CEO older than 50 because the age of 50 is a key age in life at which CEOs start to think about their future (Neugarten 1996) and succession planning becomes much more relevant (Marshall et al. 2006; Strike 2012; Gagnè et al. 2011).

The firms are selected from a small and medium-sized business database by stratifying the population by size and applying random sampling within each stratum afterwards. In order to increase the response rate, the completeness of data, and their reliability, we assured confidentiality in a cover letter that accompanied the

survey. We sent reminders to nonresponding informants after one month. We tested for nonresponse bias on several firm characteristics of this study (e.g. firm size, CEO age, and number of directors). No significant mean differences were found for these variables. After the follow-up, a total of 590 completed questionnaires were received, i.e. a response rate of 14.4%. According to our family firm definition, 417 firms are classified as family firms managed by a family CEO. In addition, we deleted all firms with only one employee (45). After removing cases with missing values for one of the used variables and controlling for outliers, a final sample of 225 Belgian family firms remained.

Additional analyses show that common method variance is not a problem in our study. We applied a confirmatory factor analysis marker technique (Williams et al. 2010) with the *emotional attachment of family members* dimension of socioemotional wealth (Berrone et al. 2012) as marker variable. This variable measures how emotionally attached family members are to each other. The marker variable is only weakly correlated with our main variables and is expected to share potential common rater, common item method, and social desirability bias with them which made it a suitable marker variable candidate (Williams et al. 2010). Since the analysis showed a common factor value of 0.40 and thereby a common factor variance of 16%, the likelihood that our results are the result of common method bias is low.

### **3.2 Measurements**

#### **3.2.1 Dependent variable**

In line with Sharma et al. (2003), we measure the level of succession planning by focusing on the organizational level of analysis, arguing that succession planning does not solely mean a particular person was named the next CEO. However, it means that in addition to selecting and training the successor (example of an item in the scale of Sharma et al. (2003): *explicit succession criteria were developed for identifying the best successor*), succession planning activities take into account the post-succession business strategy (e.g. *we have an explicit plan for the business after the transfer of leadership to the business*), the post-succession role of the incumbent (e.g. *we have an unwritten understanding of my roles and responsibilities after the leadership is passed on to the successor*), and the communication of the succession decision to family members and employees (e.g. *the decision of who the successor will be is clearly communicated to family members active in the business*). Since there is no reason to assume that one of the four components is more important than another in this research context, we use the equally weighted arithmetic average of the 12 items covering the four components of succession planning. These items are measured on a five-point Likert scale, resulting in a value varying from 1 (low level of succession planning) to 5 (high level of succession planning).

#### **3.2.2 Independent variables**

In order to measure the use of FGP, i.e. how intensively FGP are used in the family firm, we make the distinction between the family council, the family charter, and informal family meetings. Building on the literature of FGP (Neubauer and Lank 1998; Aronoff and Ward 2011; Lievens 2004), respondents were asked to identify if the following nine topics which are related to the future and continuity of the firm are discussed or stipulated in each of the three FGP: ownership of the family firm, leadership of the family firm, how to solve family conflicts, how to maintain family harmony, careers in the family business, training of family members, succession, governance of the family and the business, and the role of non-family members in the firm. For each topic, a value '1' is

attributed when the topic is discussed in each specific FGP; '0' otherwise. The use of FGP is measured as the sum of these 0/1 values for the three FGP with a minimum of zero items discussed and a maximum of 27 items discussed which means that all items were discussed in all FGP (3 FGP \* 9 topics). Respondents who indicated that they had no form of FGP, received the minimum value of 0 for the variable measuring the use of FGP.

In order to measure board involvement in the succession process<sup>1</sup>, respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very low; 5 = very high performance) to what extent the BOD of their company fulfills the following two succession related tasks: 'Direct succession problems' (Van den Heuvel et al. 2006) and 'Planning leadership succession' (Lane 2006). The measure for board involvement in the succession process was calculated as the equally-weighted arithmetic average of the two items, resulting in a value varying from 1 (low level of board involvement in the succession process) to 5 (high level of board involvement in the succession process). Respondents who indicated that they have no working/active BOD received a value of 0 for the variable measuring board involvement in the succession process.

In order to measure the family CEO's inability to let go, we rephrased the five-point Likert scale proposed by Sharma et al. (2000) as we target family firms that are expected to have a succession in the near future: 'I do not want to let go of the leadership of the business' and 'I have the feeling that my presence in the company is necessary to keep the business running'. The construct for this variable was calculated as the equally-weighted arithmetic average of the two items, resulting in a value varying from 1 (low inability to let go) to 5 (high inability to let go).

### **3.2.3 Control variables**

In line with prior succession research, our analysis includes several firm and CEO characteristics that can influence the level of succession planning in a family firm. First, we control for firm size. In line with Huang (1999) and Motwani et al. (2006), who found a strong positive relationship between firm size and the adoption of a succession plan, we argue that the larger the firm is, the higher the level of succession planning will be. Firm size is measured as the natural logarithm of the number of employees. Second, we control for generation of management. In line with Sharma et al. (2003), we argue that generation is a more appropriate measure to use than firm age because generation more effectively captures differences in experience with the succession process. Since a more mature family firm, frequently a second or higher generation family firm, has already more experience with the succession planning process (Suare and Santana-Martin 2004), we argue that generation of management is positively related to the level of succession planning. Management generation is measured as a binary variable for which the value '0' stands for the first generation and the value '1' for second or higher generations in charge of management. Third, we control for the age of the CEO. When the incumbent enters the later stages of life, the perceived need for succession planning may be higher relative to when he or she is rather young. As the incumbent ages, and as ailments become more salient within his or her immediate surroundings, the idea of one's own mortality and the need to plan for one's replacement become more noticeable (Malone 1989; Lansberg 1988; Harveston et al. 1997).

---

<sup>1</sup> Six family firms indicate that they have a board of advisors but no board of directors. As there is no clear content-wise difference between the role of a board of directors and the role of a board of advisors in Belgian family firms, these firms are included in the sample.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics and validation of scales

Descriptive statistics are summarized in Table I. The average family firm in our sample has 28 employees and a 61-year old CEO. The mean level of succession planning is 2.36, and the mean level of board involvement in the succession process is 2.18. 39.1% of the firms in our sample have at least one form of FGP. In 8.9% and 9.4% of the responding firms, a family council respectively a family charter is present. 31.6% of the family firms indicate that they use informal family meetings. For those firms that have at least one form of FGP, the mean value for the use of FGP is 6.99. Table I shows that the mean value for the use of FGP for the entire sample is 2.73. The mean value of the family CEO's inability to let go is 3.12. 60% of the firms in our sample are managed by a second or higher generation of the family.

INSERT TABLE I HERE

Table II presents pairwise correlations. The correlation table displays a significant positive correlation between the level of succession planning and both the use of FGP and board involvement in the succession process. The use of FGP shows a significant positive correlation with board involvement in the succession process. The family CEO's inability to let go is negatively correlated to the level of succession planning. There are no significant correlations between the family CEO's inability to let go and both governance mechanisms. Based on the correlation values in Table II and the computed VIF which are lower than a threshold of 10 (the highest value of VIF is 1.21) (Mansfield and Helms 1982), we conclude that multicollinearity is not a problem in our study.

INSERT TABLE II HERE

Next, Cronbach Alphas for the scales of the level of succession planning, board involvement in the succession process, and the family CEO's inability to let go are 0.97, 0.94, and 0.71 respectively. Since all Cronbach Alphas exceed the threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally 1978), the internal consistency and reliability of these measures are confirmed. Confirmatory factor analyses on the items of the level of succession planning support the choice to integrate the four discrete components into one variable. Exploratory factor analysis on the two items that measure board involvement in the succession process ('planning leadership succession' and 'direct succession problems') shows that communalities are higher than 0.836. One factor is extracted which explains 83.64% of the variance. For the family CEO's inability to let go factor analyses confirm the validity of this construct. Further, as the use of FGP is measured by a sum scale, the measurement is more reliable when more items are integrated in the scale. Cronbach Alpha for the use of FGP is 0.91 which confirms the internal reliability of this scale (Nunnally 1978).

### 4.2 Regression results

We test the hypotheses by means of a conditional process model (Hayes 2013) containing a mediation process (use of FGP → board involvement in the succession process → level of succession planning) combined with a moderation process, being the moderation of the relation between board involvement in the succession process and the level of succession planning by the family CEO's inability to let go (cf. Figure I). Before testing the moderated mediation model, we test the simple mediation model (i.e. hypotheses 1 and 2). Table III presents the regression results of the simple mediation model. For this model, we used the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes

2013). We use bias-corrected bootstrapping to test for statistically significant mediation effects. In that way, power problems that result from asymmetric and other non-normal sampling distributions of an indirect effect are avoided. This macro can also explore the significance of conditional indirect effects at different values of the moderator variable (Hayes 2013), which we use to test hypothesis 3.

Model 2 in Table III displays the direct effect of the use of FGP on the level of succession planning. Since the direct effect is positive and statistically significant (effect = 0.068,  $p < 0.01$ ), hypothesis 1 is confirmed. Model 1 in Table III indicates that the use of FGP has a positive, significant effect on board involvement in the succession process (coefficient = 0.068,  $p < 0.05$ ). In model 2, the coefficient of board involvement in the succession process estimates the effect of this involvement on the level of succession planning for equal values of the use of FGP. This effect is positive and statistically different from zero (coefficient = 0.125,  $p < 0.01$ ). The indirect effect of the use of FGP (effect = 0.0085,  $p = 0.076$ ) on the level of succession planning through board involvement in the succession process is confirmed by the bootstrap results in Table III part B, as the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval around the indirect effect does not contain zero. Hence, hypothesis 2 is confirmed.

INSERT TABLE III HERE

Table IV shows the moderated mediation model. The effect of board involvement in the succession process on the level of succession planning is indeed contingent on the family CEO's inability to let go, as evidenced by the statistically significant interaction between board involvement and the family CEO's inability to let go in model 4 (coefficient = -0.072,  $p < 0.05$ ). Hence, hypothesis 3 is confirmed<sup>2</sup>. Further, in Table V we examine the conditional indirect effect of the use of FGP on the level of succession planning through board involvement in the succession process at three values of the family CEO's inability to let go: the mean value and one standard deviation above and below the mean. Table V indicates that for both the mean value and one standard deviation below the mean value, the confidence interval does not contain zero. This means that a significant conditional indirect effect was found for those values of the family CEO's inability to let go. On the contrary, for the highest values of the family CEO's inability to let go, the conditional indirect effect is not significant. The positive, conditional indirect effect of the use of FGP on the level of succession planning through board involvement in the succession process thus declines when the value of the family CEO's inability to let go increases.

INSERT TABLE IV HERE

INSERT TABLE V HERE

In order to complete the analysis, we use the Johnson-Neyman technique (Hayes 2013) to explore the range of values of the family CEO's inability to let go for which the marginal effect of board involvement in the succession process on the level of succession planning is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Figure II graphically shows this marginal effect (solid line) as well as the upper and lower 95% confidence interval (dotted lines). When both the upper and the lower bound of the confidence interval are above or below the zero line, the

---

<sup>2</sup> As a robustness check, we re-performed the analysis with each of the four succession planning components alternately as a dependent variable. Results are the same except for the post-succession role of the departing incumbent for which the mediating effect was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.11$ ).

marginal effect is significant. Figure II shows that board involvement in the succession process has a positive significant effect on succession planning up till the family CEO's inability to let go takes on values above 3.57. This means that for 69.8% of the total sample the marginal effect is statistically significant. Furthermore, the positive effect declines when the values for the family CEO's inability to let go become higher, which is in line with our hypothesis. That is, the positive relation between board involvement in the succession process and the level of succession planning weakens when the family CEO's inability to let go grows.

INSERT FIGURE II HERE

Firm size, generation in charge of managing the firm, and CEO age were used as control variables in this study. Our results indicate that generation and CEO age have a positive, significant influence on the level of succession planning. These results are in line with expectations.

We also performed several additional analyses to confirm the robustness of our results. First, we controlled for CEO power in the moderated mediation model to exclude the interpretation that the family CEO's ability to hamper the decision by the board of directors with regard to the succession planning process results from the family CEO's amount of voting control. We used the % of shares the CEO holds to measure CEO power, namely CEO power equals '1' when the CEO holds 100% of the shares and '0' otherwise and alternately CEO power equals '1' when the CEO holds 50% of the shares and '0' otherwise (Daily & Johnson, 1997; Finkelstein, 1992). According to our results (not reported), ownership power does not influence the level of succession planning. Second, we replaced our control variable generation in charge of management by several dummy variables: *Gen dummy 1* equals '1' when the first generation is in charge of management and '0' otherwise (i.e. the left-out category in our analysis), *gen dummy 2* equals '1' when the second generation is in charge of management and '0' otherwise, and *gen dummy 3* equals '1' when the third or a higher generation is in charge of management and '0' otherwise. As shown in Tables VI and VII, results are similar to the original results. Third, we performed an additional test with firm size split up into dummy variables based on the staff headcount definition of the EU recommendation 2003/361. *Firm size dummy micro* takes on the value of '1' for micro-sized firms (number of employees < 10) and '0' otherwise (i.e. the left-out category in our analysis), *firm size dummy small* takes on the value of '1' for small firms (number of employees  $\geq 10$  and < 50) and '0' otherwise, and *firm size dummy medium* takes on the value of '1' for medium-sized firms (number of employees  $\geq 50$  and < 250) and '0' otherwise. As shown in Tables VIII and IX, results are comparable to the original results. Last, we controlled for industry effects. Again, results (not reported) are similar to the original results for all hypotheses.

## 5 Discussion and conclusions

### 5.1 Theoretical implications

In this study, we examine whether the use of FGP affects the level of succession planning directly and indirectly through board involvement in the succession process. In addition, we investigate how the family CEO's inability to let go influences the relationship between board involvement in the succession process and the level of succession planning.

Our findings make several contributions to succession research on family firms. First, our results empirically show that using FGP will stimulate succession planning in family firms. Prior studies indicate that FGP perform

several important duties such as maintaining trust, encouraging commitment of family members, and tempering conflicts (Uhlaner et al. 2007; Suess-Reyes 2017; Arteaga and Menéndez-Requejo 2017). Our study complements prior literature by providing evidence for the role of FGP to facilitate succession planning. In this respect, FGP are also a supporting factor to ensure the long-term success of the family firm. In addition, we contribute by building on implementation intention theory to support the proposed relationship between FGP and succession planning activities. In turn, our results add to this theory by showing that in family firms governance practices that pursue the goal intention to guarantee the continuity of the family firm implement their intention by performing succession planning activities.

Second, our study adds to succession and governance literature by showing that both FGP and the BOD are important contributors to the succession planning process. More, our results empirically show that FGP have the ability to influence decisions made by the BOD in a family firm. That is, in addition to the direct effect of the use of FGP on the level of succession planning, our results provide evidence for an indirect effect through board involvement in the succession process. When succession issues are discussed in the family council or during family meetings or written in the family charter, the family can communicate any recommendations to the BOD which in turn can make decisions with regard to the planning of the leadership succession (Lane 2006; Gallo and Kenyon-Rouvinez 2005). FGP thus play a crucial role in reaching family unity with regard to important business topics such as the planning of the succession. Afterwards, family members' opinions and visions will be documented to and approved by the BOD.

Third, by drawing on goal adjustment theory, this study contributes to succession and governance literature by combining emotions and governance practices in the succession planning context. Emotions (Shepherd 2016) and governance mechanisms (Aronoff and Ward 2011) are two important fields in family business research, yet substantial gaps exist in our understanding of emotions and their influence on broader firm dynamics in family firms (Brundin and Härtel 2014; Shepherd 2016; Zona 2016). In the succession planning context, which is an emotionally loaded context (Sharma et al. 2001), it is vital to include the family CEO's emotions. These emotions can influence decision making in the family firm (Berrone et al. 2012; Baron 2008; Rafaeli 2013) and thereby also the outcome of board decisions (Zona 2016). Our results indeed show that although the use of governance mechanisms increases the level of succession planning, the family CEO's inability to let go weakens this positive effect to a certain extent. So, the higher the family CEO's inability to let go, the lower is the positive effect of the board's role on the level of succession planning. As follows, the indirect effect of the use of FGP on the level of succession planning is weakened as well. Our findings thus clarify that there is an important interplay between the family CEO's emotions and governance mechanisms in the succession planning context. Further, these findings contribute to existing literature on goal adjustment theory by showing that poor goal disengagement capacities of the family CEO may affect governance outcomes with regard to the succession planning process in family firms.

The last contribution lies within the measurement of the variables in this study. Although prior studies already put forward the relationship between the BOD and succession planning (Poza and Daugherty 2014; Motwani et al. 2006), we contribute to this research stream by measuring this relationship in depth. We measure a behavioral component of board involvement in the succession process instead of merely looking at board demography and we define succession planning as the sum of four components and not just as the identification of a successor. In

addition, we advance literature on FGP by developing a sum scale to measure the use of FGP based on the expected stipulations in the family charter and discussions during the family council and informal family meetings.

## **5.2 Practical implications**

Two major practical implications arise from our findings. First, family firms should be encouraged to establish and use FGP, as these practices may reduce potential conflicts within the succession process and create a shared vision as input for the BOD. Many family firms in our sample did not install formal FGP (the family council and the family charter) so it is important to sensitize the use of FGP as these practices are the first step in contributing to the succession planning process. In addition, family firm owners and/or managers need to be aware that a good functioning BOD (or board of advisors) is key in a family firm. The board can assist in planning the succession and if necessary, convince different stakeholders of the need of this planning activity.

Second, as our results show that emotions can limit the benefits of governance mechanisms in the succession planning context, CEOs need to be aware of the influence of their emotions on decision making concerning the succession planning process. The emotions of the crucial player within the succession planning process – the incumbent CEO – shed light on why in some family firms governance structures are able to successfully assist in the succession planning process, while in others they are not. The CEO has to acknowledge that being in a fearful or sad state may negatively affect or postpone the implementation of decisions made in governance mechanisms concerning succession planning. Family business advisors can provide the necessary assistance during the succession process (Michel and Kammerlander 2015). They can support the CEO in this difficult process by making him or her aware that it is in the firm's best interests to plan the succession process, as the lack of a timely and adequate succession planning process will ultimately lead to discontinuation of the family firm. So, although family CEOs are psychologically tied to the firm, family business advisors should make them realize that they have to let go of the firm in order to allow governance mechanisms to fulfill their duties in the succession process.

## **5.3 Limitations and future research**

This study has some limitations. Nevertheless, these limitations provide interesting avenues for future research. First, our results are based on a sample of private Belgian family firms. Therefore, the family firms in our sample are subject to Belgian legal requirements on governance structures. Although the one-tier board structure which is common in Belgium is representative for continental European countries in the Latin country class (Weimer and Pape 1999), future research could explore whether our findings can be generalized to other countries to strengthen the validity of our results. Next, only one internal informant (namely the CEO) completed our survey. Although for the purpose of this study the CEO was the sole suitable respondent (emotions), future research may include the view of other stakeholders with regard to the succession planning process through the medium of a combined method of in-depth case studies, surveys, and/or multiple face-to-face interviews. Last, since our results are based on cross-sectional data, claims about causality cannot be substantiated. Longitudinal data can provide additional insights and help solidify causal directions.

We focused on two important fields in family business literature, i.e. governance mechanisms and emotions. However, other characteristics on different research levels (individual, organizational, environmental) can



influence the decision of family firms to engage in succession planning activities. For example, it might be interesting to empirically research the role of trusted advisors in the succession planning process, as proposed by Michel and Kammerlander (2015). In addition, the family CEO may have several other reasons to be reluctant to retire from the family business and hinder the succession planning process alongside his or her emotions of being unable to let go. For instance, it is possible that the family CEO is reluctant to retire because he or she believes that transferring the business to the next generation may result in a decline in family income which is a more rational economic decision than an emotional one.

Future research should further investigate the role of emotions within family firm processes as emotions are an integral part of family firms. A possible direction is to investigate the evolution of emotions during the succession process as well as its determinants. The evolution of emotions can depend on several factors, for instance the quality of the relationship between the family CEO and the potential successor, the dedication of the successor, the acceptance of the succession decision by management and so on. In this regard, the use of qualitative methods can prove valuable.

Last, since we define a firm as a family firm when the firm identifies herself as a family firm and/or when at least 50% of shares are owned by a single family, future research should investigate whether the effect of emotions in the succession planning process is different for certain types of family firms for instance family firms with higher or lower family involvement. Also, we focused on intrafamily leadership succession in this study. However, not all successions are intrafamily ones. Future research should therefore investigate the succession dynamics and the role that emotions play in other succession setting such as when a nonfamily CEO has to be replaced.

## References

- Angie, A. D., Connelly, S., Waples, E. P., & Klygite, V. (2011). The influence of discrete emotions on judgement and decision-making: A meta-analytic review. *Cognition and emotion*, 25(8), 1393-1422, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2010.550751>.
- Aronoff, C. E., & Ward, J. L. (2011). *Family business governance: Maximizing family and business potential*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Arteaga, R., & Menéndez-Requejo, S. (2017). Family constitution and business performance: Moderating factors. *Family Business Review*, 1-19, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486517732438>.
- Baron, R. A. (2008). The role of affect in the entrepreneurial process. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(2), 328-340.
- Barsade, S. G. (2002). The ripple effect: Emotional contagion and its influence on group behavior. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47(4), 644-675, doi:<https://doi.org/10.2307/3094912>.
- Basco, R., & Rodríguez, M. J. P. (2009). Studying the family enterprise holistically: Evidence for integrated family and business systems. *Family Business Review*, 22, 82-95, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486508327824>.
- Bee, C., & Neubaum, D. O. (2014). The role of cognitive appraisal and emotions of family members in the family business system. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 5(3), 323-333, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfbs.2013.12.001>.
- Berent-Braun, M., & Uhlaner, L. (2012). Family governance practices and teambuilding: Paradox of the enterprising family. *Small Business Economics*, 38(1), 103-119, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-010-9269-4>.
- Berrone, P., Cruz, C., & Gomez-Mejia, L. R. (2012). Socioemotional wealth in family firms: Theoretical dimensions, assessment approaches, and agenda for future research. *Family Business Review*, 25(3), 258-279, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486511435355>.
- Blumentritt, T. (2006). The relationship between boards and planning in family businesses. *Family Business Review*, 19(1), 65-72, doi:10.1111/j.1741-6248.2006.00062.x.
- Brenes, E. R., Madrigal, K., & Requena, B. (2011). Corporate governance and family business performance. *Journal of Business Research*, 64(3), 280-285, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.11.013>.
- Brun De Pontet, S., Wrosch, C., & Gagne, M. (2007). An exploration of the generational differences in levels of control held among family businesses approaching succession. *Family Business Review*, 20(4), 337-354, doi:10.1111/j.1741-6248.2007.00103.x.
- Brundin, E., & Härtel, C. E. J. (2014). Emotions in family firms. In L. Melin, M. Nordqvist, & P. Sharma (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of family business* (pp. 529-548). London: Sage.
- Brundin, E., & Sharma, P. (2011). Love, hate and desire: the role of emotional messiness in the business family. In A. Carsrud, & M. Brannback (Eds.), *International perspectives on future research in family business: Neglected topics and under-utilized theories* (pp. 55-71). New York: Springer.
- Chua, J. H., Chrisman, J. J., & Sharma, P. (1999). Defining the family business by behaviour. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 32(4), 935-947, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/104225879902300402>.
- Daspit, J. J., Holt, D. T., Chrisman, J. J., & Long, R. G. (2015). Examining family firm succession from a social exchange perspective: A multiphase, multistakeholder review. *Family Business Review*, 29(1), 44-64, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486515599688>.
- De Massis, A., Sieger, P., Chua, J. H., & Vismara, S. (2016). Incumbents' attitude toward intra-family succession: An investigation of its antecedents. *Family Business Review*, 29(3), 278-300, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486516656276>.
- Eddleston, K. A., & Powell, G. N. (2008). The role of gender identity in explaining sex differences in business owners' career satisfier preferences. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 23(2), 244-256, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2006.11.002>.
- Filser, M., Kraus, S., & Märk, S. (2013). Psychological aspects of succession in family business management. *Management Research Review*, 36(3), 256-277, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/01409171311306409>.
- Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (2010). *Predicting and changing behavior: The reasoned action approach*. New York: Psychology Press.

- Gagnè, M., Wrosch, C., & Brun De Pontet, S. (2011). Retiring from the family business: The role of goal adjustment capacities. *Family Business Review*, 24(4), 292-304, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486511410688>.
- Gallo, M., & Kenyon-Rouvinez, D. (2005). The importance of family and business governance. In D. Kenyon-Rouvinez, & J. L. Ward (Eds.), *Family business. Key issues* (pp. 45-57). Basingstoke: Palgrave/macmillan.
- Gersick, K. E., & Feliu, N. (2014). Governing the family enterprise: Practices, performance and research. In L. Melin, M. Nordqvist, & P. Sharma (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of family business* (pp. 196-225). London: Sage.
- Gilding, M., Gregory, S., & Cosson, B. (2015). Motives and outcomes in family business succession planning. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 39(2), 299-312, doi:10.1111/etap.12040.
- Gnan, L., Montemerlo, D., & Huse, M. (2013). Governance systems in family SMEs: The substitution effects between family councils and corporate governance mechanisms. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 53(2), 355-381, doi:10.1111/jsbm.12070.
- Gollwitzer, P. M. (1999). Implementation intentions: Strong effects of simple plans. *American Psychologist*, 54, 493-503.
- Gomez-Mejia, L. R., Takacs-Haynes, K., Nunez-Nickel, M., Jacobson, K. J. L., & Moyano-Fuentes, J. (2007). Socioemotional wealth and business risks in family-controlled firms: Evidence from Spanish olive oil mills. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 52(1), 106-137, doi:<https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.52.1.106>.
- Harveston, P., Davis, P., & Lyden, J. (1997). Succession planning in family business: The impact of owner gender. *Family Business Review*, 10(4), 373-396, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.1997.00373.x>.
- Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Holt, R., & Popp, A. (2013). Emotion, succession, and the family firm: Josiah Wedgwood & Sons. *Business History*, 55(6), 892-909, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2012.744588>.
- Huang, T. (1999). Who shall follow? Factors affecting the adoption of succession plans in Taiwan. *Long Range Planning*, 32(6), 609-616, doi:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0024-6301\(99\)00077-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0024-6301(99)00077-1).
- Ibrahim, A. B., Soufani, K., & Lam, J. (2001). A study of succession in a family firm. *Family Business Review*, 14(3), 245-258, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.2001.00245.x>.
- Kets de Vries, M. (2003). The retirement syndrome: The psychology of letting go. *European Management Journal*, 21(6), 707-716, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2003.09.009>.
- Lane, S. (2006). Guidelines for family business boards of directors. *Family Business Review*, 19(2), 147-167, doi:[tps://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.2006.00052.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.2006.00052.x).
- Lansberg, I. (1988). The succession conspiracy. *Family Business Review*, 1(2), 119-143, doi:10.1111/j.1741-6248.1988.00119.x.
- Lansberg, I. (1999). *Succeeding generations: Realizing the dream of families in business*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Le Breton-Miller, I., Miller, D., & Steier, L. P. (2004). Toward an integrative model of effective FOB succession. *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*, 28(4), 305-328, doi:10.1111/j.1540-6520.2004.00047.x.
- Lefebvre, M. R., & Lefebvre, V. (2016). Anticipating intergenerational management transfer of family firms: A typology of next generation's future leadership. *Futures*, 75, 66-82, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2015.10.010>.
- Lievens, J. (2004). *Governance in het familiebedrijf*. Tielt, Belgium: Lannoo nv.
- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2006). New directions in goal-setting theory. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 15, 265-268, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2006.00449.x>.
- Lussier, R. N., & Sonfield, M. C. (2012). Family businesses' succession planning: A seven-country comparison. *Journal of Small Business & Enterprise Development*, 19(1), 7-19, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/14626001211196370>.
- Maglio, S. J., Gollwitzer, P. M., & Oettingen, G. (2014). Emotion and control in the planning of goals. *Motivation and Emotion*, 38, 620-634, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-014-9407-4>.

- Malone, S. C. (1989). Selected correlates of business continuity planning in the family business. *Family Business Review*, 2(4), 341-353, doi:10.1111/j.1741-6248.1989.tb00003.x.
- Mansfield, E. R., & Helms, B. P. (1982). Detecting multicollinearity. *American Statistician*, 36(3), 158-160, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00031305.1982.10482818>.
- Marshall, J. P., Sorenson, R., Brigham, K., Wieling, E., Reifman, A., & Wampler, R. S. (2006). The paradox for the family firm CEO: Owner age relationship to succession-related processes and plans. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 21(3), 348-368, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2005.06.004>.
- Martin, H. F. (2001). Is family governance an oxymoron? *Family Business Review*, 14(2), 91-96, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.2001.00091.x>.
- Mathews, T., & Blumentritt, T. (2015). A sequential choice model of family business succession. *Small Business Economics*, 45, 15-37, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-015-9628-2>.
- Melin, L., & Nordqvist, M. (2007). The reflexive dynamics of institutionalization: the case of the family business. *Strategic Organization*, 5(3), 321-333, doi: 10.1177/1476127007079959.
- Michel, A., & Kammerlander, N. (2015). Trusted advisors in a family business's succession-planning process — An agency perspective. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 6(1), 45-57, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfbs.2014.10.005>.
- Michiels, A., Voordeckers, W., Lybaert, N., & Steijvers, T. (2014). Dividends and family governance practices in private family firms. *Small Business Economics*, 44(2), 299-314, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-014-9594-0>.
- Miller, D., & Le Breton-Miller, I. (2005). *Managing for the long run: Lessons in competitive advantage from great family businesses*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Miller, D., & Le Breton-Miller, I. (2006). Family governance and firm performance: Agency, stewardship, and capabilities. *Family Business Review*, 19, 73-87, doi:10.1111/j.1741-6248.2006.00063.x.
- Motwani, J., Levenburg, N. M., Schwarz, T. V., & Blankson, C. (2006). Succession planning in SMEs: An empirical analysis. *International Small Business Journal*, 24(5), 471-495, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/02662426060607270>.
- Mustakallio, M., Autio, E., & Zahra, S. A. (2002). Relational and contractual governance in family firms: Effects on strategic decision making. *Family Business Review*, 15(3), 205-222, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.2002.00205.x>.
- Neubauer, F., & Lank, A. G. (1998). *The family business: Its governance for sustainability*. London: Routledge.
- Neugarten, B. L. (1996). *The meanings of age*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Nunnally, J. C. (1978). *Psychometric theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Payne, G. T., Benson, G. S., & Finegold, D. L. (2009). Corporate board attributes, team effectiveness and financial performance. *Journal of Management Studies*, 46(4), 704-731, doi:10.1111/j.1467-6486.2008.00819.x.
- Peterson, P., & Distelberg, B. J. (2011). Differentiating value orientations and unity in values as predictors of varying family business system processes. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 2(4), 207-219, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfbs.2011.10.004>.
- Pierce, J. L., Kostova, T., & Dirks, K. T. (2001). Toward a theory of psychological ownership in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 26(2), 298-310, doi:10.5465/AMR.2001.4378028.
- Poza, E. J., & Daugherty, M. S. (2014). *Family business*. Mason, Ohio: South-Western.
- Rafaeli, A. (2013). Emotion in organizations: Considerations for family firms. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, 3(3), 295-299, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1515/erj-2013-0061>.
- Schulze, W. S., Lubatkin, M. H., Dino, R. U. N., & Bucholtz, A. K. (2001). Agency relationships in family firms: Theory and evidence. *Organizational Science*, 12(2), 99-116, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.12.2.99.10114>.
- Sharma, P., Chrisman, J. J., & Chua, J. H. (2003). Succession planning as planned behavior: Some empirical results. *Family Business Review*, 16(1), 1-15, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.2003.00001.x>.
- Sharma, P., Chrisman, J. J., Pablo, A. L., & Chua, J. H. (2001). Determinants of initial satisfaction with the succession process in family firms: A conceptual model. *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*, 25(3), 17-35, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/104225870102500302>.

- Sharma, P., Chua, J. H., & Chrisman, J. J. (2000). Perceptions about the extent of succession planning in Canadian family firms. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 17(3), 233-244, doi:10.1111/j.1936-4490.2000.tb00223.x.
- Shepherd, D. A. (2016). An emotions perspective for advancing the fields of family business and entrepreneurship: Stocks, flows, reactions, and responses. *Family Business Review*, 29(2), 1-8, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486516634943>.
- Siebels, J.-F., & zu Knyphausen-Aufseß, D. (2012). A review of theory in family business research: The implications for corporate governance. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 14(3), 280-304, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00317.x.
- Strike, V. M. (2012). Advising the family firm: Reviewing the past to build the future. *Family Business Review*, 25(2), 156-177, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486511431257>.
- Suare, K. C., & Santana-Martin, D. J. (2004). Governance in Spanish family business. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, 10(1), 141-163, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/13552550410521425>.
- Suess-Reyes, J. (2017). Understanding the transgenerational orientation of family businesses: The role of family governance and business family identity. *Journal of Business Economics*, 87, 749-777, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11573-016-0835-3>.
- Suess, J. (2014). Family governance – Literature review and the development of a conceptual model. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 5(2), 138-155, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfbs.2014.02.001>.
- Sundaramurthy, C. (2008). Sustaining trust within family businesses. *Family Business Review*, 21(1), 89-102, doi:10.1111/j.1741-6248.2007.00110.x.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel, & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (Vol. 1, pp. 7-24). Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall.
- Uhlener, L., Floren, R. H., & Geerlings, J. R. (2007). Owner commitment and relational governance in the privately-held firm: An empirical study. *Small Business Economics*, 29, 275-293, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-006-9009-y>.
- Van den Heuvel, J., Van Gils, A., & Voordeckers, W. (2006). Board roles in small and medium-sized family businesses: Performance and importance. *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, 14(5), 467-485, doi:10.1111/j.1467-8683.2006.00519.x.
- Vandorpe, G., & Tchinda, C. (2016). Het KMO-Rapport: De financieel-economische gezondheid van de Vlaamse, Brusselse en Waalse KMO in beeld. UNIZO - Graydon Belgium - UCM.
- Venter, E., Boshoff, C., & Maas, G. (2005). The influence of successor-related factors on the succession process in small and medium-sized family businesses. *Family Business Review*, 18(4), 283-303, doi:10.1111/j.1741-6248.2005.00049.x.
- Weimer, J., & Pape, J. C. (1999). A taxonomy of systems of corporate governance. *Corporate Governance*, 7(2), 152-166, doi:10.1111/1467-8683.00143.
- Westhead, P., & Cowling, M. (1998). Family firm research: The need for a methodological rethink. *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*, 23(1), 31-56, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/104225879802300102>.
- Wieber, F., Thürmer, J. L., & Gollwitzer, P. M. (2012). Collective action control by goals and plans: Applying a self-regulation perspective to group performance. *American Journal of Psychology*, 125(3), 275-290, doi:10.5406/amerjpsyc.125.3.0275.
- Williams, L. J., Hartman, N., & Cavazotte, F. (2010). Method variance and marker variables: A review and comprehensive CFA marker technique. *Organizational Research Methods*, 13(3), 477-514, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428110366036>.
- Wrosch, C., Scheier, M. F., Miller, G. E., Schulz, R., & Carver, C. S. (2003). Adaptive self-regulation of unattainable goals: Goal disengagement, goal reengagement, and subjective well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 1494-1508, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167203256921>.
- Zattoni, A., Gnan, L., & Huse, M. (2015). Does family involvement influence firm performance? Exploring the mediating effects of board processes and tasks. *Journal of Management*, 41(4), 1214-1243, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312463936>.
- Zellweger, T. M., & Astrachan, J. H. (2008). On the emotional value of owning a firm. *Family Business Review*, 21(3), 347-363, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/08944865080210040106>.

Zona, F. (2016). CEO leadership and board decision processes in family-controlled firms: Comparing family and non-family CEOs. *Small Business Economics*, 47, 735-753, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-016-9764-3>.

Figure 1: Research model

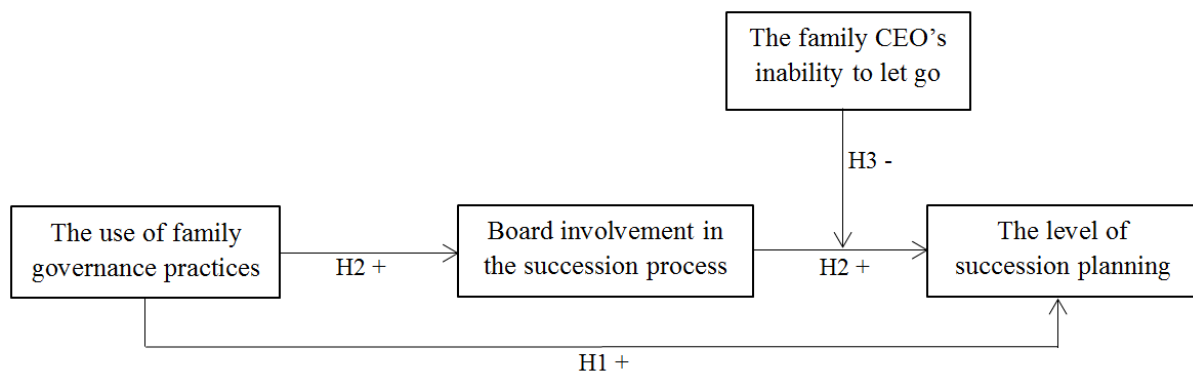
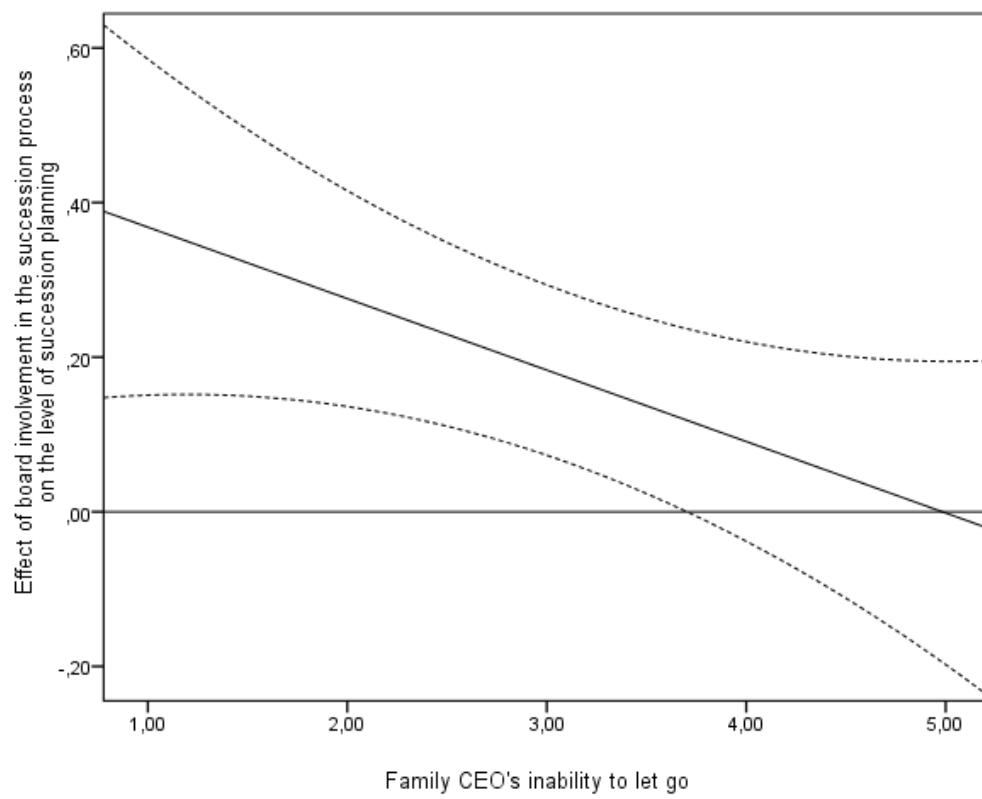


Figure II: Marginal effect of board involvement in the succession process on the level of succession planning as the family CEO's inability to let go changes





*Table I: Descriptive statistics*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Level of succession planning	1	5	2.36	1.35
Use of FGP	0	21 <sup>a</sup>	2.73	4.31
Board involvement in the succession process	0	5	2.18	1.81
Family CEO's inability to let go	1	5	3.12	1.14
Number of employees (firm size) <sup>b</sup>	2	200	28.43	40.16
Management generation	0	1	0.60	0.49
CEO age	50	74	60.54	4.44

*N* = 225

<sup>a</sup>The maximum possible value for the use of FGP is 27 which means that all items are discussed in all FGP.

<sup>b</sup>In the regression model we used the natural logarithm of the number of employees.

Table II: Pairwise correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Level of succession planning	1						
2 Use of FGP	0.360***	1					
3 Board involvement in the succession process	0.282***	0.214***	1				
4 Family CEO's inability to let go	-0.189***	-0.097	-0.003	1			
5 Firm size	0.223***	0.254***	0.254***	-0.080	1		
6 Management generation	0.370***	0.251***	0.016	-0.116*	0.220***	1	
7 CEO age	0.308***	0.063	0.157**	0.019	-0.119*	0.108	1

$N = 225$

\*, \*\*, \*\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.1 level, 0.05 level, 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table III: Regression results for the simple mediation model of the use of FGP on the level of succession planning through board involvement in the succession process

<b>Part A</b>		Model 1			Model 2		
Dependent variable		<b>Board involvement in the succession process</b>			<b>Level of succession planning</b>		
		Coefficient	SE	t	Coefficient	SE	t
<b>Use of FGP</b>		0.068	0.028	2.432**	0.068	0.019	3.630***
<b>Board involvement in the succession process</b>					0.125	0.045	2.808***
<b>Firm size</b>		0.387	0.100	3.856***	0.109	0.069	1.595
<b>Management generation</b>		-0.376	0.244	-1.539	0.728	0.163	4.472***
<b>CEO age</b>		0.077	0.026	2.936***	0.076	0.018	4.334***
<b>Constant</b>		-3.424	1.623	-2.110	-3.446	1.086	-3.175***
		R <sup>2</sup> = 0.128			R <sup>2</sup> = 0.322		
		F = 8.085, p < 0.01			F = 20.770, p < 0.01		

**Part B:** Total, direct, and indirect effects

<b>Effect of use of FGP on level of succession planning</b>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
<i>Total</i>	0.0765	0.0188	4.0750***	0.0395	0.1135
<i>Direct</i>	0.0680	0.0187	3.6295***	0.0311	0.1049
	<i>Effect</i>	<i>Boot SE</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>BootLLCI</i>	<i>BootULCI</i>
<i>Indirect</i>	0.0085	0.0051	1.7748*	0.0006	0.0203

N = 225

\*  $p < .10$ . \*\*  $p < 0.05$ . \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . (two-tailed)

LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit, CI = confidence interval (95%)

Bootstrap sample size = 10000

Table IV: Regression results for the moderated mediation model of the use of FGP on the level of succession planning through board involvement in the succession process with the family CEO's inability to let go as a moderator

Dependent variable	Model 3 (cf. model 1)			Model 4		
	<b>Board involvement in the succession process</b>			<b>Level of succession planning</b>		
	Coefficient	SE	t	Coefficient	SE	t
<b>Use of FGP</b>	0.068	0.028	2.432**	0.069	0.019	3.714***
<b>Board involvement in the succession process</b>				0.349	0.116	3.019***
<b>Family CEO's inability to let go</b>				-0.006	0.097	-0.065
<b>Board involvement in the succession process * Family CEO's inability to let go</b>				-0.072	0.035	-2.066**
<b>Firm size</b>	0.387	0.100	3.856***	0.098	0.068	1.449
<b>Management generation</b>	-0.376	0.244	-1.539	0.678	0.161	4.222***
<b>CEO age</b>	0.077	0.026	2.936***	0.076	0.017	4.391***
<b>Constant</b>	-3.424	1.623	-2.110	-3.350	1.116	-3.003***
	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.128			R <sup>2</sup> = 0.351		
	F = 8.085, p < 0.01			F = 16.758, p < 0.01		

N = 225

\*  $p < .10$ . \*\*  $p < 0.05$ . \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . (two-tailed)

*Table V: Conditional indirect effect of the use of FGP on the level of succession planning through board involvement in the succession process at three values of the family CEO's inability to let go*

<b>Family CEO's inability to let go</b>	<b>Effect</b>	<b>Bootstrap SE</b>	<b>Boot LLCI</b>	<b>Boot ULCI</b>
1.9728	0.0141	0.0078	0.0015	0.0321
3.1156	0.0085	0.0051	0.0007	0.0205
4.2583	0.0029	0.0049	-0.0055	0.0145

*N* = 225

*LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit, *CI* = confidence interval

*Bootstrap sample size* = 10000

Table VI: Robustness check - Regression results for the moderated mediation model taking into account two dummy variables for management generation

Dependent variable	Board involvement in the succession process			Level of succession planning		
	Coefficient	SE	t	Coefficient	SE	t
Use of FGP	0.052	0.023	2.284**	0.063	0.018	3.418***
Board involvement in the succession process				0.454	0.145	3.133***
Family CEO's inability to let go				0.075	0.124	0.603
Board involvement in the succession process * Family CEO's inability to let go				-0.094	0.043	-2.183**
Firm size	0.276	0.081	3.404***	0.103	0.066	1.558
<b>Gendummy2</b>	<b>-0.242</b>	<b>0.194</b>	<b>-1.247</b>	<b>0.492</b>	<b>0.155</b>	<b>3.186***</b>
<b>Gendummy3</b>	<b>0.078</b>	<b>0.220</b>	<b>0.353</b>	<b>0.743</b>	<b>0.175</b>	<b>4.245***</b>
CEO age	0.062	0.021	2.913***	0.077	0.017	4.494***
Constant	-2.024	1.317	-1.537	-3.750	1.118	-3.355***
	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.123			R <sup>2</sup> = 0.373		
	F = 6.166, p < 0.01			F = 16.056, p < 0.01		

N = 225

\*  $p < .10$ . \*\*  $p < 0.05$ . \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . (two-tailed)

*Table VIII: Robustness check with two dummy variables for management generation - Conditional indirect effect of the use of FGP on the level of succession planning through board involvement in the succession process at three values of the family CEO's inability to let go*

<b>Family CEO's inability to let go</b>	<b>Effect</b>	<b>Bootstrap SE</b>	<b>Boot LLCI</b>	<b>Boot ULCI</b>
1.9728	0.0140	0.0084	0.0004	0.0330
3.1156	0.0084	0.0053	0.0002	0.0205
4.2583	0.0028	0.0045	-0.0050	0.0133

*N* = 225

*LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit, *CI* = confidence interval

*Bootstrap sample size* = 10000

Table VIII: Robustness check - Regression results for the moderated mediation model taking into account two dummy variables for firm size

Dependent variable	Board involvement in the succession process			Level of succession planning		
	Coefficient	SE	t	Coefficient	SE	t
Use of FGP	0.059	0.022	2.643***	0.070	0.018	3.792***
Board involvement in the succession process				0.463	0.147	3.149***
Family CEO's inability to let go				0.074	0.125	0.590
Board involvement in the succession process * Family CEO's inability to let go				-0.093	0.044	-2.118**
<b>Firm Size Dummy Small</b>	<b>0.614</b>	<b>0.208</b>	<b>2.944***</b>	<b>0.098</b>	<b>0.171</b>	<b>0.569</b>
<b>Firm Size Dummy Medium</b>	<b>1.004</b>	<b>0.280</b>	<b>3.592***</b>	<b>0.308</b>	<b>0.232</b>	<b>1.329</b>
Management generation	-0.264	0.199	-1.331	0.683	0.162	4.228***
CEO age	0.061	0.021	2.909***	0.074	0.017	4.270***
Constant	-1.658	1.281	-1.295	-3.473	1.106	-3.139***
	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.133			R <sup>2</sup> = 0.355		
	F = 6.711, p < 0.01			F = 14.871, p < 0.01		

N = 225

\*  $p < .10$ . \*\*  $p < 0.05$ . \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . (two-tailed)



*Table IX: Robustness check with two dummy variables for firm size - Conditional indirect effect of the use of FGP on the level of succession planning through board involvement in the succession process at three values of the family CEO's inability to let go*

<b>Family CEO's inability to let go</b>	<b>Effect</b>	<b>Bootstrap SE</b>	<b>Boot LLCI</b>	<b>Boot ULCI</b>
1.9728	0.0165	0.0086	0.0027	0.0358
3.1156	0.0103	0.0056	0.0015	0.0233
4.2583	0.0040	0.0052	-0.0048	0.0164

*N* = 225

*LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit, *CI* = confidence interval

*Bootstrap sample size* = 10000