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ORIGINAL PAPER

Unexpected Successor in Family Firms: Opportunity or Trap for Women?

Angel L. Meroño-Cerdán[1]

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Abstract
Female managers are more common in family firms largely due to women's incorporation into management positions via succession. Nonetheless, extrinsic and intrinsic factors constrain to some extent the access and the outcomes of female managers as potential successors. This study aims to uncover the particular conditions under which women frequently have access to CEO positions in family firms. Using a database of 177 SME Spanish family firms and using cluster analysis based on TwoStep technique, women are found to be unexpected successors to a greater extent than male successors. Oftentimes, they are chosen as a last resort to cope with poor business performance and low family orientation. More than an opportunity, this unplanned access becomes a trap since it fails to comply with all the requirements of successful transmissions.

Keywords Gender · Succession · Theory of planned behaviour

Introduction

Family firms show higher rates of women in top positions (Barrett & Moores, 2009). Despite the apparent advantage family firms offer to women to perform a management role, mainly due to the incorporation of daughters as successors (Humphreys, 2013), the choice of the successor still suffers from gender inequality in that males have prominence over female family members (Jimenez, 2009). The lack of consideration of women as planned successors reduces the chances of effective transitions (Remery et al., 2014), proving the exclusion of daughters as a waste of resources (Breton-Miller et al., 2004; Wang, 2010) and creating discontent from their unfair treatment.

The literature assumes that the succession process is planned in advance where the successor is identified, prepared and, at the same time, willing to take over as the firm leader (Baù et al., 2020; Decker et al., 2016; Gagné et al., 2019; Motwani et al., 2006). The reality is quite different. In fact, few family firms have succession plans (Daspit et al., 2016), with estimates ranging from 32% (Casillas et al., 2015) to 50% (Steier, 2001). Precisely, this is the context in which most women are chosen as successors. According to Overbeke et al., (2013), daughters are not deliberately considered as successors unless a critical event arises. This line of research was introduced by Ryan and Haslam (2007) when they proposed the emergence of women as candidates in unexpected and/or critical circumstances.

The focus in this work is on unexpected succession in family firms and the appearance of women as unexpected successors in a hostile context. This research sheds light on circumstances surrounding the choice of daughters as unexpected successors. Critical circumstances, from the work of Ryan and Haslam (2007), are applied to the domain of family firms giving a finer-grained understanding of the specific context in which succession takes place. The deterioration of business and family conditions will be considered here as critical events encouraging a change in the current or

✉ Angel L. Meroño-Cerdán
angelmer@um.es

[1] Department of Management and Finance, University of Murcia, Murcia, Spain

planned CEO. Thus, the research question is: under what family and business conditions do women become unexpected successors?

Grounded in the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), the presence of unplanned successors is analysed using a gender approach. TPB has been used within the field of family firms adopting the incumbent's perspective (Sharma et al., 2003; De Massis et al., 2016) or the successor's perspective (Mussolino & Calabrò, 2014; Stavrou, 1999; Zellweger et al., 2011). Planned successions are the result of the desire of incumbents to transmit or handoff the firm, the acceptance of the family owners and the intention of successors to join the firm. All of these studies confirm the value of TPB for analysing succession; however, gender issues still have not been sufficiently addressed. Only the work of Overbeke et al., (2013) adopts an approach considering TPB, succession, and gender in family firms. In line with that work, I consider succession as a gendered process. When succession can be planned, the weight of tradition and other gender prejudices place male candidates as potential successors. Gender prejudices only seem to disappear when coping with critical events produces unplanned successions. Unlike Overbeke et al., (2013), this study uses quantitative analysis with a wider population of successors (males vs. females, planned vs. unplanned) to refine critical events in the domain of family firms based on the deterioration of business and family orientations.

This work contributes to expanding the knowledge on women's management careers in family firms by focusing on succession planning and the role of business and family orientations in the choice of unexpected successors. In doing so, it meets the need to investigate the influence of gender in succession claimed by various authors (Campopiano et al., 2017; Humphreys, 2013; Hytti et al., 2017; Nelson & Constantinidis, 2017). The results of the empirical analysis reveal that unplanned successions usually take place when business and family conditions are declining. From a theoretical view, a link between theories addressing intentions to engage in given behaviours with gender theories is presented. Data analysis of this study confirms lower gender barriers in adverse conditions, which unfortunately represents more of a trap than an opportunity for women.

Literature Review

Succession Planning in Family Firms

Succession is a critical moment in the life cycle of family firms (Gilding et al., 2015). It is an event occurring only every 20 to 25 years (Schlepphorst & Moog, 2014). Accomplishing a successful intergenerational replacement assures the fulfilment of the objective of the long-term orientation, thereby preserving family wealth both in economic and social terms. Succession should be seen as a dynamic process (Daspit et al., 2016). Researchers (Breton-Miller et al., 2004; Decker et al., 2016; Schlepphorst & Moog, 2014) have categorised the different stages that must be fulfilled until the transition ends with the designation of the new CEO. Breton-Miller et al.'s (2004) three phases integrate other classifications also proposing a process comprised of three stages: Ground rules and first steps (Stage 1) consist of the preparation of the process and assessment of needs and usually includes the identification of possible candidates; Nurturing/development of successor (Stage 2) includes the education and experience required for potential successors; and Handoff/transition/installation (Stage 3) comprises the incumbent's withdrawal together from economic and legal issues related to firm transmission. Key elements for a successful transition are, on the one hand, the choice of the candidate matching predefined criteria and shared values and, on the other hand, the preparation for the position to be filled, usually through close interaction with the predecessor. The change in CEO implies not only the assurance of economic performance but also the preservation of the family's socioemotional wealth (Minichilli et al., 2014).

TPB (Ajzen, 1991) has been used to analyse the role of the successor (Mussolino & Calabrò, 2014; Stavrou, 1999; Zellweger et al., 2011) and the incumbent (Sharma et al., 2003; De Massis et al., 2016) in the succession process of family firms. TPB was first adapted to the study of family firms by Stavrou (1999) to explain successors' intentions to take over a business. Sharma et al., (2003) tested the influence of attitudes from the incumbent, family, and successors on succession planning activities and found the most powerful predictor of success was when a trusted capable successor was identified to take over the business. The probability that a trusted and capable successor will take control is an indication that succession may be successful (Mussolino & Calabrò, 2014; Venter et al., 2005).

The existence of a trusted successor is a critical starting point. Therefore, a succession plan is much easier and feasible when qualified candidates are identified, and additionally, they are committed to joining the firm. At the same time, the reluctance of predecessors to step aside diminishes. Despite the rationale and benefits derived from planning succession, the majority of family firms do not plan succession (Casillas et al., 2015; Daspit et al., 2016; Steier, 2001). Moreover, there is a scarcity of works dealing with unplanned successions. Steier (2001) differentiated three types of succession in addition to the planned succession: natural immersion, rushed succession, and unplanned-sudden succession. Gilding (2015) investigated the drivers of succession planning and proposed a typology of four outcomes arising from incumbents' motives for family business succession planning: (1) Institutionalization, the ideal outcome, takes place when there is a strong desire for continuity and strong family harmony; (2) Imposition occurs when there is a strong desire for continuity due to good business performance but weak family harmony exists. Incumbents are reluctant to share power and they impose succession normally following the primogeniture rule; (3) Implosion is the outcome of weak family harmony and weak desire for continuity, characterized by unmotivated incumbents, incompetent successors, and unclear succession plans. This situation leads to an unplanned succession that challenges the logic of any succession: no relation incumbent-successor, no development of successor, and no family support, among others; (4) Individualization occurs when incumbents, motivated by family harmony but unmotivated by business continuity, sell the firm as the best solution to preserve the family climate.

In short, planning succession seldom takes place and mainly is the result of exceptional circumstances: favourable economic and familial conditions, but also the existence of a trusted candidate willing to accept the challenge.

Gender Barriers in Accessing Management Positions

Although gender and birth order have been identified as the least important criteria for choosing successors (Schlepphorst & Moog, 2014), these criteria have been found by others to play a determining role (Schenkel et al., 2016).

A review of the literature indicates two factors prevent women from accessing top management positions. The first refers to extrinsic factors that deny leadership roles to women (Hytti et al., 2017; Jimenez, 2009; Wang, 2010). The role incongruity theory addresses gender stereotypes that act as barriers for women to fill management positions (Koenig et al., 2011). Cultural assumptions consider men to have qualities (e.g., assertiveness, competitiveness, courage) that are valued in leadership positions, whereas women's qualities (gentle, kind, supportive, expressive, affectionate, and tactful) are less valued. Therefore, role incongruity between women and the perceived demand for leadership persists (Eagly & Karau, 2002), explaining the association between masculinity and leadership. The second group comprises intrinsic factors that impede women from advancing into leadership roles. Women are found not to aspire to ownership (Vera & Dean, 2005) and doubt their capabilities more often (Remery et al., 2014), which leads them to self-select out of the succession processes (Hytti et al., 2017). Undoubtedly, a reciprocal relationship exists between both kinds of factors. Following role incongruity tenets, women often view the display of masculine behaviours required for leadership roles as inappropriate or presumptuous (Koenig et al., 2011).

Women as Unplanned Successors

Humphreys (2013) reported a fivefold increase in the number of daughters taking over their family firms. Barret and Moores (2009) stated that women access leadership roles in family firms at a rate four times higher than that of non-family firms. Presumably, although family firms bring opportunities for women to succeed the former generation, controversy surrounds the conditions of their access. The few studies of succession criteria showed that gender is explicitly mentioned as one of the less influential aspects to choose a successor (e.g., Chrisman et al., 1998; Motwani et al., 2006; Sharma & Rao, 2000). Nevertheless, comparatively few women are chosen as planned candidates (Schenkel et al., 2016). Therefore, female successors are often related to unplanned successions. Accordingly, succession very often takes place in an unexpected way where gender norms might vary, meaning unplanned successions are less gendered than planned ones.

To gain insight into the incorporation of daughters as successors, planned and unplanned successions must be differentiated. The classical model is featured by the sequence of phases aforementioned (ground rules, nurturing of successors, and handoff) aimed to designate the successor and fill the CEO position. The most common situation occurs when primogeniture and gender stereotypes generally apply (Ahrens et al., 2015; Gilding et al., 2015; Hytti et al., 2017; Overbeke et al., 2013; Aldamiz-Echevarría et al., 2017).

Hypotheses

Succession planning in family firms usually takes place under certain circumstances, mainly the existence of a trusted capable candidate willing and prepared to take over the firm (Mussolino & Calabrò, 2014; Sharma et al., 2003) and a favourable business and family situation (Gilding et al., 2015). Although gender is mentioned as the least important criteria for choosing successors (Motwani et al., 2006; Schlepphorst & Moog, 2014), few women are chosen as planned candidates (Schenkel et al., 2016). Indeed, diverse circumstances and reasons lead the head of a family firm to designate a daughter as a future leader with the common denominator of helping the family face a difficult situation (Jimenez, 2009). Sometimes, it is the absence of other available and competent candidates or simply because there are no male heirs (Wang, 2010; Dumas, 1998; Overbeke et al., 2013) found daughters may not deliberately consider succession until a critical event motivates them to do so. Wang (2010) referred to special circumstances as those that place daughters as last-resort saviours, suggesting these often lead to unexpected successions. Instances of these situations include sudden predecessor's retirement caused by new interests, health issues, or the absence of viable male alternatives. Based on previous considerations, the first hypothesis predicts the decrease in intrinsic and/or extrinsic gender prejudices in unexpected successions resulting in a higher number of women as successors.

H1. There is a higher rate of women than men as unexpected successors.

Adverse situations resulting from the decline of business performance and familial relationships lead to unplanned succession (Gilding et al., 2015), under these circumstances it could be expected that women are preferred to take over the firm. Women's assumed emotional sensitivity, relational style, and interpersonal skills may be more highly valued in struggling organisations that face a crisis or are at risk for failure (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

The emergence of unexpected successors, especially female candidates, may coincide with a deterioration in of family harmony. Family rivalries complicate the agreement on successors (Gilding et al., 2015). A long tradition points to the more personal and people-oriented style of female managers. For instance, Danes et al., (2007) reviewed previous literature and found female managers to be more participative and committed to people. Thus, to cope with troublesome family relationships, women might be preferred over their male counterparts.

H2. The choice of women as unexpected successors is associated with deteriorating family relationships.

Likewise, unsatisfactory family orientation has a negative relationship with business performance in unexpected successions. The point is not related to differences in financial performance between male and female-managed business but rather in the economic circumstances forcing unexpected successors to arise. Although women could be viewed as less competent, low performance may reduce prejudices about women as leaders (Cook & Glass, 2014).

H3. The choice of women as unexpected successors is associated with declining business performance.

Familial and economic declining conditions are factors clearly limiting firm survival. Precisely, these are the predominant conditions surrounding the choice of women in unexpected successions. Lack of planning and, therefore, not following suggested stages to successful transitions (Breton-Miller et al., 2004; Decker et al., 2016; Schlepphorst & Moog, 2014) entails insufficient preparation of successors as well as poor knowledge of the values and the demands surrounding the management of family firms.

In addition, women may not see their work in the family firm as a professional career (Jimenez, 2009) but rather come into the business to help the family temporarily (Dumas, 1998). In fact, Ryan and Haslam (2007) observed that women are often replaced when the critical situation is overcome. Not only do they face adverse firms' financial situation but also the lack of confidence in comparison with planned successors.

According to the tenets of TPB, the availability of a trusted and capable successor willing to take control predicts a successful succession (Mussolino & Calabrò, 2014; Venter et al., 2005). Therefore, the choice of unexpected successors may constrain the chances of success. The lack of support and acceptance toward a candidate seriously affects their confidence in being successful in the new role.

Derived from the above-mentioned literature, women being unexpectedly assigned as successors might be associated with a short-term perspective of the firm, either due to adverse conditions to overcome (business risk) and/or lack of trust in them (candidate risk).

H4. The choice of women as unexpected successors is associated with a short-term perspective of the firm.

Table 1 Variables and measurement scales 129,129*

Variable	Options	Scale
CEO gender	Male Female	Choose one
CEO access	Founder Expected successor (planned) Unexpected successor (unplanned)	Choose one
Business and family orientations	Financial Independence Profitability Survival Growth Firm Reputation Transmission to the next generation Increase economic wealth Family Owners' involvement Family managers' incorporation	Likert 1–5
Term orientation	*Governance perspectives* Maintain Generational transmission Sell Close	Choose one

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

Data was collected through a web survey in May 2016. The sample used in this study comprised 177 SME Spanish family firms with an average operating age of 34 years (*SD* 10) within the services (33%), commerce (24%), manufacturing (30%) and building (13%) industries. Regarding the size, 55% are microenterprises (fewer than 10 employees), 34% small enterprises (between 10 and 49 employees) and 11% medium enterprises (between 50 and 249 employees). Sales average is 4.2 million € (*SD* 12.8 million €) and assets average is 4.1 million € (*SD* 8.1 million €).

The sample was drawn from a panel of 300 self-identified family firms that are part of an Observatory of Family Firms attempting to measure economic outcomes and expectations twice a year. In addition to permanent questions concerning perception of economy and evolution of their business, each semester a specific topic is addressed; in this case, it was succession in family firms.

Measures and Reliability Scales

Table 1 shows the variables and measurement scales used in this study. The CEO position is considered when enquiring about access and gender. *CEO access* differentiates firms run by the founder from the rest; in the latter case, the CEO was asked whether the appointment was previously planned. *CEO gender* differentiates between male and females.

Business and family orientations. Family-firm owners' wealth is usually invested in one firm in an undiversified manner (Anderson et al., 2003). Therefore, a confluence of family and firm goals takes place. It is well established that family firms may pursue objectives other than economics (Chrisman et al., 2012). Objectives related to family issues, such as maintaining family control, financial independence of the family, family harmony, and family employment, tend to be more important than traditional business objectives, such as value/profit maximisation, growth, and innovation (Voordeckers et al., 2007). Gomez-Mejia and colleagues (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2007, 2011; Berrone et al., 2012) coined the term 'socioemotional wealth' to give explicit recognition to efforts to preserve social endowments. In this research, two constructs to measure business orientation and family orientation were identified. A tradition distinguishing between both orientations (e.g., family-centred business vs. business-centred family) exists in the field (Singer & Donoho, 1992).

The consideration of business and family orientation contributes to distinguishing different types of family firms in that success factors will be different (Leenders & Waarts, 2003). In line with Bamberger (1994) and Basu (2004), a set of goals using a 5-point Likert scale was used to rate their importance for respondents. It was expected that two factors reflecting both family and firm orientations would be found. Principal components analysis followed by varimax rotation was used for factor extraction. The rule used to determine the number of factors was the eigenvalue greater than 1 criterion (Kaiser, 1974). To test the appropriateness of the data set for using factorial analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (0.699) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p = 0.000$) were used. Hair et al., (2009) recommended a KMO index of >0.6 and Bartlett's $p < 0.5$ as suitable for factor analysis. A total of two factors were extracted and explained 56% of the variance; to emphasise the association of specific items with derived factors, the highest loadings of each row are given in bold. As shown in Table 2, each item loaded strongly (>0.6) on only one of the factors, which indicates high convergent validity, whereas all other factor loadings for these items remained below the 0.4 criterion recommended by Churchill (1979) as an indication of strong discriminant validity. In addition, to ensure the consistency of the factors obtained, reliability analysis was carried out to eliminate items that were not strongly related to other items in the construct. For each factor, Cronbach's alpha was above the 0.7 standard suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), thus supporting construct reliability.

Family ownership fosters long-term orientation to preserve a family's wealth. In fact, one of the features of family firms is the intention to pass on the business to successive generations (Chua et al., 1999), which is a long-term perspective rooted in transgenerational goals (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006). According to the essence approach (Chrisman et al., 2005), this transgenerational vision together with the family commitment explains the distinctiveness behaviour of family firms. To measure *term orientation*, governance perspectives were considered. Respondents were asked about their intentions in the following two years related to (a) continuity of the firm either by current CEO or transmitting the firm to the next generation and (b) discontinuity caused by selling or closing the firm.

Results

Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations are provided in Table 3. Seemingly, the data show a profile of unexpected successors: mainly women with short-term orientation in that it is expected the firm will be sold or closed in the near future. The opposite situation of planned successors is featured by being male and intending to maintain their firms. Business orientation is negatively correlated with CEO women and intentions to transmit or sell/close the

Table 2 Business and family orientations

			Factor loading	
	Mean	St. dev	Business	Family
Financial independence	3.76	1.057	**0.720**	0.034
Profitability	3.73	0.876	**0.826**	0.016
Survival	3.98	0.935	**0.758**	0.139
Growth	3.50	0.886	**0.717**	0.161
Reputation	4.20	0.749	**0.611**	0.120
Transmission	3.12	1.199	0.359	**0.684**
Wealth	2.86	1.011	0.276	**0.606**
Owners involvement	3.49	1.191	−0.012	**0.727**
Family management	2.83	1.143	−0.083	**0.861**

Table 3 Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations

	Mean	S.D.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Unexpected[a]	0.154	0.364	1								
(2) Planned[a]	0.846	0.364	−1.000**	1							
(3) Founder	0.417	0.495	[b]	[b]	1						
(4) CEOwoman	0.152	0.360	0.376**	−0.376**	−0.035	1					
(5) Maintain	0.768	0.424	−0.333**	0.333**	0.031	−0.092	1				
(6) Transmission	0.167	0.374	−0.148	0.15	0.075	−0.047	−0.822**	1			
(7) Sell/Close	0.063	0.243	0.627**	−0.627**	−0.155	0.223**	−0.470**	−0.117	1		
(8) Business or.	3.8	0.687	0.072	−0.072	0.043	−0.159*	0.293**	−0.172*	−0.247**	1	
(9) Family or.	3.1	0.836	−0.135	0.135	−0.013	−0.060	0.004	0.128	−0.201*	0.000	1

[a] *Only successors (n = 101)*

[b] *Not calculable*

*$p < 0.01$ ** $p < 0.001$*

firm, consequently it is positively correlated with maintaining the firm without changes. Family orientation is negatively associated with selling/closing the firm. Information provided by the correlation analysis shows apparently two scenarios. First, "continuism" featured by favourable business conditions and maintenance of the current corporative governance which, at the same time, is related to planned successors. Second, "discontinuity" associated with declining business and family orientation, selling/closing the company and women in CEO positions. Being these two former variables related to unexpected successors.

In order to test the hypotheses of this study, under a multivariable analysis, two phases have been followed.

1) Identification of CEO profiles in terms of succession according to gender (male, female), access (founder, planned successor, unexpected successor) and firm term orientation (maintain, transmit, sell/close). As a result, four groups of CEOs are identified: unexpected and expected successors, founders and transmitters (firms planning to transmit the company to the next generation).
2) Mapping CEO profiles identified in phase 1 according to scores in family and business orientations.

In both phases, a cluster analysis based on the TwoStep technique was performed. TwoStep is quite different from the traditional and widely recognised hierarchical and k-means clustering methods. Its advantages include the use of log-likelihood distance measures (enabling the modelling of both dichotomous and continuous variables) and an automatic determination of the number of clusters based on changes in a distance (Gibcus et al., 2008). The Bayesian information criterion (BIC) is then used to select the 'best' cluster solution, with smaller values of the BIC indicating better models.

Four groups were identified (Table 4) in the first phase:

Table 4 Cluster analysis: classification of CEOs

	Unexpected successors	Expected successors	Transmitters	Founders
	17.9%	34.9%	21.7%	25.5%
CEO Access				
Founder (42.6%)	13.6%	0%	27.3%	59.1%
Expected (48.6%)	11.3%	69.8%	18.9%	0%
Unexpected (8.8%)	77.8%	0%	11.1%	11.1%
CEO Gender				
Female (15.2%)	100%	0%	0%	0%
Male (84.8%)	3.3%	41.1%	25.6%	30.0%
Governance Perspectives (term orientation)				
Maintain (76.9%)	13.5%	50%	0%	36.5%
Generational transmission (16.9%)	6.3%	0%	93.8%	0%
Sell (4.4%)	100%	0%	0%	0%
Closure (1.8%)	0%	0%	100%	0%

- Expected successors (34.9%): Logically, all the CEOs in this group were expected/planned (69.8% of total expected successors), all of them were male (41.1% of total males CEO) and in all cases there was a long-term orientation in that they did not foresee changes in governance (50% of total firms expecting no changes in governance).
- Founders (25.5%): This group was composed mainly of founders (59.1% of total founders) that planned to maintain current corporate governance (36.5% of total). In other words, they were firms still managed by the founder with no intention to make any change.
- Transmitters (21.7%): The main characteristic of this group was related to governance perspectives since these firms planned to transfer the company to the next generation (93.8% of total). These firms were managed

by males and with a low percentage of firms intending to close.
- Unexpected successors (17.9%): All the female CEOs in the sample belonged to this group and also all the firms intending to sell. The majority of successors accessing unexpectedly were also in this group (77.8%).

These results confirm H1 and H4. Actually, there was a clear higher presence of women as unexpected CEOs than in any other group. In fact, all the female unexpected successors were included in the group of "Unexpected successors". Additionally, a test of difference (*t*-test) was performed finding a higher rate of women as unexpected successors in comparison with male successors (45.5% vs. 8.1%) ($p<0.001$). This evidence leads to confirming H1.

Regarding H4, the group of unexpected successors had the shortest term-orientation in that it included all the cases intending to sell the firm. Looking into the correlations (Table 3), unexpected successors were positive correlated with selling/closing the firm (0.627, $p<0.01$) and female CEOs (0.376, $p<0.01$).

To evaluate H2 and H3, a new TwoStep cluster analysis was performed. All previous clusters (founder, expected, unexpected and transmitters) were included as categorical variables with orientations (business and family) as continuous variables. Again, four clusters were identified corresponding exactly with previous clusters; the novelty was the scoring of each cluster in each orientation. Figure 1 shows the results using mapping tools. Clearly, the unexpected successors group had the lowest score in family orientation. Regarding the business orientation, the unexpected successors group shared the lowest ratings with the founders group. Within the quadrant of best scores, the group of expected successors and especially the group of transmitters showed the highest scores in business orientation.

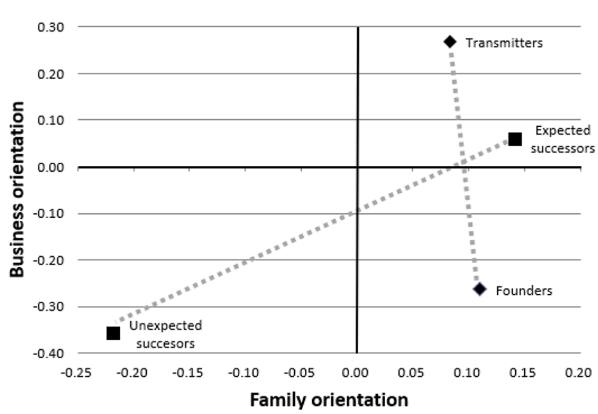

Fig. 1 Classification of CEOs according to family and business orientations

In short, unexpected successors were placed in the quadrant of low business and family orientation, whereas expected successors were in the quadrant of high family and business orientations. Therefore, H2 and H3 were supported. Regarding the groups pending to transmit the firm to the following generation, both founders and transmitters were high in family orientation. The difference was in business orientation. The transmission was especially associated with a high business orientation, whereas founders were in the quadrant featured by high family orientation but low business orientation.

Discussion and Conclusions

Family firms emerge as ideal organisations to improve female presence as CEOs mainly via succession (Meroño-Cerdán & López-Nicolás, 2017). At the time of evaluating candidates, incumbents may expand the range with the inclusion of daughters. Furthermore, women find family firms a favourable scenario to become managers where the interplay between private and professional contexts reduces the gender gap (Bjursell & Bäckvall, 2011). However, despite the increasing incorporation of women to management positions, some factors still constrain the access as well as the outcomes of female managers, especially as successors.

The planning factor is introduced to distinguish candidates previously identified, nurtured and committed from those appointed due to an unexpected situation, which is normally regarded with adverse conditions. The results of this study show that women are chosen as unexpected successors as a last resort to cope with poor business performance and unsatisfactory family relationships. Logically in this context, the continuity of the firm is severely threatened. Being like this, more than an opportunity for women, this situation becomes a trap since it fails to comply with all the ingredients of successful transmission. At first, the 'unique talents' of women were seen useful in crisis (Ryan & Haslam, 2007) but further studies found that preference for women leadership was predominant in cases with little to gain (Ellemers et al., 2012), as is the case of unexpected succession featured by adverse conditions. As outcomes of these decisions, not only are women capabilities underutilised but they also may lead to bad experiences that damage the image of women as managers.

Planning succession is vital to ensure the continuity of a family business and the preservation of the economic and socioemotional wealth. Relying on TPB, a trusted and capable successor willing to take over the firm is the key to trigger and complete the transmission process successfully (Sharma et al., 2003; Stavrou, 1999). However, the existence of adverse economic and family circumstances alters the intention to transmit the firm to the next generation, ultimately causing unplanned successions. Incumbents will hesitate about the desirability of transmitting the firm impeding agreement on a committed, trusted and capable candidate. This scenario will lead to postponing the succession planning and increase the likelihood of producing unexpected successions. Women emerge as consensual candidates to cope with adverse conditions when incumbents withdraw without preparing future successors.

This work contributes to expanding knowledge about women management careers in family firms by focusing on succession planning in a number of ways. First, analysis shows the influence of family and business situation on succession in family firms. To address this issue, a map of CEOs according to their family and business orientations is proposed. Two groups of CEOs are identified: successors and incumbents. The first group includes unexpected and expected successors, whereas the latter comprises founders and transmitters (firms planning to transmit the company to the next generation). Regarding the successors, results confirm expected successors are chosen under conditions of family harmony and business continuity. The case of unexpected successors matches with weak family harmony and weak business performance. The choice to appoint daughters as successors may be prompted by an attempt to cope with these adverse conditions. Moreover, results reveal interesting insights concerning incumbents. Transmission seems to be more likely when family harmony occurs with satisfactory business performance. Founders resist passing the baton in an adverse economic situation. In this respect, it may be of interest to inquire whether this situation is associated with a personal commitment of the founder to overcome business difficulties or it is simply associated with being a company in its early stages, being the business in a consolidation stage. In both cases, family relationships are still simple with no complications. Findings of this study refine Gilding et al.'s (2015) framework, which was developed from the incumbent's perspective to cover drivers and typology of succession planning. This study provides empirical evidence supporting succession planning under favourable business and family conditions, expected successors when the succession is done and transmitters in the case of an imminent succession; and vice versa, lack of planning in adverse conditions producing unexpected successors. Family harmony in difficult business situations is the case of founders not considering succession as explained above. However, no category has been identified in the map of CEOs associated with weak family harmony but favourable business performance.

Second, clear differences are found between planned and unplanned access when the profile of successor is examined in detail, confirming adverse conditions surrounding the choice of women in unplanned succession. While the concept of a glass cliff gained popularity in symbolising the access of women to leadership roles in periods of crisis (Ryan & Haslam, 2007), empirical evidence, in the context of family firms, to support this notion was found only in qualitative studies (e.g. Overbeke et al., 2013). The present study recurs to a quantitative approach to identify the effect of negative economic and family contexts in choosing a woman as an unexpected successor in a family firm.

Third, the theoretical approach is based mainly on the TPB. The results of the study lead to develop TPB in the context of family firms through the correspondence with a gender approach (Table 5). Successful transmissions need trustful candidates willing to take over the firm. From a gender perspective, in line with Akhmedova et al., (2019), extrinsic and intrinsic factors are proposed to explain the impediments women experience in gaining access to management positions. Extrinsic factors refer to gender stereotypes about women's capabilities to fill management positions, whereas intrinsic factors are those inhibiting women themselves to pursue leadership roles. At this point, I believe there to be feasible a link between theories addressing intentions to engage in given behaviours with gender. TPB finds three traits of successors in successful transmission: trust, capability and willingness (Mussolino & Calabrò, 2014). In other words, not only is an appropriate candidate needed but also someone who is perceived as trustworthy and competent. Therefore, extrinsic factors affect the way women successors may be perceived as trustful and capable, whereas intrinsic factors affect women's willingness to assume management positions. In most cases, adverse conditions cause unplanned successions. In this scenario, gender prejudices are diminished and daughters are seen to a larger extent as potential candidates, which increases their willingness to accept the assignment of successor. However, far from being an opportunity for women, this way of unplanned access to management positions is a trap in that the firm's survival is seriously threatened.

The practical implications and challenges of this study are various and related to the lack of consideration of women as planned successors being not only unfair but also detrimental to the business (Wang, 2010). First, succession is a long-term decision that is fundamental for the continuity

Table 5 Theoretical framework

Succession	Conditions (family, business)	TPB	Gender prejudices
Planned	Good	Trust/capability	Stereotypes (extrinsic)
		Willingness	Self-confidence (intrinsic)
Unplanned	Adverse	Last resort	No prejudices

of the family firm. Data reveal many companies lack a succession plan (Casillas et al., 2015; Daspit et al., 2016). Day-to-day operations together with the sensitive nature of the incumbent's withdrawal and identification of candidates leave this vital decision unaddressed, especially in adverse business and family conditions. Delaying the choice of the successor results in negative and sometimes irreversible consequences. The last resort of choosing women to cope with unexpected successions is more a trap than an opportunity, reinforcing the underutilisation of women management capabilities and contributing to spread the bad image of female managers, increasing the extrinsic gender prejudices. Chandler et al. (2016) provided an interesting reflection on the reconciliation of paradoxical temporal factors as a success factor in family firms. On one hand, short-term decisions devoted to exploiting current resources and, on the other hand, long-term orientation related to explore and prepare the future (Breton-Miller & Miller, 2006). Succession is a clear long-term decision that cannot be postponed and must be embedded in day-to-day affairs. Consequently, succession falls under the aforementioned concept of paradoxical temporal factor. All the steps of succession planning must be met in order to achieve all the benefits derived from a successful transition to next generations. It is essential that a trusted successor be identified to engage owners in succession planning. Therefore, successor development systems are needed (Motwani et al., 2006). Future successors should acquire a deep firm knowledge and gain affective commitment that prepares them to accept the challenge of taking over the business. Consequently, it is crucial they receive support from the incumbent and family members. The results reveal the adverse conditions surrounding the choice of unexpected successors. This is the case of unexpected succession. Therefore, a balance is needed between the day-to-day operations and the decisions about the role of the family in the business.

Second, in the case of women candidates, it may be useful to differentiate intrinsic from extrinsic factors constraining their role as successors. Extrinsic factors must be conveniently addressed to overcome gender barriers and take real advantage of female managing capabilities as planned candidates. Those firms able to get rid of gender stereotypes about women in leadership roles will benefit a broader range of candidates, increasing the diversity of management styles. Experiencing positive transmissions under favourable conditions will improve the image of female managers and, at the same time, lower extrinsic but also intrinsic gender prejudices. Undoubtedly, there is a direct link between both kinds of factors. If the image of women as manager improves, more women will be willing to take over the firms. Another complementary approach contributing to the knowledge of the role of successors is the commitment construct initially proposed for family firms by Sharma and Irwing (2005) to understand the attitudes that compel next-generation members of family-owned businesses to pursue a career in their family firms. A successor's commitment or willingness to succeed their parents may be more important than other skills to complete a successful transition of leadership (Chrisman et al., 2005; Sharma & Irving, 2005). Cabrera-Suarez and Martin-Santana (2012) empirically found the contribution of affective commitment to the success of succession either directly or mediating the contribution of normative commitment. Normative commitment is the main reason to accept the family assignment for unexpected successors, especially for women of the next generation (Dawson et al., 2013).

Finally, in the case of unplanned successors, candidates should be completely aware of the consequences. Frequently, women are chosen as unplanned successors based on their normative commitment to fulfil family expectations. If that were the case, women should know the challenges with which they must cope. Women need to evaluate the situation, and overall, they should negotiate their conditions as saviours. Leaving their careers or duties to satisfy family desires must be compensated, especially when there are low chances to overcome adverse situations and moreover when odds to continue in the position are low even when the firm may survive. Women are often replaced as CEOs by male candidates when critical conditions disappear (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Chalus-Sauvannet et al., 2016) report successors who initially pursued careers outside the firm to negotiate conditions about their return as they felt legitimized. Therefore, women's access to CEO positions in adverse conditions deserves more attention.

This study is intended to open or expand research about access and consequences of women in management positions. First, cross-sectional data from one country (Spain) were used. The objectives of this study together with the size of the sample led the researcher to choose cluster analysis to identify CEO profiles and measure them in terms of family and business orientations. Further research in different countries may be undertaken with a longitudinal design and other statistical tests. Second, CEOs were the respondents, which might produce a bias due to the tendency to respond positively. Future research may consider the adoption of a combined method of comprehensive, multiple face-to-face interviews, survey and in-depth case studies to generate data among different stakeholders in the succession process. Third, a post-succession temporal approach is adopted to research the access of current CEOs but could be of interest to measure precandidates' intentions and preparation, specifically attitudes and circumstances explaining women's acceptance as unexpected successors. Last, it may be useful to know the negotiation process and the existence of terms of the agreement, if any. In this regard, a set of interesting research questions arises: Why do women accept unexpected successions when apparently everything seems insuperable? Do they negotiate before accepting the position? Do men? What happens exactly if they overcome adverse conditions? Do they remain as CEOs? Are they replaced by other male candidates? Do they leave deliberately to balance work and life?

To conclude, traditionally, family firms are favourable contexts for women accessing management positions mainly via succession. However, this study uncovers the real conditions and possible consequences associated with the designation of women as unexpected successors. Overcoming gender prejudices should entail the choice of women as planned successors encompassing a set of benefits. On the one hand, clear advantages for the firm since the range and quality of potential successors will increase and, on the other hand, social benefits for inclusive reasons and decisively contribute to improving the removal of gender prejudices.

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