

Exploring the role of gender in next generation's plans for succession in their family businesses

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ABSTRACT This study explores the intricate dynamics of gender and gender roles within family businesses, specifically focusing on their impact on succession plans. Drawing from existing literature, we construct a model aimed at explaining succession intentions of the next generation of owners. Our analysis zeroes in on the nuanced interplay of gender roles, examining how they shape the perceptions and aspirations of successors within the business context. To empirically investigate these relationships, we employ a robust structural equation model, leveraging preliminary data gathered from 34 next-generation owners. Through this analytical framework, we aim to illuminate the pathways through which gender and associated roles influence the outlook and engagement of successors in shaping the future trajectory of their family businesses.

Track: gender in management

Key words family business, succession intention, next generation, gender, structural equation modelling

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Introduction

Succession is a pivotal element that not only differentiates family businesses from other organizational forms but also critically shapes their trajectory and evolution. It stands as a vital process that profoundly influences familial cohesion and the business's prosperity and endurance. Unlike a simplistic view of succession as a unilateral appointment by current business leaders, it is, in reality, a complex, bidirectional negotiation that involves both the incumbent and the next generations. This complexity makes succession a key challenge for family businesses, requiring an aligned vision between business owners and their potential successors (Joshi et al., 2011; Jaskiewicz et al., 2016; Hollander, 2012).

Current research on succession within family businesses has primarily focused on the preferences of current business leaders, examining the determinants considered during the selection of future leaders and how these elements coalesce to influence the ultimate decision of successor designation. Gender has emerged as a significant factor, with studies revealing a tendency towards favoring male offspring as successors in certain geographical contexts, regardless of birth order or the educational and human capital of female descendants (Ahrens et al., 2015). This reflects the different perceptions of owners' obligations, expectations, and reciprocity towards sons and daughters, significantly influenced by prevailing gender norms. However, the role of successor is socially influenced, with gendered expectations shaping potential hierarchies and extending the discussion of gender dynamics in family business succession beyond a binary view of biological sex (Byrne et al., 2019).

However, the existing literature is quite scarce on the other actor involved in the succession planning, the next generation. A small number of studies examine factors that influence the next generation's willingness to take over the family business in the future, including their affective attachment to the business, exposure to the family business (Gimenez-Jimenez et al., 2020), self-perceived capability as future leaders (Zellweger et al., 2011), and the perceived likelihood of their parent's preference for them to be the next leader (Schröder et al., 2011). Notably, gender appears to play a discreet yet significant role in moderating the effect of these factors on the next generation's succession intentions, contributing to the dearth of daughters as family business successors.

Despite these insights, the decision-making journey that successors undergo—a journey as consequential as it is intricate—has not been adequately addressed in scholarly research. Gimenez-Jimenez et al. (2021) found that affective commitment partially mediates the relationship between exposure to family businesses and offspring's succession intentions, with this correlation manifesting more strongly in sons than daughters. This underscores a significant gap in understanding how a multitude of factors, interplaying with gender, inform the formation of these intentions. The role of gender in shaping the perceptions and aspirations of potential successors within the business context remains largely unexplored, highlighting a compelling need for deeper investigative scrutiny.

Consequently, the purpose of this investigation is to address this gap by examining the determinants of succession intentions among the next generation of family business owners. Drawing upon the factors highlighted in existing scholarly discussion on family business succession, we construct a model aimed at explaining succession intentions of the next generation of owners. These influences encompass the degree of emotional investment in the family enterprise (affective commitment) (Gimenez-Jimenez et al., (2021), the extent of their engagement with the business (family business exposure) (Schröder et al., 2011), their self-assessed leadership capabilities (self-perceived capability) (Remery et al., 2014), and their perceptions of the incumbent generation's preferences for a successor (perceived heir

preference) (Bang et al., 2023). Moreover, the role of gender plays in this mechanism is explored beyond the biological sex of the business incumbents and next generations. We also examine the impact of gender dynamics, particularly the influence of a maternal figure's prominence within the family enterprise, on the succession intentions of the next generation (Cosson and Gildings, 2021).

To empirically investigate these relationships, we will conduct surveys as the main data collection method, targeting students from a UK-based university who come from a family business background. These respondents will provide a diverse perspective due to their varied cultural and familial experiences with family businesses. We plan to employ a robust structural equation model to analyse the preliminary data gathered from xxx next-generation owners. Through this analytical framework, we aim to illuminate the pathways through which gender and associated roles influence the outlook and engagement of successors in shaping the future trajectory of their family businesses.

Theoretical background and hypothesis

Theory of planned behaviour theory and Succession intention

To understand what drives succession intentions in family businesses, we apply the theory of planned behaviour. This theory, developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) and expanded by Ajzen (1991), suggests that whether someone intends to do something depends largely on their willingness to engage in that action. This intention is influenced by how the attitudes towards a behaviour are evaluated within the context of subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Essentially, intention is a state of mind that focuses a person's efforts on a specific goal. It reflects a person's motivation, the support they expect from their surroundings, and how capable they feel, considering their skills and the effort required. This theoretical framework helps us break down the complex factors that contribute to why an individual from the controlling family may or may not decide to take over a family business, focusing on their motivations, societal influences, and self-confidence.

Succession in family businesses involves transferring managerial control from one family member to another, a critical and complex issue central to the sustainability of these enterprises (Sharma et al., 2003; Chua et al., 2003). Extensively researched, it stands as one of the most heavily investigated topics within the domain of family business scholarship, underscored by numerous studies over the years (Vera and Dean, 2005; Bennedsen et al., 2007; Jaskiewicz et al., 2016; Nelson and Constantinis, 2017; Zellweger et al., 2011). This succession process, which includes both the incumbent and the intended successor, reveals the intricate dynamics and potential conflicts between generations, highlighting the complexities involved in ensuring continuity across family business generations (Gilding and Cosson, 2015).

The challenge of transgenerational succession is particularly pronounced when the preferences of the incumbent generation do not align with the intentions of potential successors. In particular, most of the existing studies focus on the demand side—exploring factors that influence incumbents' succession planning and their criteria for choosing successors (Morris et al., 1996; Sharma et al., 2003). Research has empirically shown that entrenched gender norms influence business incumbents who favour male successors, relegating women to the role of an underutilized asset within succession planning, considered primarily in exigent circumstances as a fallback option (Dumas, 1992; Feldmann et al., 2022; Merono-Cerdan, 2023). This perpetuation of traditional patriarchal values positions women in

peripheral roles, either within the domestic sphere or in subordinate capacities within the family enterprise (Banchik, 2019; Chang et al., 2021).

While most existing studies on family business succession focus on the demand side—analysing factors that influence incumbents' succession planning and their criteria for choosing successors—the supply side, which involves the next generation's intentions to take over the business, remains underexplored. This includes understanding the perspectives of both sons and daughters (Overbeke et al., 2013). Additionally, research on the dynamics between generations, particularly where mothers serve as business incumbents or copreneurs, is limited (Ferrari, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate what factors might increase or decrease the intention of next-generation women to assume leadership roles within the family business, and to explore whether these factors differ in their impact on women compared to their male counterparts.

Family business exposure and next generation's affective commitment

Growing up in a family-owned business presents a unique context where career intentions are shaped. Children in these environments are often intimately exposed to both the challenges and opportunities of succeeding in the family firm, which is typically managed with a transgenerational perspective (Chua et al., 1999). This close exposure can significantly influence their future career choices regarding succession.

Family business exposure acts as an agent of intergenerational influence, facilitating the transmission of information, beliefs, and resources within the family (Moore et al., 2002). The socialization process in family firms involves ongoing reflection and action, which shapes individuals' attitudes and behaviours. This process influences how they interact with others, the life choices they make, and their decisions regarding lifestyles and work roles. Early exposure to entrepreneurship and direct experience in the family business are pivotal in affecting offspring's attitudes and intentions towards succession (Dyer and Handler, 1994). This exposure is critical in determining how the next generation perceives and engages with the possibility of leading the family business in the future.

Allen and Meyer (1990) define affective commitment as a positive feeling of emotional bonding with, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Within family firms, this commitment acts as a proxy for affectual solidarity, manifesting as a strong belief in the organization's goals, a desire to contribute to these goals, and confidence in one's ability to do so (Sharma and Irving, 2005). Affective commitment is closely linked to psychological ownership, a state of mind where individuals feel that something is "theirs" (Pierce et al., 1991). This feeling typically develops from exposure to the family business (Townsend et al., 2009).

Schröder et al. (2011) emphasize that a parent's preference for succession and the preparatory steps they take are crucial in shaping adolescents' career intentions. Conversely, a lack of engagement with the family business, along with insufficient mentoring and training from current business leaders, diminishes both male and female adolescents' connection to the business (Remery et al., 2014; Gimenez-Jimenez et al. 2021). In other words, increased exposure to the family business is likely to enhance the next generation's emotional attachment and commitment to the business. Based on these insights, we hypothesize that the next generation's affective commitment to the family business positively mediates the relationship between family business exposure and their intention to continue in the family business.

Hypothesis 1a: *There is a positive influence of exposure to family business and succession intention.*

Hypothesis 1b: *Affective commitment mediates the relationship between exposure to family business and succession intention.*

Self-perceived capability as a leader and perceived heir preference

Based on the theory of planned behaviour, the dimension of perceived behavioural control is defined as ‘an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing a particular behaviour’ (Ajzen, 1991). This concept consists of Bandura's (1994) notion of self-efficacy and Brockhaus's (1980) concept of locus of control, both of which are crucial in understanding an individual's perceived ability to execute a target behaviour. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute a specific task at a designated level and is influenced by past performance outcomes (Chen et al., 1998). Locus of control, shaped by personal experiences, determines whether individuals view the outcomes of their actions as under their control or influenced by external forces (Dyal, 1984).

In family businesses, leadership roles have traditionally been seen as more suitable for males, leading to significantly fewer women in ownership and managerial positions. This gender disparity not only reinforces stereotypes about men's superior entrepreneurial capabilities but also affects women's self-perceived competence, which is vital for career decision-making. For instance, research by Overbeke et al. (2013) suggests that daughters often do not see themselves as suitable for executive roles within their family businesses due to a perceived lack of competence, a view that generally persists unless challenged by a pivotal event. The low self-perceived leadership suitability, compounded by entrenched gender norms, poses a significant obstacle to women's advancement in family businesses (Bang et al., 2023).

Thébaud (2010) argues that individuals must believe in their own competency in the tasks necessary for a chosen career to realistically pursue it, emphasizing that self-perception as a competent leader is key to considering a future in leading the family business. This belief system extends to the concept of locus of control, where individuals view the outcomes of events as either within or beyond their personal control (Rotter, 1966; Shook et al., 2003). For the next generation of family business leaders, whether they can successfully assume control of the business depends significantly on their perception of how much control they have over becoming the successor, which is often influenced by family dynamics and explicit or implicit signals from current business leaders about heir preference. Thus, we posit that next-generation members' self-perceived capability as leaders and their perception of the incumbent generation's preference for them as successors are crucial determinants of their succession intentions. These perceptions help them evaluate how likely external factors—such as family structure and business incumbents' preferences—will support their succession efforts, when they perceived themselves to be sufficiently capable as a business leader.

Hypothesis 2a: *There is a positive influence of self-perceived capability as a leader and succession intention.*

Hypothesis 2b: *Perceived heir preference mediates the relationship between self-perceived capability and succession intentions.*

Mother's visibility in business and gender

The concept of subjective norms, introduced to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2002), accounts for the external pressures that influence behaviour. These norms are shaped

by expectations and societal norms, including those from family and cultural attitudes toward gender. Such influences are particularly significant when family business owners make decisions about actions like succession planning. As sons and daughters often experience different socialization processes in family businesses due to prevailing gender norms (Glover, 2014; Hytti et al., 2017), particularly for daughters, gender roles formed through early family and peer interactions significantly influence their career intentions (Jodl et al., 2017). Parents' perceptions of obligations and reciprocity, varying by the child's biological sex, often lead daughters to prioritize family needs over ambitions within the family firm (Jaskiewicz et al., 2017). Additionally, the cultural norm of primogeniture, which historically excludes female successors, further perpetuates inequality in experiences between daughters and sons regarding selection and inheritance.

Except for the effect of gendered norms and next generation's biological sex, proficient role models, such as parents who manage their own firms, provide effective strategies for handling challenges, influencing next generation's self-efficacy in successors through a social comparison process (Boyd and Vozikis, 1994; Zellweger et al, 2011). This involves children from business families assessing their capabilities by observing and comparing themselves to their parents. In particular, the same-sex role model significantly impacts the succession intentions of daughters. Mothers who are actively involved in the upper echelon of family businesses as owners, co-owners, board members, or senior managers provide a model that encourages more inclusive attitudes towards female successors, exposing daughters to potential viability of obtaining leadership in the family business (Haberman and Danes, 2007). Besides, according to gender-role orientation theory, these orientations are shaped by attitudes, values, and self-concepts (Livingston and Judge, 2008). As found by studies (Dumas et al., 1995; Barrett and Moores, 2009), families with egalitarian structures in terms of power distribution and gender composition are more likely to foster environments where daughters can emerge as successors.

Based on these insights, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: *Gender differences significantly influence the relationship between a mother's visibility in business and family business exposure. Specifically, this relationship is stronger for daughters compared to sons.*

Hypothesis 4: *Gender differences significantly influence the relationship between a mother's visibility in business and succession intention. Specifically, this relationship is stronger for daughters compared to sons.*

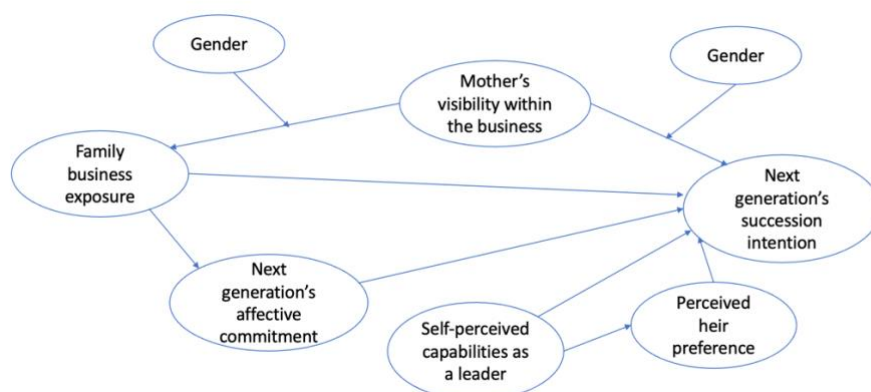


Figure 1. proposed theoretical model of factors can affect next generation's succession intention to the family business

Methodology and Measures

To test the proposed hypotheses, participants were recruited from a business school in the UK, known for its diverse student body drawn from over 90 countries. Data collection involved an online survey that utilized a structured questionnaire designed to gather information about the next generation's intentions regarding succession in family businesses. This survey incorporated variables relevant to career planning within the context of family businesses, which were identified from an extensive review of literature including sources (Carr & Sequeira, 2007, Schröder et al., 2011, Meyer and Allen, 1990, Dumas, 1998, Thébaud, 2010, Zellweger et al., 2011, and Gimenez-Jimenez et al., 2018, 2021).

Eligibility for the survey was limited to students whose families own businesses, in line with Chua et al. (1999)'s definition of a family business. This definition emphasizes that a family business should consist of “a vision developed by a dominant coalition controlled by one or a few families, with the intent for this vision to sustain across generations”, integrating concepts of family ownership, governance, and a long-term vision for succession and sustainability. Many participants were also students from the Family Business elective course, helping to mitigate the risk of respondents who might not genuinely belong to family-owned businesses.

The sample was refined by excluding students with missing data and those who did not respond to questions related to the independent variables and gender category. This filtering process resulted in a final usable sample size xxx, which will be specified after data cleaning, representing students from xxx countries.

Dependent variable

To measure the career intentions of the next generation, we utilized a survey question that asked students about their post-graduation career plans. Our dependent variable is categorical and includes six options that represent different career paths: 1) joining their family business, 2) starting their own business, 3) working in another company to gain experience before joining their family business, 4) working in another company to gain experience before starting their own business, 5) pursuing higher education, or 6) other plans, which they are asked to specify.

For analytical purposes, we categorized these options into three groups to simplify the analysis and enhance clarity: Options 1 and 3, which both involve planning to join the family business at some point, were coded as '1' to indicate the intention to be a successor. Options 2 and 4, which involve entrepreneurial intentions either directly after graduation or after gaining external experience, were coded as '2' to indicate the intention to be an entrepreneur. Options 5 and 6, which represent alternative career paths that do not involve becoming a successor or an entrepreneur, were coded as '0'.

This coding reflects the specific career trajectories that students may pursue and aligns with the understanding that career decisions, particularly those related to entrepreneurship, often involve gaining experience outside of the family business first (Brockhaus and Horwitz, 1986). This approach not only categorizes the intentions effectively but also anticipates the

reality of these plans by considering the typical paths taken by young entrepreneurs and family business successors.

Independent variables

Family business exposure: we employed a variable termed "Family Business Exposure, to gauge the level of exposure of children to their family business, (Carr & Sequeira, 2007; Stavrou, 1999). To measure this, respondents were asked to evaluate the extent to which six specific statements applied to their situation, effectively capturing various dimensions of their involvement and exposure to the family business. The statements include: 1). "My parents/family talk about the business with me." 2). "My parents/family teach me business skills." 3). "My parents/family take me to work with them." 4). "My parents/family take me to business meetings." 5). "My parents/family take me to industry fairs/customers/suppliers." 6). "I have work experience (including part-time employment, vocational job) in the family business." Each of these statements is rated using a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 signifies "strongly disagree" and 5 signifies "strongly agree." Thus, a score of 1 represents no exposure to the family business, while a score of 5 indicates high exposure. This allows for a nuanced understanding of the various ways children may be involved in their family's business, from casual discussions to direct work experience.

Affective commitment: The variable affective commitment is the mindset of affective commitment as encompassing identity relevance, shared values, and personal involvement (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). The measurement of affective commitment in our study is developed based on the psychometric scales by Meyer and Allen, (1990). We measure these elements through three specific survey items: identity relevance and personal involvement are assessed by the statements, "It is important to me that my family's reputation is preserved in the community" and "When I talk about the family business, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'," while shared values are gauged through the item, "Tradition and history play a very important role in the family business." Responses are gathered using a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 represents 'strongly disagree' and 5 represents 'strongly agree'. These items, derived from Zellweger et al. (2016), align with previous literature on affective commitment in family businesses (Gimenez-Jimenez et al., 2021).

Self-perceived capability as a leader: The variable "self-perceived capability as a leader" is employed to gauge the next generation's self-assessment of their competence as potential leaders and decision-makers in their family business. To measure this confidence in their leadership expertise and skills, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with three specific statements: 1) "My level of education is sufficient to be a successful leader in the family business." 2) "I will gain sufficient experience to be a successful leader in the family business." 3) "I have sufficient capability to be a successful leader in the family business." Each statement is evaluated using a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree'), where a score of 1 indicates no confidence in their ability to lead successfully, and a score of 5 reflects a high level of confidence. These measurement items, adapted from Remery et al. (2014), are consistent with prior research that explores the link between succession intentions and self-perceived leadership capabilities in family businesses (McAdams et al., 2021).

Mother's visibility in business: To assess and understand the role and involvement of mothers in family businesses, we operationalized mother's visibility in two distinct dimensions:

formal and informal involvement (Dumas et al., 1998; Bang et al., 2023). For formal involvement, we used three dichotomous questions to get a grasp whether mothers hold ownership stakes, executive roles, or are involved in day-to-day management. Respondents answer "Yes" or "No" to each question, with "Yes" coded as 1 and "No" coded as 0, indicating the presence or absence of formal roles within the business.

To evaluate the informal involvement of mothers, we developed three statements: 1) "She perpetuates the family's values and tradition," 2) "She advises my father on business matters," and 3) "She informally nurtures employees." Responses to these statements are measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with the addition of a 'not applicable' option coded as 6. The scale ranges from 1 ("strongly disagree"), indicating low informal involvement, to 5 ("strongly agree"), indicating high informal involvement. A score of 6 represents no involvement in that particular aspect. This allows for a nuanced understanding of mothers' roles in family businesses, capturing both their formal positions and the subtler, yet influential, informal contributions they make.

Perceived heir preference: The variable "perceived heir preference" is designed to gauge the next generation's perception of business incumbents' likelihood to select heirs among potential candidates for the family business. This perception can significantly influence their commitment to pursuing a career path as a successor (Sharma and Irving, 2005; Venter et al., 2005). To measure this variable, four questions are used: 1. The respondent's presumption about their likelihood of joining the leadership team of the family business. 2. Whether they have any siblings who might also be considered as potential successors. 3. If their siblings are currently working within the business. 4. The perceived likelihood of their siblings joining the leadership team. These questions help to assess the next generation's expectations and perceived position within the succession plan, capturing both individual aspirations and the competitive dynamics among siblings.

Moderating Variable

Gender: To understand how gender identity, which is shaped by family and peer interactions and may not necessarily align with biological sex, influences career intentions, we asked respondents to identify their gender. To assess gender identity, we provided six options: 1). Male. 2). Female. 3). Transgender. 4). Non-binary. 5). Prefer not to say. 6). Other. This categorization allows respondents to select an identity that best represents their personal experience, acknowledging the diversity and complexity of gender in the context of family business succession and career planning (Decker et al., 2017; Jaskiewicz et al., 2017).

Control Variables

To account for factors influencing children's future career choices, particularly in terms of succession intentions, we included several control variables in our analysis. Previous studies, such as Minola et al. (2016), have noted the influence of age on career choices related to succession. Therefore, we included age as a numeric control variable, ranging from 18 to 34 years old. Parker and Van Praag (2012) observed that the level of study impacts entrepreneurial decisions. Consequently, we controlled for the level of study using a categorical variable, where 1 indicates undergraduate and 2 indicates postgraduate status as all the respondents for this survey are either undergraduate or postgraduate students. The field of study has been identified as influential in shaping family expectations regarding succession (Zellweger et al., 2016). Thus, we included the field of study as a categorical variable, coded as 1 for business, economics, and management, and 0 for natural sciences, medicine, social

sciences, and other fields. Given the gender differences observed in the industries where men and women typically start businesses (Anna et al., 2000), which could affect decisions to take over the family firm, we controlled for industry. This variable is coded as 1 for trade, construction, manufacturing, and other related industries, and 0 for all types of services, including information and technology, consulting, advertising, education and training, tourism and gastronomy, health services, and other services. To address regional differences that might influence children's succession intentions, we included country dummies in our model, as suggested by prior research (Sieger & Monsen, 2015; Zellweger et al., 2011).

Statistical Procedure

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be employed to analyse the data and examine the hypothesized model. SEM is particularly suited for this research due to its ability to accommodate complex constructs and delineate systems of relationships among multiple variables, including both direct and indirect effects (Hair et al, 2021). This methodological choice is appropriate given the multifaceted nature of succession planning, which involves a web of influences rather than a simple cause-effect relationship. SEM's capacity to assess the model's overall fit and the effectiveness of the proposed relationships makes it an ideal tool for understanding the nuanced factors that influence the next generation's intentions in family business succession planning.

Early Results

Based on the analysis of 38 complete responses collected thus far, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy returned a value of .532, indicating a moderate level of adequacy. This outcome suggests the need for a larger sample size, which aligns with our planned next steps to gather more responses for the survey. The significance level, with a p-value of less than .001, confirms that the variables share relationships warranting further examination through factor analysis.

In the preliminary model, six factors were identified, including the dependent variable—next generation's succession intention. These factors cumulatively account for 63.263% of the variance after extraction, highlighting a substantial portion of the variance explained by the model.

However, the Chi-Square test result is not statistically significant ($p > .05$), suggesting that the current model's fit to the data is relatively poor. This indicates a need for model refinement through the collection of additional empirical data.

The results provide support for some of our hypotheses. We found a moderate positive correlation between affective commitment and family business exposure ($\beta = 0.371$, $p < 0.001$). This result indicates that family business exposure has a positive indirect effect through affective commitment. We also found a moderate positive correlation between self-perceived capability and perceived heir preference ($\beta = 0.370$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that perceived heir preference has a positive indirect effect through self-perceived capability. Therefore, these results support Hypotheses 1b and 2b. More data is required to test the direct effects of family business exposure and self-perceived capability on the next generation's succession intentions, specifically Hypotheses 1a and 2a.

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