

**A family imprinting approach to nurturing willing successors:
Evidence from centennial family firms**

ABSTRACT

A critical aspect for the continuity of family businesses (FB) is the existence of willing successors. In this paper, we use the imprinting theory to ground an explanation of how the family imprinting process shapes siblings' willingness to become a successor in the FB. We stylize three family imprinting types based mainly on different family motivations: the FB-centric, the entrepreneurship-centric, and the free will-centric. The uniqueness of this approach is that it offers an imprinting-based process model capable of explaining the origins of homogeneity and heterogeneity in succession willingness at both the inter- and the intra-family levels.

Keywords:

Family Business, Family Imprinting, Imprinting, Succession, Willing successors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Family businesses (FB), the predominant type of firm and a basic pillar of wealth creation worldwide (La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes and Shleifer, 1999; Family Firm Institute, 2017), face the same environmental and organizational challenges as non-family firms while also confronting idiosyncratic family-related challenges such as succession, which becomes a subject of major interest to both academics and managers (Chua, Chrisman, and Sharma, 2003; Kotlar and Chrisman, 2018; De Massis, Wang and Chua, 2018). The succession process is defined as the actions and events that affect the transfer of leadership from one family member to another (Sharma, Chrisman, Pablo, & Chua, 2001). Succession is not in fact specific to family businesses, but is a significant moment in their business' life, as succession involves a

series of critical changes in the family firm: family relationships need to be realigned, traditional patterns of influence are redistributed, and longstanding management and ownership structures must give way to new structures (Brockhaus, 2004). Moreover, succession facilitates the intention to shape and pursue the vision held by the family across generations (Chua, Chrisman and Sharma, 1999).

While some studies find that second and later generations of FB perform worse than founder-managed ones (Villalonga & Amit, 2006), others suggest that intra-family succession may have numerous benefits if adequately planned and managed (Calabrò, Minichilli, Amore, & Brogi, 2018; Miller, Steier, & Le Breton-Miller, 2003) and despite the limited pool of talent in the family. Keeping family control has several advantages for the FB, including a longer-term view, the extensive expertise of family members due to high exposure to the business, greater independence, and increased resilience during hard times due to greater willingness to plow profits back into the business (de Vries, 1993). In addition, most FB founders seek to maintain the socioemotional wealth (SEW) of their businesses through transmission to the next generation (Humphrey, De Massis, Picone, Tang & Piccolo, 2021). Furthermore, scholars recognize that family firm governance is important for SEW preservation and protection (Berrone et al., 2012) and that the presence of a family CEO positively contributes to firm performance (Minichilli et al., 2010).

A critical aspect for intra-family succession is the existence of willing successors (Zellweger, 2017; Zellweger, Sieger & Halter, 2011), offspring motivated, willing, and able to actively continue in the family firm through the generations (De Massis, Chua, and Chrisman, 2008). A significant number of studies have addressed the drivers of intra-family succession (Habbershon & Pistrui, 2002; Zellweger, Sieger, & Halter, 2011; Schröder & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2013; De Massis et al., 2008) and its benefits while acknowledging the difficulties of engaging offspring to continue in the family firm (Parker, 2016; Zellweger, 2017). In this

regard, the current rates of next-generation intentions to join the FB are not high, estimated to be less than 29% (calculated using data from Sieger, Fueglistaller, Zellweger, & Braun, 2019), a lower figure than in previous editions of the same survey. This harsh truth raises the question as to why offspring are unwilling to become successors in their family firms (Chrisman, Chua, & Sharma, 1998; Sharma & Rao, 2000) and the practical challenge of trying to redress this situation (Parker, 2016). There are multiple possible reasons for this low predisposition, such as tending to prefer employment elsewhere before joining the FB (Sieger et al., 2019), feeling pessimistic about being in control (Zelwegger & Sieger, 2012), having a “bad view” of the FB (Sieger et al., 2016), having a low level of commitment or self-efficacy (Garcia, Sharma, De Massis, Wright & Scholes, 2019), or possibly having had insufficiently competent nurturing predecessors (Samei and Feyzbaksh, 2015).

Despite this reality, some argue that extant research has focused more on predecessors than on next-generation members (De Massis, Sieger, Chua, & Vismara, 2016), with a major interest in firm-level processes and performance and little attention paid to the family and individual levels (Daspit, Holt, Chrisman, & Long, 2016; Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017). Others argue the need to consider the joint effect of predecessor and successor because succession is essentially a two-party issue involving an exchange of material and emotional resources (De Massis et al., 2008). This joint effect has been largely neglected in succession research (Lee et al., 2019). Moreover, with a few exceptions (e.g., Garcia et al., 2019; Samei and Feyzbaksh, 2015, Medina-Craven et al., 2021), there is still a limited number of studies on the issue of nurturing the willingness to become a successor (Parker, 2016) and a lack of empirical research and theoretical understanding of how and why some siblings become successors and others do not (Zellweger, 2017; Zellweger et al., 2011). Furthermore, Davis et al. (2021) highlight the need to examine the micro-foundations underlying the motivations and mindsets of the main stakeholders in transgenerational succession.

This paper addresses this theoretical and empirical gap, building on the imprinting theory (Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013), which emphasizes the importance of external actors and entities such as a family members in shaping the persistent characteristics of an entity, such as a possible successor. We specifically aim to answer the research question, **“How does family imprinting influence the willingness to become a successor?”** We understand succession willingness as next-generation intention to actively contribute to the leadership and sustainability of their FB (Zellweger, Sieger and Englisch, 2012), particularized in being open to assume managerial control once the top management position in the FB is relinquished by the incumbent (De Massis, Chua & Chrisman, 2008).

Imprinting theory suggests that imprinting individuals with persistent characteristics, such as a propensity for entrepreneurship, may be possible (e.g., Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). It has previously been used in family firm research (e.g., Braun and Sharma, 2007; Pieper, Smith, Kudrats & Astrachan, 2015; Jaskiewicz, Combz and Rau, 2015; Kidwell, Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2018; Ahn, 2018; Erdogan, Rondi & De Massis, 2020) for a variety of purposes and at different levels, but never to explain the process of nurturing successors or to address the degree of heterogeneity of families in this endeavor.

We use an abductive approach to analyze the findings of a multiple-case study of six centennial family firms, eventually allowing us to make three main contributions to the literature. First, we present a family imprinting model of the process of influencing siblings to be willing successors, encompassing both the commonalities of the components and its stages (sources of imprints, motivation, mechanisms, and sensitive periods), which taken globally leads to a certain likelihood of siblings becoming successors, while also allowing for different relevant sources of heterogeneity at the family and successor levels. Second, it further integrates the theory of imprinting (Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013) with FB succession research, providing a wider definition of the main elements of the theory and introducing motivation (intention) for

this process, an element mostly overlooked in previous works. And third, in contrast to extant research, our imprinting process provides a causal theoretical framework for previous results on the characteristics of willing successors (e.g., Bozer, Levin & Santora, 2017; Chalus-Sauvannet, Deschamps, and Cisneros, 2016; Sharma and Irving, 2005) and their possible determinants (e.g., Dawson, Sharma, Irving, Marcus, & Chirico, 2015; Miller et al., 2003; Zellweger *et al.*, 2011). Our approach encompasses the sources of homogeneity and heterogeneity among FB and siblings, adding to previous approaches that seek commonalities in nurturing transgenerational succession (e.g., Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). An understanding of the overall imprinting process also has implications for the practice of nurturing willing successors.

The next section presents the theoretical background for the analysis, exploring the state of the art in succession intentions and imprinting theory to outline the foundations of the reasoning and identify the theoretical and empirical gap. The method and main results are presented in the findings section, organized by family imprinting types. A discussion follows, which includes an analysis of the contributions, a visual model of the process of imprinting willing successors, an exposure of the implications for research and practice, the study's limitations, and future paths of enquiry. Last, a concluding section closes the paper.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Nurturing willing successors

Intra-family succession comprises a wide array of actions, events, and developments that lead to the transition of leadership from one family member to another, generally from an older to a younger generation (Sharma, Chrisman, Pablo, & Chua, 2001). Succession eventually involves the transfer of business ownership, governance, and management. Leadership can be understood in different ways, but in this study it is understood as responsibility for the ongoing management of the firm (Blumentritt et al., 2013; Marler, Botero & De Massis, 2017), which

eventually depends on the power distribution of ownership. The predecessor's propensity to step aside and the successor's willingness to take over are key to a successful succession process in FB (Sharma, Chrisman & Chua, 2003). One line of research has focused on the role of the founder or predecessor (e.g., Schein, 2010; De Massis et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2021) in this process, and another on the opposite and complementary view of the role and perspective of the successor (e.g., Birley, 1986; Rogal, 1989; Venter, Boshoff & Maas, 2005; Parker, 2016). There have been many contributions to the study of succession intentions in FB. Some of these approaches are descriptive analyses of the common or possible characteristics of siblings willing to succeed in the FB, many of them focusing on a single dimension (Bozer, Levin & Santora, 2017). An example is the exploration of the nature of successors' commitment, which has found that there are both different levels of commitment (Handler, 1989; Sharma, 1997) and different types of successor commitment (Sharma and Irving, 2005), namely affective, normative, calculative, and imperative. Also using a single descriptive dimension, motivation, Chalus-Sauvannet, Deschamps, and Cisneros (2016) summarized the motivations to be a successor in three main categories: continuity of the family identity, perceived obligation to succeed, and developing the family firm.

Other studies have focused on business characteristics to describe succession intentions, such as the role of the company's good economic performance in enhancing intention (Stavrou, 1999; Sharma, Chrisman, Pablo & Chua, 2001), while others have argued the contrary, that good performance may incline the successor to sell due to the higher valuation of the company (Parker, 2016).

Taking a further step, other studies have looked for the association between multiple possible explanatory variables and succession intentions, including individual attitudes and family characteristics (e.g., Barach & Ganitsky, 1995; Miller et al., 2003; Zellweger et al., 2011; Dawson, Sharma, Irving, Marcus, & Chirico, 2015), eventually concluding that succession is

a long-term socialization process that starts in early adolescence or even childhood (Lambrecht, 2005; Dawson et al., 2015). Using a further multifactorial perspective, Stavrou and Swiercz (1998) find significance for personal and market factors favoring succession intentions, concluding that the family factor is only significant to explain intention not to join the business. Venter, Boschhoff and Maas (2005) find that successors' willingness is strongly linked to factors such as their desire to continue the FB, their ability to find challenging opportunities within the firm, their confidence to manage the FB successfully, and their perceived level of excitement, happiness, pride, and reward regarding working in the FB.

Most of the abovementioned studies have implicitly used SEW dimensions, i.e., the sum of affective values that a family derives from their control of the FB (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007), as important factors for succession since they encompass the renewal of family bonds through dynastic succession to continue the family legacy and tradition (Berrone, et al., 2012). For instance, Dawson, Sharma, Irving, Marcus, & Chirico (2015) reflect that social costs associated with non-participation increase continuance commitment. Chalus-Sauvannet, Deschamps, and Cisneros (2016) mention non-financial motivations to succeed in the FB such as preservation of the family name. Similarly, Parker (2016) argues that nonfinancial objectives have a positive effect on intra-family succession and FB longevity, while Venter, Boshoff & Maas (2005) also argue that non-monetary rewards have a positive impact on the successor's propensity to take over the FB.

The abovementioned studies contribute overall to characterizing willing successors but they do not explain how these features are cultivated to enhance succession intentions. With a more explanatory focus, there is a third type of study that explores the determinants of succession intentions, with the predecessor identified as the most common source of influence, potentially taking on a technical or consultancy role to support the successor (Cadieux 2007; Handler 1990), although this role may also have its drawbacks (Chalus-Sauvannet et al., 2016) if

extended in scope or time. Lee et al. (2019) propose and test a model that explains successor willingness to take over as the outcome of the congruence between founder and successor in the terms of the value of family prosperity because this (dis)similarity influences the relationship between them. With the intention of moving towards a multi-dimensional causality of generational succession, Bozer et al. (2017) explore key personal and professional factors associated with effective family-business succession for four key stakeholders: incumbent, successor, family, and non-family members. Their multiple-case study also identifies a role for family influence, considering culture, cohesion, spousal support, and sibling rivalry. Within this third category of studies, which provide causality analyses of succession intentions, there is a line of research based on the transgenerational entrepreneurship construct, defined as the "processes through which a family uses and develops entrepreneurial mind-sets and family influenced capabilities to create new streams of entrepreneurial, financial, and social value across generations" (Habbershon, et al., 2010: 1). This concept has recently been explored with a theoretical basis of imprinting, as will be discussed in the next section.

Regarding the role of parents, there have been some relevant theoretical proposals to explain the relationship between parental behaviors and succession willingness. Building on self-determination theory, McMullen and Warnick (2015) propose a model where parent-founders promote affective commitment in child-successors by supporting their psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness within the FB. In turn, Garcia et al. (2019) use a social-cognitive approach to theorize the indirect influence of parental behavior (support and psychological control) on next-generation engagement in family firms through the mediating role of FB self-efficacy (i.e., one's belief in being capable of performing according to business demands) and commitment to managerial leadership in the FB.

There are some relevant theoretical approaches to the nurturing successors topic and abundant literature describing the association of factors involved in succession intentions but not

generally the causality. In this regard, Lee et al. (2019) call for a relational approach to succession willingness because of the fundamentally relational nature of succession, which involves at least a predecessor and a successor, and the importance of their relationship in the succession process (De Massis et al., 2008). To the authors' knowledge, existing contributions do not offer an approach to help explain the process of nurturing willing successors in a way that helps to understand the phenomenon and acknowledge its relational nature or that provides a more holistic picture and understanding of FB succession. Offering explanatory approaches to succession can also be informative for practice, to assist family firms in the nurturing of willing successors.

2.2. A family imprinting process approach to nurturing willing successors

The concept of imprinting was first conceived under the name "stamping in" by an English biologist named Douglas Spalding (1873). It was rediscovered and called "imprinting" in 1911 by Oskar Heinroth, a German ethologist, and further studied and generalized by his disciple Konrad Lorenz (1935). Some years later, the concept was adapted to different fields, including organization theory (Stinchcombe, 1965; Marquis, 2003; Burton & Beckman, 2007), strategy (Harris & Ogbonna, 1999), management (Boeker, 1989), psychology (Hoffman, 2014; Sluckin, 2017), and entrepreneurship (Leung et al., 2013), among others. Marquis and Tilcsik (2013:8) defined imprinting as "a process whereby, during a brief period of susceptibility, a focal entity develops characteristics that reflect prominent features of the environment, and these characteristics continue to persist despite significant environmental changes in subsequent periods". The subjects or entities bearing imprints can be at different levels and include individuals, collectives, organizations, and even networks of organizations (Marquis, 2003). At the same time, imprints can come from different environmental sources such as individuals, institutions (e.g., organizations), and collectives (parts of organizations and other groups),

among other sources (e.g., economic and technological), generating imprint sedimentation (Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013),

Imprinting approaches have already been applied to FB research for a variety of purposes and at different levels of analysis, including within and between the family and the business. They have been used, for example, to analyze family influence on the business, including the effect of family values on business rules through family governance (Braun and Sharma, 2007), the effect of family negative dynamics on human resource practices in the family firm (Kidwell et al., 2018), and the effect of the founder's legacy on corporate survival (Ahn, 2018). More recently, Erdogan et al. (2020) explore how imprints from the previous generation influence the current generation, affecting family firm behavior as regards innovation. Within the FB system, the imprinting approach has also been used to explore how organizational imprints of the founder generation affect the structures and processes of FB in subsequent generations (Pieper et al., 2015), and to explore the existence of sensitive periods and the nature and persistence of imprinted values in the family firm (Clinton, O'Gorman, Faherty & DeTienne, 2017). Focusing mainly on the family system, Jaskiewicz, Combz and Rau (2015: 29) use an imprinting approach to explain the transmission of entrepreneurial legacy, defined as a "family's rhetorical reconstruction of past entrepreneurial achievements or resilience", which the authors conceive as a driver for the incumbent and next generation to engage in strategic activities that ultimately foster transgenerational entrepreneurship.

While there is very relevant research on FB based on the imprinting theory, to the authors' knowledge there is no research on the imprinting process of siblings becoming willing successors in the family firm, a choice that is arguably desirable to facilitate business continuity (e.g., Sharma, Chrisman & Chua, 2003), which is the basis for the preservation of the SEW that a family derives from its FB.

Following Marquis and Tilcsik (2013), the main elements to describe an imprinting situation are the focal entity (entity bearing the imprint), the sources of imprints (imprinting entities), the sensitive periods, the imprinting mechanisms, and the resulting imprinting content. In addition, since the focus of this study is on family imprinting, we consider the family motivation for this process also worth pondering.

The focal entities are each of the siblings of an incumbent generation in the FB who, barring legally justified reasons, could be candidates to be successors in the FB. The incumbent generation is the one holding the formal power in the business, which essentially means having majority ownership. A primary source of imprints in siblings is likely to be the family, as assumed by most of the extant related research (e.g., Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Kidwell et al., 2018), and especially the previous generation (Erdogan et al., 2020), with the incumbent leader (predecessor) found to be highly influential (e.g., Bozer et al., 2017), especially if they also happen to be the founder (e.g., Boeker, 1989; Pieper et al., 2015). Other possible sources of imprints are the FB itself and its other members, as well as other organizations and their members (e.g., education institutions and teachers, business organizations, peers, etc.). Sensitive periods are brief periods of time during which the focal entity exhibits high susceptibility to external influences (Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013). The previous literature has frequently identified childhood and adolescence as common sensitive periods for siblings (Lambrecht, 2005; Dawson et al., 2015), while some works point to other events related to family or business “crises” (Clinton et al., 2017). Imprinting mechanisms, in turn, are the ways used by the sources of imprints (e.g., the predecessor or other family members), either purposely or not, to leave an imprint on siblings during a sensitive period. In the case of entrepreneurial legacy, the three main types of imprinting mechanisms identified are the strategic education of the next generation (encouraging education and work experience relevant to the firm’s entrepreneurial future), entrepreneurial bridging (the older and younger

generations working together), and strategic succession (ensuring the protection of the successor's key resources and power in the FB) (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). An imprinting view of nurturing willing successors would generally assume that a family in a business aiming at an ordinary family succession is likely to influence the siblings during sensitive periods, with a probable influence on their willingness to become successors (our focal imprint).

An imprinting approach offers a relational view of succession that focuses on the influence of imprinters on possible successors (with an expected crucial role of predecessors), which not only responds to the requested relational approach to succession (e.g., Lee et al., 2019) but also allows for multiple sources of influence aside from the predecessor.

3. METHOD

Like previous studies in the FB field (Strike, 2013; Cater et al., 2016), this study uses an abductive (Dubois & Gadde, 2002) multiple-case research approach (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1989), which is particularly suitable for understanding complex social processes like those that underlie interactions among family members of different generations and affect the willingness of offspring to continue in the family firm. Abduction is rather like a detective process involving making puzzling observations that enable new theories to be discerned and constructed (Locke et al., 2008). Hoffman (1999) defines abductive reasoning as the process of examining a mass of facts and allowing them to suggest a theory. Furthermore, abduction should not be confused with induction, despite their similarities, the first seeking to find explanations for observed facts, viewed as missing premises in an argument based on available background knowledge deriving those facts, while the second seeks to find general rules covering a large number of given observations (Flach and Hadjiantonis, 2013). Given the nature of our problem, abductive reasoning seemed to be the most suitable approach for this study, resulting in a theoretical formulation based on the facts gathered from the analysis of multiple cases.

Furthermore, and more specifically, this research fits a “systematic combining” approach which, within an abductive reasoning mode, aims to refine existing theories as opposed to invent new ones by means of developing combinations of established theoretical models and new concepts derived from the confrontation with reality (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). We found this approach particularly suitable for our research because it incorporates abductive reasoning and creates a fruitful cross-fertilization through a combination of established theoretical models and new concepts derived from this confrontation (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

3.1. Research context and sample design

According to Eisendhardt (1989: 537), the sample should be a small number of extreme and transparent cases that illustrate the phenomenon of interest, which in this case is the shaping of willing successors across generations. We therefore selected six family firms, using a deliberate theoretical sampling based on five criteria: i) longevity, by which only centennial firms were chosen, making transgenerational phenomena easily understandable; ii) majority family ownership to avoid the influence of non-family owners; iii) a minimum size (minimum 25 employees and a minimum operating income of 2 million euros), meaning that it was probably both an attractive prospect and one that was generating enough wealth to allow the offspring to pursue other ventures or qualified professions; iv) multiple accessible generations to obtain richer data and to triangulate some aspects; and v) locational homogeneity (north-east of Spain) to reduce macroeconomic and cultural variance among cases (Salvato & Corbetta, 2013). Table 1 presents a summary of the main characteristics of the FB cases and the interviewees.

----- Insert Table 1 about here -----

Using available secondary data (Bureau van Dijk’s SABI database), we constructed a list of companies aged at least 100 years in the Catalan region (north-east of Spain), checking for a majority family ownership (more than 50%) and the minimum size previously mentioned.

The six companies in our study can be considered as “polar” (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) from a double perspective. First, the selected cases are extreme cases of family business longevity compared to the global population of FBs, because they were long-living FBs, but since there might have been ownership changes, we also ensured that at least two successions had taken place within the current owning family. Second, we searched for cases with different proportions of willing successors, namely cases with a large proportion of siblings willing to succeed (3 cases with more than 60%) and cases with a small proportion of siblings available (3 cases with 33% or less). Theoretical sampling is especially useful to detect clear patterns in the central construct, relationships, and logic of the focal phenomenon (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007:27).

The companies belonged to different industries within manufacturing and services and they were small to medium size, ranging from 37 to 360 employees. Four of them produced consumer products and two of them industrial products (Cases 4 and 6). Four of the businesses had always been in the same family, while two of them had been bought from another owner family, in both cases a long time previously (more than 100 years for Case 4 and more than 30 years for Case 6), and had undergone at least two successions within the new acquiring family. In all the cases except one (Case 4), there was a clear successor in place and no retirements pending for at least a decade.

3.2. Data collection

We used multiple data sources to support and triangulate the findings (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009): multiple interviews for each FB with open-ended and closed questions, participant observation, and secondary data available online or printed (corporate website, company catalogue, annual reports, press releases about the firm and the family, historical and anniversary books, and other publications). For each case, we examined an average of six archival documents of different types and from various sources. Although the main source of data was the interviews, the

documents and observation were important to understand the context, background, and meanings of the interviewees, their families, and their businesses. In four cases (excluding Case 4 and Case 5), the interviews were preceded or followed up by a visit to the FB museum and/or history hall where portraits of the founders and successors, photographs of significant events, and historical symbols were displayed.

We contacted the selected companies via email or telephone call to arrange face-to-face interviews, complementary visits, and follow-up interviews, always with two researchers present. Overall, we conducted 25 interviews with 18 informants between June 2018 and February 2019. The interviews always took place at the company site, except on two occasions when the informants were interviewed in their homes.

The semi-structured interview protocol used covered four main thematic blocks: i) the determinants of firm survival, entrepreneurial priorities, and legacy; ii) perception of received imprints (sources, processes, and evaluation); iii) stages of education and training; and iv) imprinting intentions for the future generation. The interview protocol contained mainly open-ended questions to encourage flexible dialogue. There was also a closed-ended ranking question to capture the importance of sources of imprints in the decision to be engaged with the FB. Rankings are a type of response mode that capture ordinal data, the main advantages of which are ease of scoring and forced discrimination between the provided items (Cohen et al., 2007). The researchers included some *ad-hoc* questions in the interviews wherever needed to tackle emerging issues and to encourage open discourse on the part of the interviewees, including giving their impressions of the questionnaire and the research. In the case of siblings with low or no involvement in the FB, the questionnaire was modified to reduce the emphasis on joining the FB and to create more room for discussing alternative callings, including other professions or new ventures.

The interviews lasted between ninety minutes and three hours, plus the visit to the FB museum or history hall where relevant. Approximately 40 hours of individual interviews were recorded and transcribed, always shortly after the interviews. For each case, at least two family members were interviewed separately, which was useful to triangulate the data, gain alternative perspectives from multiple positions regarding succession and multiple generations, and mitigate biases. Some siblings from the same generation as the successor were not available for a variety of reasons but were sometimes mentioned by the predecessor or siblings. These individuals were essentially not involved in the FB, with no or a low percentage of shares, and some had explicitly renounced being successors.

3.3. Data Analysis and Coding

The cases were initially analyzed separately, basically considering the transcriptions of the interviews and observations of each participant for each FB, followed by a cross-case content analysis of the data to look for patterns and insights across the cases. The information gathered was coded separately by at least two of the authors (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), who carried out a separate coding using spreadsheets. which involved identifying and classifying important phrases and observations, followed by an iteration to eventually reach the final data structure. Table 2 shows the data structure, following the recommendations of Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton (2012), with the first-order concepts derived from participants' quotations, the second-order themes using more abstract researcher-centric concepts, and finally the aggregate dimensions.

----- Insert Table 2 about here -----

Since we used a systematic combining approach within abductive reasoning (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), some of the aggregate dimensions were conditioned in advance by the theoretical background on imprinting, especially sources of imprints, imprinting mechanisms, and sensitive periods. However, aside from the sources of imprints, the rest of the first-order

concepts were developed using a relatively open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) because the nature of the imprinting mechanisms and sensitive periods could not be fully anticipated. The open coding was even more unconditioned in the case of motivations for imprinting, predecessors' values, imprinted values on siblings, and imprinted commitment, because these aggregated dimensions were not explicit in the initial theoretical grounds. The only case of non-open coding was the dimension of sources of imprints, which was based on an *ex ante* grounded categorization including the predecessor, other previous family members, the current generation, the next generation, the FB itself, and a list of other sources of influence beyond the family and the business. In a second phase, the first-order concepts were collapsed into second-order themes using summarizing namings borrowed from or inspired by FB research concepts (e.g., SEW preference, entrepreneurial preference, types of commitment) and management vocabulary (e.g., different types of values), or aiming to describe the effect of some of the actions (e.g., facilitating mechanisms, discouraging mechanisms, and ambivalent mechanisms). The final namings for the aggregate dimensions were thus a combination of dimensions clearly defined in the initial theoretical structure (sources of imprints, mechanisms), some of them slightly modified from extant theory (sensitive periods becomes timing), and others more openly designed based on the first-order concepts and second-order themes (motivations for imprinting, predecessors' values, imprinted values, and imprinted commitment). The data structure presented is therefore also the result of an exercise of axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in the production of second-order themes, which sought interconnections among codes and comparisons with existing theory. We provide the most exemplary quotations interspersed in the text and some additional quotations for each of the first-order concepts in Table 3.

----- Insert Table 3 about here -----

4. FINDINGS

The findings will be presented in four parts, corresponding to the three types of family imprinting identified, namely FB-centric imprinting, entrepreneurship-centric imprinting, and free will-centric imprinting. This inter-case analysis aims to present the different patterns found, explained mainly in terms of family (and predecessors') motivations for imprinting (the why), resulting imprints on siblings (the what), and the willingness to become a successor (the so what), the latter being the target outcome of both the process and this research. Intra-family commonalities will be described and analyzed in the following three sections, while a fourth section presents other processes detected that can explain the variance both in general and within siblings of the same family.

While the following sections argue the differences between the family imprinting types, the inter-case analysis also revealed that some of the findings present common elements across most of the cases, particularly regarding the main sources of imprints (the who), some of the mechanisms used for imprinting (the how), and the most common sensitive periods (the when). To begin with, as presented in Table 4, the main source of imprints cited and ranked for all cases was the previous generation, and especially the predecessor as anticipated, followed by the FB itself, and third their own generation. As regards the imprinting mechanisms used by families and other sources of imprints to influence siblings, the presence and role of the father figure and education relevant to the FB were omnipresent in all cases, as quoted by some respondents:

At first, I didn't have an important role in the business, but then I started taking on more responsibility in different sections. I was an assistant manager to my father, and I started to make decisions, and gradually there came a time when I started to notice that while the experience of the previous generation is obviously always valid, you start to see the world faster than they do. That's when I started to take the reins, but always considering the opinion of the previous generation. (Case 2; Sibling 1)

It was basically a set of circumstances that brought me here as it wasn't my intention to work in the FB. But the previous generation and how much it meant to them to carry on the business also played a part in that. (Case 3; Sibling)

The most frequently cited sensitive periods were childhood and youth, as suggested in the previous literature (e.g., Lambrecht, 2005; Dawson et al., 2015), while approaching adulthood, when choosing which degree to study, and during periods of work experience outside the FB were also mentioned:

I grew up here. When I was 7-10 years old, I used to visit wine cellars in La Rioja and the south of Spain with my dad. And from when I was 16-17 years old, I started working here in the summers ... obviously because my learning has been in this company since I was little. Like I said before, I used to go with my father to La Rioja to see wine cellars, and to the south of Spain to see cork. So, the FB played a big part in my childhood. Yes, from about age 16, I spent every summer working in the factory. (Case 2; Sibling 1)

I did a short stay with a supplier in Italy, which served to show me it was something I never wanted to do ... that firm was so badly managed! (Case 5; Sibling 1)

However, we also observed some nuanced differences among sources, mechanisms, and sensitive periods across the three mentioned imprinting types which, where relevant, will be analyzed in the corresponding sections.

4.1. FB-centric imprinting

This type of family imprinting is constructed from Cases 4 and 5, where predecessors – the main source of imprints – revealed a strong caring for FB survival for both they and their family, which qualifies as an outstanding SEW preference:

When my mother died, my father passed the reins of the business to me. He couldn't carry on as before and I had to start running all the units of the business, not only the one I had started with ... I'm glad that three of my siblings are involved, two of them with a higher level of engagement ... we'll see how we organize the succession. ... We are known in the region by the name of the company, which is almost like our "surname" ... (Case 4; Predecessor)

I have lived and breathed the company since I was really little ... And when I started working, I also studied as a commercial specialist ... And later, I asked myself what right did I have to break the succession when the previous generations had given the firm everything they had? (Case 5; Predecessor)

The socio-emotional motivation of these predecessors was associated with common ethical values (e.g., commitment, role model, honesty, effort, modesty, social commitment), followed in importance by common business values (e.g., talent and competence management,

excellence, business orientation). Meanwhile, the main imprinting mechanisms used were the presence of the father figure and education relevant to the FB. The resulting imprints on siblings also revealed a preference of a socio-emotional nature, but one where people (including employees) became more important than for their predecessors:

I want to have the opportunity to carry the company on and be able to talk about 200 years, not 100... And I know most of the workers and I like the business and our work... The values have always been very much linked to continuity in terms of the people; the people working here must feel comfortable professionally so that they don't want to leave. We have a good relationship with the staff. Another characteristic is rigorousness; we like to do things well, to be in control. (Case 4, Sibling 1)

Nowadays, the company is the number one candle manufacturer in the country. The values we have always upheld on the journey to the leading position are passion for a job well done, and the experience and consistency of five generations of the same family. (Case 5, website)

In comparison to my father, team building is more important, not only within the family but also with employees (Case 5, Sibling 1).

These preferences were consistent with the values first cited by the siblings, which were people-oriented values (e.g., caring for people, creating a positive environment), followed by common business values (e.g., rigor, excellence, control, quality). Thus, for siblings, people's values emerged as more important than ethical values, while business values remained second in importance, as for their predecessors.

As another resulting imprint, siblings revealed a certain motivation or rationale for their willingness to participate in the FB, most of them willing to do so either in leading or secondary roles, manifesting an affective type of commitment (Sharma and Irving, 2005) understood as a wish or desire to be in the FB:

I don't want it to disappear, and I want to carry on the FB ... The family was an important factor for me; you could call it family responsibility. If I don't carry on the business, who will? (Case 4, Sibling 1)

I have been living the FB since I was a kid ... I played in the shop after school ... I'm supposed to go abroad to learn, but I want to come back to the FB. (Case 4, Sibling 2)

I hardly ever question my father because it's a phase where I'm having to learn a lot. What I want to do is listen and learn what has to be done because he has been running the company successfully. What's more, we generally tend to agree on lots of things, which helps us to work together. (Case 5, Sibling 1)

In these cases, the proportion of siblings engaged in the FB was relatively large, both of the two siblings in Case 5 and three of the five siblings in Case 4. Based on the findings for this type of family imprinting, we can describe a pattern of family motivation (previous generation and especially predecessors) based on SEW that explains the direction of the family imprinting exercised and which translates into particular types of imprints (SEW-related business values and affective motives) that ultimately influence the degree of succession willingness. This pattern is summarized in the following propositions:

- P1.1. Prevalent SEW family preferences induce FB-centric imprinting, promoting in siblings the preservation of SEW-related values and affective motives to engage in the FB.*
P1.2. FB-centric imprinting increases the likelihood of siblings willing to engage in the FB.

4.2. Entrepreneurship-centric imprinting

Case 2 and Case 3 describe this imprinting type, where predecessors – the main source of imprints – revealed the importance of entrepreneuring across generations:

We've been going for 100 years because over the generations we've really felt the company intensely, we've created passion for the product. (Case 2; Predecessor)

I believe we have survived a century because there is always someone who has engaged with the business, who has had the passion for the job and the product. We have learned to innovate, to develop research, to go abroad when it was almost impossible. My parents weren't exactly entrepreneurs, because they lived through the post-war period, and it was difficult. But my grandfather, he was the one ... a real entrepreneur. (Case 3; Predecessor)

Predecessors of these cases cited entrepreneurial values first (e.g., passion for the product and/or the sector of activity, self-actualization), followed by ethical values (e.g., social commitment, social responsibility). In comparison to the previous type, a wider set of imprinting mechanisms were observed including the presence of the father figure, education relevant to the FB, supporting diversity among siblings (e.g., education, hobbies, etc.), and facilitating entry to the FB, either from the bottom up - low responsibility position in the beginning, rotation in various positions, and gradual scale-up to a management position- or via a temporary substitution:

From around the age of 16, I spent every summer working in the factory. I started with the machines and then went from section to section. I always say that I did the equivalent of a second university degree here in the company, learning from the others. (Case 2; Sibling 1)

Immediately after I finished my degree, I did see the FB as a possible objective, but it wasn't my real intention. In fact, I tried working there after my degree because someone was on maternity leave, but I didn't like it. I said I didn't want to go back ... But a series of events led me back to the company in the end. (Case 3; Sibling 2)

In this category siblings cited people-oriented values first (e.g., business as a family, sharing with employees, caring for people), followed by entrepreneurial values (e.g., perseverance, enthusiasm). The pattern was that predecessors' values were again preserved as the second most cited, but were preceded by "people-oriented" values. As a resulting imprint, siblings showed a predisposition for entrepreneurship:

Our innovativeness and entrepreneurial orientation, the attitude of continuously improving, are the factors that have allowed us to survive and to be what we are now. Entrepreneurship is one of the strengths of this business. There has eventually been an entrepreneur in every generation. (Case 2; Sibling 1)

My passion was gardening (not the FB) and my parents fostered my passion ... My family helped me with the new company (Case 3; Sibling 1)

However, this entrepreneurial vocation was not necessarily confined to the FB, as the latter case illustrates, and siblings sometimes imposed conditions on assuming a leading role or gradually reaching this position via a calculative type of commitment (Sharma and Irving, 2005) based on an idea of a possible perceived gain from entering the FB and opportunity cost:

In our case, progress has really happened when people have come into the firm with an interest in developing something. I mean they didn't just come in for the sake of it and that's made things much easier... One of the advantages is having a company that is totally adapted to the present in terms of the human resources team, and technology too, and that is in a stable financial situation. When you have a basis like this it's easier to take up the challenge and carry on. (Case 2; Sibling 1)

... a series of events later led me to the company. The firm I was working for wasn't going well; they were having financial problems. And the FB was growing then and they needed staff, so my father asked me to help him because they needed people. I set out some conditions, which my father accepted, so I decided to go into the company. And I'm still here. (Case 3; Sibling 2)

In these cases, there were also siblings leading separate business units related to the core FB (Case 3) and new entrepreneurs starting their own ventures (Case 2). For this type, the findings

suggest a path from a family (especially predecessor's) preference for entrepreneurial values, generating motivation for imprinting siblings in this direction using a wider set of imprinting mechanisms and influencing siblings' imprints by preserving the entrepreneurial values that eventually induce a higher entrepreneurial willingness to be applied in the FB or other ventures.

Consequently, we propose:

P2.1. Prevalent entrepreneurial family preferences induce an entrepreneurship-centric imprinting, promoting in siblings the preservation of entrepreneurial values and calculative motives to engage in the FB.

P2.2. An entrepreneurship-centric imprinting increases the likelihood of siblings willing to engage in the FB or new ventures.

4.3. Free will-centric imprinting

This type of family imprinting is derived from Cases 1 and 6 and is based on less focused motivations from the predecessors' side. A mixture of values is presented, including ethical values (e.g., modesty, social commitment), entrepreneurial values (e.g., innovation, enthusiasm), and other values such as cohesion among family and staff. However, neither strong preferences for socio-emotional protection nor clear entrepreneurial preferences are presented. On the contrary, these two families were more supportive of free-will principles, with 4 and 5 siblings, respectively, which is a relatively large number to provide a role for in the FB. In Case 6 there were also several cousins, or future shareholders, to consider. The numerous siblings were encouraged or decided themselves to explore paths outside the FB, following their free will, and when succession was deemed necessary some of them had to be attracted to the FB:

There was no other option than the youngest one carrying on the company. While he was still at school, from the age of 14, he went to work in the factory in the summer holidays. What he really loved was architecture, but when he was twenty-six his father died and so he decided to take over the company. (Case 1; Predecessor)

All our siblings and my nephews and nieces, a large bunch of people, took their own path ... but at some point, my father-in-law and I realized that we had to scout for a possible successor from the family. It was actually my father-in-law who chose my daughter, although my wife and I were the ones to approach her to try to find out how she felt about the idea. (Case 6; Predecessor)

This type presented an even wider set of imprinting mechanisms than the other two. They included the previously cited ones and also support from professionals (external or top management team), the discouragement of entry into the FB by encouraging self-made siblings, and later, when succession was necessary and imminent, facilitating entry directly at the management level.

Siblings involved in the FB showed a preference for business values (e.g., rigor, prudence, stability), followed by entrepreneurial values (e.g., perseverance, innovation), and ethical values (e.g., social commitment, attachment to people and the region). People-oriented values were less present than in the two previous types, and neither was there a clear pattern of preservation of predecessors' values, which were already of a mixed and thus less focused nature.

The resulting predisposition to join the FB was lower for siblings, and the engaged ones were strongly influenced by special circumstances such as being the last chance successor for the FB (Case 1) or being selected and recruited to join the FB, which was presented as a better opportunity for self-realization than alternative jobs (Case 6). The first situation (Case 1) reflects a normative type of commitment (Sharma and Irving, 2005) based on a perceived sense of obligation, while the second corresponds to a calculative type (Case 6):

The fact that I was the youngest offspring and none of the others had wanted to carry on the company (the eldest son renounced the opportunity and the girls were not in the running for reasons of temperament) increased the pressure on me to carry on the firm... It's also true that I had no clear alternative or personal vocation, I had no plans. (Case 1; Sibling 1)

I had never considered going into the FB. It wasn't in my scheme of things. We always said that the business was my parents' sixth child. So, when they suggested I go into the FB I was really surprised, and I decided to accept but on some conditions: I knew I wanted a child and I wanted enough freedom to be able to be with him or her; and I didn't want the pressure of having to be my father's successor. If there was someone more suitable than me, then it didn't have to be me. When they accepted the conditions, I decided to go into the business. (Case 6; Sibling 1)

We named this category as free will-centric imprinting, where families and predecessors promoted a variety of values and commitments regarding the FB based on free-will principles,

resulting in a low willingness to engage in the FB since most siblings were encouraged to pursue other non-FB-related professional alternatives. When the succession became pressing, willing successors were eventually found with the help of additional input, such as relying on a sibling sense of obligation or the recruitment of a chosen successor from careers outside the FB. Accordingly, we propose the following:

P3.1. Prevalent free-will family preferences induce free will-centric imprinting, promoting in siblings a variety of values and vocational motives to engage in any professional activity.

P3.2. Free will-centric imprinting decreases the likelihood of siblings willing to engage in the FB.

4.4. Other shaping factors for succession willingness

The previous analysis focused on the three detected patterns found in our sample, presenting the main differences in the motivations behind the previous generation and predecessors' imprinting styles that ultimately conditioned the type of values and motivation of siblings to engage in the FB. This generated a certain likelihood of counting on willing successors of varying degrees among siblings. However, siblings' responses within the same family were not the same. For example, in Case 1, free will-centric imprinting justified most siblings not being strongly motivated to engage in the FB, except for the youngest son who stated:

My brother turned the chance (to be a successor) down for two reasons. First, a personality clash or incompatibility with our father; the relatively small age gap between him and my father meant that they often clashed. And second, on an ideological level he sympathized with the '68 movement, so he had some values that did not tie in with being a businessman. ... In my case, I was the last hope for succession; it was either me or no one ... since my brother didn't want to and my sisters were not supposed to ... I was considering studying architecture, but eventually I did join the business. (Case 1, Sibling 1)

This situation describes two siblings with opposing outcomes. The stronger unwillingness of the eldest brother was related to his age (closer to the father's) and the influences he received from the social environment (the '68 movement). This can be considered a cohort effect (Marquis, 2003), attributable mostly to the eldest brother's temporal context, which was different from that of the youngest one, who was almost 12 years his junior. Another cohort effect was mentioned in Case 4 for the youngest sibling, who was still in her 20's and had

decided to study abroad looking for opportunities entirely unrelated to the FB, and who had particular values that were different from the previous siblings' and the predecessor himself, which he mentions as follows:

My youngest daughter from my first marriage ... well, she's decided for the moment that she doesn't want to be involved in the business ... she's abroad and has other dreams ... she is an environmentalist ... (Case 4, predecessor)

These findings suggest that the influence of external factors related to the time context, i.e., cohort effects, may increase or decrease willingness to engage in the FB based on the match of siblings' values and motives with the FB value proposition and the predecessors' values and motivations. Thus, we propose:

P4.1. Cohort-related experiences positively/negatively influence the effect of family imprinting style on the likelihood of siblings willing to engage in the FB when these experiences increase/decrease the match between siblings' and predecessors' values and motives, and the FB value proposition.

To this effect, and continuing with Case 1, the youngest brother, who was less reluctant to join the FB, saw himself influenced by two aspects: being the last hope for succession, a relevant emotional condition, reinforced later by his father's illness. Both situations made him feel forced to engage with and stay in the FB. The sequence of events making him the last "hope" for succession and his decision not to follow his vocation, which reinforced his commitment to the FB since he had no alternative professional career, can be understood as a path-dependent process (Marquis, 2003). Path-dependent effects can also be considered in the third type of imprinting since the family's free will-centrism, based on the value of free will, led siblings to explore vocational careers and take decisions that progressively distanced them from the FB:

My passion was gardening (not the FB) and my parents fostered my passion ... I went to England for better training in gardening ... I met my husband ... we started our gardening company. My family helped me with the new company (Case 3; Sibling 1).

My eldest daughter, she had another passion ... gardening ... and I understand it ... it was her mother's influence (Case 3; Predecessor).

I had never really seriously considered the possibility of joining the business, although I did study business whereas my brother studied architecture and my sister audiovisual communication ... we were building our own careers outside the FB (Case 6, Sibling 1)

Based on these findings, we propose that family imprinting entails and nurtures decisions that ultimately help explain the possibility of having more or less willing successors. FB-centric imprinting induces siblings to make decisions that are more compatible with the FB, while entrepreneurial-centric imprinting favors decisions that widen siblings' entrepreneurial potential, and a free will-centric imprinting style favors siblings exploring beyond the FB. Further, path-dependent decisions lead siblings to positively reinforce the referred degree of likelihood, as stated in the previous propositions P.1.2, P.2.2, and P.3.2. Therefore, we propose:

P.4.2. Path dependence positively influences the effects of family imprinting style on the likelihood of siblings willing to engage in the FB.

Besides these processes, the role of individual experiences and characteristics is also a source of heterogeneity, which may reduce the commonality of the same family imprinting style within a family as regards the FB.

5. DISCUSSION

The concept of imprinting has attracted interest from many fields, among which the business field is no exception. This paper uses the concept to analyze a recurring and crucial issue in the field of FB, family succession, providing a different approach where we show how the type of imprinting plays a significant role in siblings' willingness to become a successor. Our study shows how imprinting theory (Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013) can be used to explain both the heterogeneity between successor profiles across family firms and the homogeneity between sibling profiles within the same family. Furthermore, we show that path dependence and cohort effects may act as willingness moderators and therefore as sources of intra-family heterogeneity.

The present paper is compatible with the concepts of transgenerational entrepreneurship (Habbershon et al., 2010; Basco et al., 2019) and especially entrepreneurial legacy (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015) with a focus on explaining why predecessors influence siblings, but with significant nuances. The motivation for influencing siblings (the why) was found to be different for each type of imprinting, based on the importance given to the business, to entrepreneurship, and to free will, respectively. Entrepreneurial legacy is particularly important for the FB-centric type, where predecessors and siblings express their socio-emotional caring for the FB, which leads them to pursue FB survival. Differently, in the entrepreneurship-centric imprinting style, entrepreneurship directed towards the FB and elsewhere is promoted, as if the entrepreneurial legacy was more open to new ventures than in the FB-centric type. And contrarily, the entrepreneurial legacy was not as important for the free will-centric imprinting style, with the previous generation supporting siblings in finding alternative callings, and even risking the loss of their entrepreneurial legacy by disengaging siblings from FB succession. Therefore, while the study and concept of entrepreneurial legacy (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015) has been defined as a common element across long-lived FB, our imprinting approach allows and uncovers heterogeneity among FB because for predecessors entrepreneurial legacy is given varying importance and is of a different nature for each of the three imprinting styles.

The motivation to influence siblings (the why) was also explored in terms of different predecessor values, which were compared with siblings' values. Some, but not all, of the predecessor values were observed among all siblings, but with a different level of importance. The new generation was keener to refer to people-oriented values first, before referring to the values of their predecessors. Value congruence has already been found to be important in successors' willingness (Lee et al., 2019). The imprinting approach offers a possible complementary explanation for the construction of siblings' values.

Our findings suggest more heterogeneity in siblings' willingness to join the FB in the case of entrepreneurial and free will-centric imprinting styles. Conversely, a higher proportion of willing siblings is found and explained for the FB-centric imprinting style. In this regard, it is worth noting that there may be limits to imprinting intensity, in the sense that excessive predecessor or family pressure may induce fear or the desire to avoid responsibilities in the FB, as shown in some succession studies (e.g., Zellweger et al., 2011).

The present paper also delves into the aspect of imprinting mechanisms, a neglected topic in most of the literature linking imprinting and business. Moreover, this research extends the view expressed in several papers that not only are individual characteristics of the predecessor and successor important (e.g., Le Breton-Miller, Miller, & Steier, 2004; Sharma, Chrisman, & Chua, 2003), but that the interaction between them which leads to imprinting is crucial in defining succession willingness.

5.1. Family imprinting and succession willingness: the common effect

Marquis and Tilcsik (2013) define imprinting as a process whereby, during a sensitive period, a focal entity comes to reflect elements of its environment which persist despite subsequent environmental changes. Family constitutes one of the main sources of imprinting, as stated by all the interviewed individuals, due to the strong influence it exerts during the main sensitive periods of an individual, which are usually childhood and adolescence (Lambrecht, 2005; Dawson et al., 2015). Based on the analysis of the studied cases, we extracted three types of family imprinting, namely FB-centric imprinting, entrepreneurship-centric imprinting, and free will-centric imprinting, each of them likely to lead to a different succession situation. FB-centric imprinting is induced by prevalent SEW family preferences and is characterized by the presence of the father figure and education relevant to the FB as imprinting mechanisms. This imprinting style leads to an increased likelihood of siblings willing to engage in the FB.

Contrarily, free will-centric imprinting, which is induced by prevalent free-will family preferences, decreases this likelihood, which may cause a lack of willing successors. Entrepreneurship-centric imprinting, in turn, is induced by prevalent entrepreneurial family preferences, promoting the preservation of entrepreneurial values and calculative motives to engage in the FB. Entrepreneurship-centric imprinting increases the likelihood of siblings being willing to engage in the FB or new ventures.

We thus contribute to describing the processes that influence potential successors' intentions to engage in or take over the leadership of the FB (Zellweger et al., 2011), thereby extending previous work on succession intentions (Dawson et al., 2015; Sharma, Chrisman, & Chua, 2003) and using the imprinting theory (Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013) to offer a causal explanation of succession willingness. Figure 1 presents a model that stylizes the approach and findings of our research. In our model, the main drivers for these processes are the motivations of predecessors and previous generations, which are related to their values. In two of the types, the socio-emotional preference of the first type and the entrepreneurial preference of the second, the motivations were preserved from the previous generation. For these categories, the type of predecessor values (business values for the first type and entrepreneurial values for the second) were also preserved for siblings, although the new generation of both categories cited people-oriented values first. This suggests that the imprinting process can be useful to explain the preservation and evolution of family preferences and values across generations, expanding previous research (Reay, 2019; Garcia et al., 2019) on mechanisms for value transmission between generations.

----- Insert Figure 1 about here -----

5.2. Heterogeneity beyond family imprinting

Family imprinting can explain a large part of succession willingness, assuming that all siblings are subject to a relatively homogeneous imprinting process. However, for many, heterogeneity is currently the “elephant in the room” in the FB (Jaskiewicz and Dyer, 2017). Thus, the existing heterogeneity between siblings requires the inclusion of additional influence factors such as cohort effects, or similarity in characteristics and outcomes within individuals who share a common set of experiences over time, and path dependence effects, or historical events affecting values, preferences, and ultimately decisions. These effects help explain intra-family differences between siblings and different generations. For instance, path dependence positively influences the effect of family imprinting style on the likelihood of siblings willing to engage in the FB, while cohort-related experiences can act as either a positive or negative influence, depending on how these experiences lived by siblings lead to a fit with the predecessor's motives and the FB value proposition.

5.3. Implications for research

Following a “systematic combining” approach within abductive reasoning (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), our research provides comprehensive and parsimonious modelling of the process that explains the effect (causality) of family imprinting on succession willingness, including all the necessary elements (who, why, how, when, what, and so what) not previously considered as a set in FB research. This research shows how imprinting theory (Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013) contributes to family succession theory and is an important source to explain successor willingness, while defining imprinting patterns that shape successors’ willingness to succeed.

The analysis in this paper is subject to some limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, in our study, the cases are from a small geographical area. While this should not significantly affect the findings, incorporating additional geographical regions could provide additional insights into the different imprinting types or the effect of path dependence

and its interaction on the aforementioned types of imprinting. Second, our study analyzed two generations as a proxy of a dynamic view of the imprinting process. However, including additional generations, which would probably require a longitudinal analysis, would allow us to better observe the evolution of imprinting styles and see how they affect potential successors. Third, we did not analyze individual characteristics that were not a product of cohort effects or path dependence. Analyzing the impact that different individual characteristics could have would imply analyzing a significantly higher number of cases, adding granularity to the stated findings. Fourth, in most of the studied cases, the succession process was relatively complete and none of them presented a significant level of conflict regarding successor choice or the succession process itself. For this reason, future research could explore cases where the succession is still in progress or resulted in a higher level of conflict. This empirical analysis presented in the form of a family imprinting process is not an objective picture of a social reality or a process in *stricto sensu*, which would benefit future research with a longitudinal approach. Rather, it is what Alvensson and Deetz (2000:136) describe as a “set of impressions and interpretations produced by situated persons, characterized by feelings, imaginations, commitments and particular pre-structured understandings”.

Our study is essentially the perspective of succession willingness to join the core operating FB. However, in the selected FB, there were already some secondary businesses, siblings’ new ventures with family support, patrimonial holdings, and other structures such as business museums. This fact raises questions about the need for a wider perspective in the study of willing successors, broadening the analysis to the level of entrepreneurial families and considering not only the core operational business but also boundary organizations that altogether generate financial and socioemotional wealth for the family (De Massis, Kotlar and Manelli, 2021). Future research could explore the nature of imprinting processes and succession willingness in these larger entrepreneurial family ecosystems, possibly also

considering the range of alternatives *for* the successor, as well as alternatives *to* the successor to gain both a wider and deeper understanding of the complex process of succession.

5.4. Implications for practice

Higher succession willingness is mostly associated with an FB-centric imprinting style, but also with entrepreneurship-centric imprinting. The imprinting of willingness to become a successor generally starts with the previous generation and especially with predecessors' focus on the importance of the FB or of entrepreneurship. Our findings indicate that free will-centric imprinting, resulting from preferences beyond the preservation of the FB and the entrepreneurial attitude, lead to a low likelihood of willing successors. Thus, predecessors' focus seems important to attract siblings into the FB.

The views expressed in this paper can inspire owner-managers to be more aware of their role in succession intentions through both their preferences and values and their imprinting motivations. They can also learn from the effects of alternative sources of imprints, experiences, and mechanisms to ensure that the imprints positively nurture the willingness to engage in the FB. This paper provides an explicit and accessible view of the process, which can better guide family members, mentors, and consultants in the nurturing of future successors.

6. CONCLUSION

“Passing the baton” from predecessors to successors in family firms has long occupied and preoccupied practitioners and researchers. This research contributes to its understanding by empirically exploring and proposing a theoretical model of the process of nurturing willing successors, particularly by means of furthering the use of the imprinting theory in the FB. This paper is unique in that it provides an integrative theoretical and empirical analysis of the

imprinting of both willing and unwilling successors, and its interest lies in the fact that it uncovers commonalities and heterogeneities in the process of influencing the willingness to become a successor using imprinting and its characteristics.

Within the context of a fast-evolving social and technological society, low figures for the next generation's intention to stay in the family firm, and a latent “shallow roots with strong wings” culture, future research is needed to further test the proposed family imprinting approach and to better understand how the imprinting process may change subject to different situations, such as times of family conflict or business uncertainty.

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Table 1: Case overview of each FB and respondents

Business information						
	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6
Industry	Meat	Cork	Biscuit	Hardware	Decoration	Metal
Foundation	1917	1887	1908	1876	1912	1808 ^b
Legal incorporation	1972	1985	1982	1978	1979	1980
Employees	356	43	33	214	39	358
Operating income (millions of euros)	72.14	9.5	3.2	46.2	9.66	1084.84
Family in business information						
Family gen. with owner. ^a	3 rd	5 th	3 rd	2 nd	4 th	7 th / 2 nd ^b
Generations involved	Son & mother	Father & sons	Father & siblings	Father & sons	Father & siblings	Father & daughter
% of family ownership	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Family owners	2	3	2	3	1	24
Family CEO	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TMT (apart from CEO)	Non-family	Mixed	Non-family	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed
Family information						
Total offspring (of predecessors)	4	3	3	5	2	5
Of which involved in the FB	1	2	1	3	2	1
Predecessor respondent	Owner/Board 2 nd gen. 80's Male	Owner/Board 4 th gen. 60's Male	Owner/Board 3 rd gen. 60's Male	Owner/CEO 2 nd gen. 60's Male	Owner/CEO 4 th gen. 60's Male	Owner/Board 2 nd gen. 60's Male
2 nd Interviewee respondent (sibling 1)	Youngest sibling Owner/CEO 3 rd gen. 50's Male	Oldest Sibling Owner / CEO 5 th gen. 30's Male	Oldest Sibling Entrepreneur 4 th gen. 40's Female	Oldest sibling Employee 3 rd gen. 30's Male	Oldest Sibling Manager 5 th gen. 40's Female	Middle sibling Owner/CEO 3 rd gen. 30's Female
3 rd Interviewee respondent (sibling 2)		Younger sibling Owner/manager 5 th gen. 30's Male	Younger sibling CEO 4 th gen. 40's Female	Younger sibling Manager 3 rd gen. 30's Male	Younger sibling CEO 5 th gen. 40's Male	
4 th Interviewee respondent (sibling 3)			Youngest sibling Manager 4 th gen. 40's Male	Youngest sibling Employee 3 rd gen. 20's Male		
Siblings followed up with secondary sources	Oldest sibling Professional 3 rd gen. 60's male	Youngest sibling Entrepreneur 5 th gen. 20's female	No more siblings	Youngest sibling Student 3 rd gen. 20's female	No more siblings	3 other siblings Professional 3 rd gen. 20's 30's

^a since business foundation. gen. – generation; owner. – ownership.

^b The original FB was acquired in 1980 by a new business family, but a third generation of the new family (granddaughter of the buyer) is already on track for succession. It is a 7th generation FB since foundation, 2nd generation in the second family.

Table 2: Data structure and codes

concepts	Second-order themes	Aggregate dimensions
Predecessors and family previous generation mostly influential for siblings	Predecessors and previous generation's influence	Sources of imprints (WHO)
Family current generation mostly influential for siblings / Family next generation mostly influential for siblings	Other family members' influence	
FB in general and FB staff (especially top management team) as an influence for siblings	FB influence	
Environment, education, business / sector organizations as marginal influence	Other sources of influence	
Predecessors and family's strong caring for FB survival, passing down the generations, being known for the FB, feeling obliged to continue the FB	SEW preference	Motivations for imprinting (WHY)
Predecessors and family placing importance on entrepreneuring and innovating across generations, entrepreneurship as a strength, admiration for entrepreneurship of previous generations	Entrepreneurial preference	
Predecessors and family placing importance on siblings' free-will	Free-will preference	
Commitment, role-model, honesty, modesty, effort, social commitment, social responsibility	Ethical values	Predecessors' values (WHY)
Talent, competence management, excellence, business orientation, prudence, stability	Business values	
Innovation, passion for the product, passion for the sector, self-actualization	Entrepreneurial values	
"Father figure" influence (role model, mentoring, persuading, cohabitation, step-out)	Predecessors' and family mechanisms	Imprinting mechanisms (HOW)
Encourage education relevant to the FB's future		
Predicate past entrepreneurial models (professional and moral examples)		
Support from business/top management team or professionals	FB facilitation mechanisms	
Facilitate / encourage entrance into the FB (from the bottom, at management level, in between)	FB discouraging mechanisms	
Discourage entrance into the FB, encourage professions outside FB, self-made siblings.		
Support diversity among siblings (e.g., education, hobbies, etc.), self-made siblings	Ambivalent mechanisms	
Work experience outside the FB (positive, negative)		
Childhood/adolescence spent by siblings in the FB	Sensitive periods	Timing (WHEN)
Young adulthood experiences (work outside FB, stays abroad)		
Perilous times/calamities occurring to the FB	Times of critical events (rushing decisions)	
Sickness/death of a core family member		
Caring for people, team effort, positive work environment, sense of belonging, business as a family, sharing with employees, cohesion	People-oriented values	Imprinted values on siblings (SO WHAT)
Social commitment, attachment to people and to the region	Ethical values	
Rigor, excellence, control, quality, prudence, stability	Business values	
Perseverance, enthusiasm, passion, innovation	Entrepreneurial values	
Wanting to carry on the FB, wishing to continue the FB, willing the FB to reach more than 100 years, or even 200 years	Affective commitment	Imprinted FB commitment on siblings (SO WHAT)
Advantages, gains, easiness of joining the FB and costs of not joining. Negotiated conditions to join the FB	Calculative commitment	
Sense of obligation, FB as supposed "destiny", responsibility to the family and the FB.	Normative commitment	

Table 3: Exemplary evidence of primary codes in cases

First-order concepts	Primary data (interview quotations, book citations, press citations, website text, etc.)
Predecessor and family previous generation mostly influential for siblings.	It was basically a set of circumstances that brought me here as it wasn't my intention to work in the FB. But the previous generation and the importance to them of carrying on the business also played a part in that. (Case 3; Sibling 2)
Family current generation mostly influential for siblings / Family next generation mostly influential for siblings.	The previous generation is really important because they pass on some values to you, they teach you about the company...but that isn't any use to us without the support of the current generation when it comes to carrying on the business (Case 2; Sibling 1).
BF in general and FB staff (especially top management team) as an influence for siblings.	I joined the FB and there were 12 years when the previous and the new generations were working there together, and so I found people there who were at the end of their professional career and they were like teachers to me. I learned; I saw how they worked in the different areas of the company (commercial, purchasing, finances). I always say that I did the equivalent of a second university degree here in the company, learning from the others (Case 2; Sibling 1)
Environment, education, business / sector organizations as marginal influence.	My parents passed on to me an entrepreneurial legacy; a mix of passion and tradition, where business is a lifestyle. I believe that this has had a positive influence on me being willing to continue the business (Case 5, Sibling 1)
Predecessors and family strong caring for FB survival, passing generations, being known for the FB, feeling obliged with the continuation of the FB.	<p>I don't want the business to disappear and I want to carry on the FB. I want to have the opportunity to carry the company on and to be able to talk about 200 years, not 100 years. The family was an important factor for me; you could call it family responsibility. If I don't carry on the business, who will? And I know most of the workers and I like the business and my work. (Case 4, Predecessor)</p> <p>I have lived the company since I was really little. Especially when there was a traditional festival because that was part of the job. I didn't really fancy studying. But I knew I had to do something. I started studying to be a chemist, because I thought it could be useful to me in the company. But I didn't finish. I did the military service, and then when I started working I studied as a commercial specialist, thinking I could use this knowledge in the company to run it more professionally. And later, I asked myself what right have I got to break the succession when the previous generations gave the firm everything they had. (Case 5, Predecessor)</p>
Predecessors and family giving importance to entrepreneuring and innovating across generations, entrepreneurship as a strength, admiration for entrepreneurship of previous generations.	<p>We've been going for 100 years because over the generations we've really felt the company intensely, we've created passion for the product. (Case 2; Predecessor)</p> <p>You find yourself involved in it because you lived it, it was what you experienced when you were little. Apart from some work placements, I've never worked anywhere else. They're companies that have been going for a long time and where you feel at home. You don't talk about anything except for the company. And because the different people that have taken over the company have known how to innovate ... there's been an entrepreneur in every generation. (Case 2; Sibling 1)</p> <p>My grandfather was a true entrepreneur, I hardly knew him, but my mother talked to me about him, he was a reference, but I also tried not to idealize him. That is why I have always valued entrepreneurship and it has always motivated me to innovate, for example, we started exporting when this was a utopia (Case 3; Predecessor)</p>
Predecessors and family giving importance to siblings' free-will.	Because of the type of company we are, it's always taken priority. And there are lots of successors because my grandad had 12 children. I don't even know how many cousins I've got, but it's about 30. Because of this huge number of possible successors, we had to set out a family protocol to regulate how family members entered the company. The way we see it is that wherever possible (but not obligatorily), it's better to have someone in the family working in the governing bodies. And for a family member to enter the company, they have to fulfil a series of training and experience requisites...and you don't ask to work in the company, you are asked. That's why neither I or nor my siblings have ever seriously considered the possibility of going into the business, and you can see that in what each of us studied: I did study business, for example, but my brother did architecture and my sister did audiovisual communication... (Case 6; Sibling 1)

<p>Commitment, role-model, honesty, modesty, effort, social commitment, social responsibility.</p>	<p>My father saw the company with a very social vision, so he was working for a better society... He's even written some texts. He was a great thinker and moralist, and he had clear values, and all this from a very practical, human, ethical standpoint. (Case 1; Sibling 1) As a result of different adverse events, such as different fires and the civil war, we saw how everyone: family, workers, suppliers, etc. helped us. This somehow shaped our values, where helping others became central for us. (Case 5; Predecessor)</p>
<p>Talent, competence management, excellence, business orientation, prudence, stability.</p>	<p>Effort, honesty and a job well done are key values for us and ones we expect employees to share (Case 5; Predecessor) An element I think can co-exist perfectly well with globality and modernity is rootedness. The values I would name are compromise, exemplariness, talent management, organizational sensitiveness, A financial sense. (Case 4; Predecessor)</p>
<p>Innovation, passion for the product, passion for the sector, self-actualization.</p>	<p>In my opinion, innovation is key, I believe that today without innovation you are lost. That's why we always try to innovate both at production and product level. (Case 3; Predecessor). In order to continue to be in the market, you have to make a constant investment in research.... If my father were alive and saw the business, he wouldn't know about it today, for example we have incorporated a laboratory to analyze cork's quality. (Case 2; Predecessor)</p>
<p>"Father figure" influence (role model, mentoring, persuading, cohabitation, step-out).</p>	<p>At first, I didn't have an important role in the business, but then I started taking on more responsibility in different sectors. I was an assistant manager to my father, and I started to make decisions, and gradually there came a time when I started to notice that while the experience of the previous generation is obviously always valid, you start to see the world faster than they do. That's when I started to take the reins, but always listening to the opinion of the previous generation. (Case 2; Sibling) My dad is still in the company; we've been working together for 6 years now. And I am entirely my own boss in the area of purchasing. My father has the last word about everything else, but he does usually ask me what I think. (Case 4; Sibling) I never usually question my father because I'm in the phase where I've got so much to learn. What I want to do is listen and learn from him what I have to do given that he's been running the business successfully. And anyway, we usually agree about most things, which helps us work together like this. (Case 5; Sibling)</p>
<p>Encourage education relevant to the FB's future.</p>	<p>I studied Business Management and Administration. So, the degree I did was because of the FB, because if not I would have chosen psychology as that's what I always liked. And what's more, over time I've also seen that it's very linked to what I do in the company, because you need a lot of aspects of psychology to manage teams of people, deal with buyers, etc. But I always thought that business was more linked to the company, and when you're 18 it's always difficult to see what's beyond. (Case 2; Sibling 1)</p>
<p>Predicate past entrepreneurial models (professional and moral examples).</p>	<p>He's even written some texts. He was a great thinker and moralist, and he had clear values, and all this from a very practical, human, ethical standpoint. (Case 1; Sibling 1)</p>
<p>Support from business/top management team or professionals.</p>	<p>My father was quite clear on the fact that we had to be a team, a good management team made up of 4 trustworthy people who were key to the day-to-day running of the company ... I gradually started to take on more and more responsibility with the help of this management team. (Case 1; Sibling 1)</p>
<p>Facilitate / encourage entrance into the FB (from the bottom, at management level, in between).</p>	<p>... My father made us go to the factory to work doing basic jobs to get to know the process (Case 2; Sibling 2) When I first finished my degree, I did see the FB as a viable objective, but it wasn't my real intention. In fact, I did try it when I finished my degree because someone had to go on maternity leave. When the company I was working for started to have problems, our FB company was growing and they needed people, so my father asked me if I could help him with that, since they needed people. (Case 3; Sibling 2)</p>
<p>Discourage entrance into the FB, encourage professions outside the FB, self-made siblings.</p>	<p>The FB isn't a place where family members can get a job guaranteed. And the reason is simple: if they're good, they won't have any trouble finding a job and if they aren't any good, then don't come here! (Case 6; Predecessor)</p>

	I had never thought about going into this business. It wasn't in my scheme of things. We've always said, anyway, that the firm is my parent's sixth child. (Case 6; Sibling 1)
Support diversity among siblings (e.g., education, hobbies, etc.), self-made siblings.	The important thing is that our children are happy. If they are happy working in the company (family) then fantastic, but if they have better interests then they should pursue them. We are right here to help them (Case 3; Predecessor) The FB is not a place to provide jobs for all the family. That is why I have always believed that my children have to do what they like, as they are more likely to be good at it. (Case 6; Predecessor)
Work experience outside the FB (positive, negative).	The company I was working in (a company that made safes for hotels) wasn't going well, it had financial troubles, and there started to be problems. (Case 3; Sibling 2)
Childhood/adolescence time spent by siblings in the FB	I grew up here. When I was 7-10 years old, I used to visit wine cellars in La Rioja and the south of Spain with my dad. And from when I was 16-17 years old, I started working in the summers... obviously because my learning has been in this company since I was little. Like I said before, I used to go with my father to La Rioja to see wine cellars, and to the south of Spain to see cork. So, the FB played a big part in my childhood. Yes, from about age 16, I spent every summer working in the factory. (Case 2; Sibling 1)
Young adulthood experiences (work outside FB, stays abroad)	Before joining the FB, I worked in different companies, among them I worked in a consulting firm and in a pharmaceutical company, where I gained experience in marketing and sales, which served me later in the FB. (Case 6; Sibling) I did a short stay with a supplier in Italy...It meant that I was able to learn Italian, and over time I've seen that language skills are key to negotiate with clients, suppliers... (Case 5; Sibling 1)
Perilous times/calamities occurring to the FB	We've overcome three large obstacles throughout our history: The Civil War, fires after the Civil War, and most recently the fire of 1998 ... But we used these setbacks to re-think things and innovate. (Case 5, Predecessor) You know, the fires in the company. My father told you. It was a test for all (Case 5, Sibling 1)
Sickness/death of a core family member	... his (of Sibling 1) father died when I was 26 years old, which was when he decided to take over the company. (Case 1; Predecessor)
Caring for people, team effort, positive work environment, sense of belonging, business as a family, sharing with employees, cohesion.	Today we are a family, we are a family firm, but we also consider the workers and the team as a family. Both the people who have been working here for thirty years and those who have been working here for five are motivated to make sure the company goes well, and they have the feeling of belonging to a project and a common end. I think this is the key (Case 2; Sibling 1) We have survived over the generations because of our management ability and the family protocol, because the people who have succeeded have known how to get things done. The values are the FB, and not only the family but the workers too. The decisions we make are shared a lot with the workers and we look after them. (Case 2; Sibling 2)
Social commitment, attachment to people and to the region.	The family is very important, but the company comes first. The FB is the firm and the family; the family is a few of us, but there are a lot of us in the firm...and then there is society. Our values are first humility, humbleness, and respect, and second innovation, developing ideas, doing something unusual, approaching something differently, and last, creating value for society. (Case 6; Predecessor)
Rigor, excellence, control, quality, prudence, stability.	Our main values are rigor, stability (not uncontrolled growth, being sensible, prudence, doing things well), rooted to the territory, and rooted in the family. I see myself as a prudent entrepreneur. I think the social aspect is also important: look after the human environment, look to satisfy people (beginning with the ones closest at hand, like the management team). (Case 1; Sibling 1)

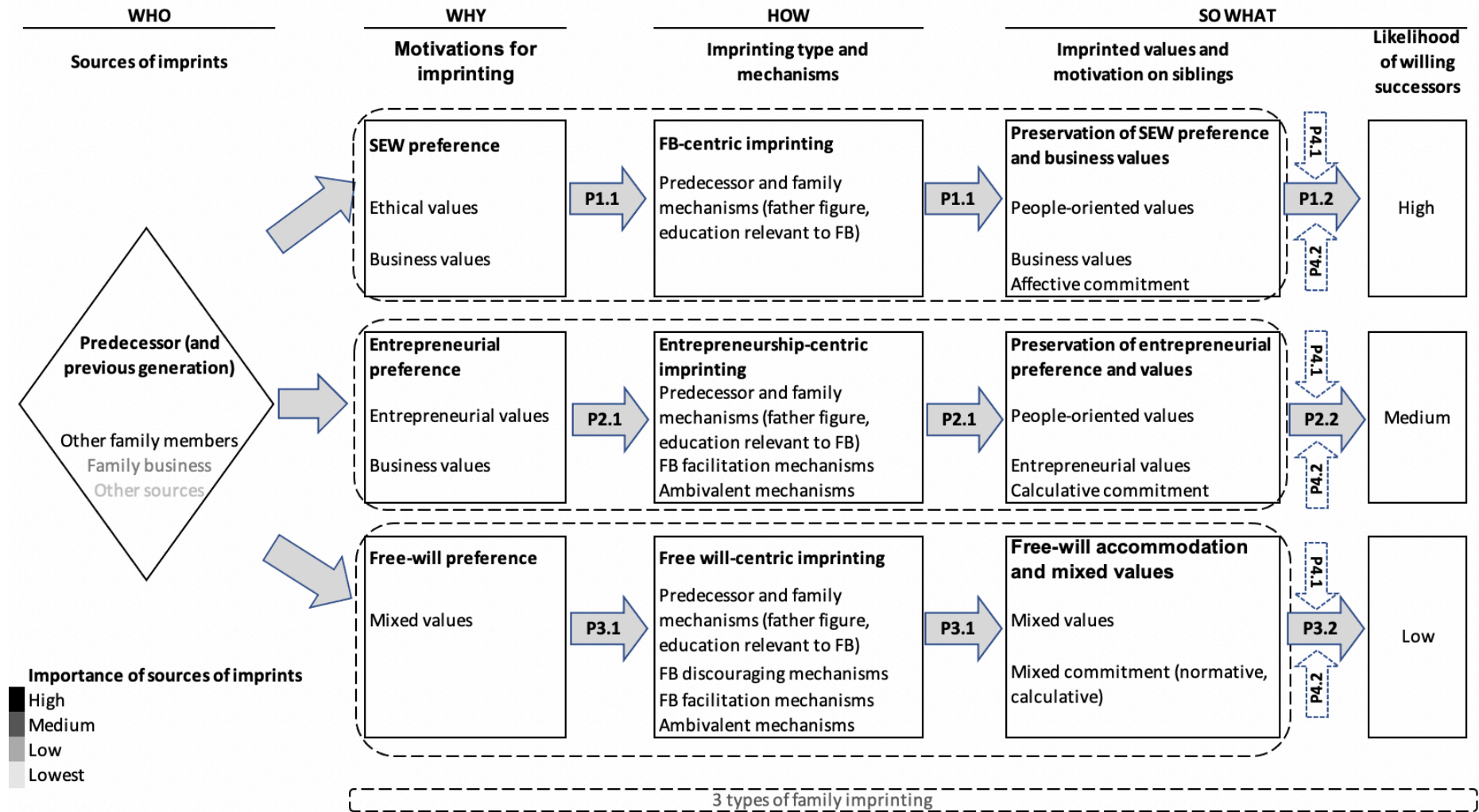
<p>Perseverance, enthusiasm, passion, innovation.</p>	<p>The most outstanding values and traits of the company are passion for the product and helping people and the sector itself. We have been going for 100 years because over the generations we have felt the company, we have created passion for the product. One thing we have always been clear about is that you shouldn't do things out of a sense of duty, but because you like it, and this is one of the reasons why our company has been there all these years. (Case 2; Predecessor)</p>
<p>Wanting to carry on the FB, wishing to continue the FB, willing the FB to reach more than 100 years, or even 200 years.</p>	<p>We are boy, girl, girl, boy in our family. The eldest one didn't want to work in the FB and girls were ruled out at that time, so my father was adamant that it had to be me. And the way was to make a member of the family the sole owner. (Case 1, Sibling 1) ...I went straight into the FB because it was what I had known all my life and I liked it. (Case 2; Sibling 1) The way it works for us is that my brother oversees the management, production, and exports as he's more adventurous than me... I work in the back-office and deal with the suppliers. I'm more pragmatic and steadier. We complement each other perfectly. (Case 5; Sibling 2)</p>
<p>Advantages, gains, easiness of joining the FB and costs of not joining. Negotiated conditions to join the FB.</p>	<p>... when they suggested I go into the FB I was really surprised, and I decided to accept but on some conditions: I knew I wanted a child, and I wanted enough freedom to be able to be with him or her; and I didn't want the pressure of having to be my father's successor. If there was someone more suitable than me, then it didn't have to be me. When they accepted the conditions, I decided to go into the business. (Case 6; Sibling 1)</p>
<p>Sense of obligation, FB as supposed "destiny", responsibility with the family and the FB.</p>	<p>When I was little, my bedroom was over the bakery, the wood burning oven passed through the wall of my bedroom. So I knew exactly when they were working...the smell of biscuits woke me up. For me, the family environment was key ... and I grew up like this. (Case 3; Previous generation)</p>

Table 4: Intra-case main findings and imprinting types

Sources of imprints for siblings					Siblings' choice to succeed in the FB or not									
	Predecessors and previous generation	Other family members	Family business	Other factors (environment, organizations, education)	Family imprinting motivations	Type of family imprinting	Imprinting mechanisms	Sensitive periods / Timing	Siblings willing to lead the FB	Siblings willing to be involved but not lead the FB	Siblings entreprenuring in new businesses	Siblings with other professional calls	Siblings with ideological mismatch	Proportion of willing successors
Case 4	●	●	●		SEW preferences by predecessors or previous generation	FB-centric imprinting	The presence and power of the "father figure" (successor gets power and freedom to make decisions/implement projects) Education relevant to FB future	Siblings spent time during childhood/adolescence in the FB Siblings travelled abroad/stayed abroad Siblings did previous work outside the FB	■	■				High
Case 5	●	●	●	●	SEW preferences by predecessors or previous generation	FB-centric imprinting	Exemplary (positive or negative) out of the FB experience The presence and power of the "father figure" (successor is continuously mentored and supported by predecessor) Education relevant to FB future	Siblings spent time during childhood/adolescence in the FB Siblings travelled abroad/did a stay abroad	■	■				High
Case 2	●	●	●		Entrepreneurial preferences by predecessors or previous generation	Entrepreneurship-centric imprinting	The presence and power of the "father figure" (successor gets power and freedom to make decisions/implement projects; predecessor is consulted) Education relevant to FB future Facilitate entrance (from the bottom)	Siblings spent time during childhood/adolescence in the FB Siblings travelled abroad/did a stay abroad	■	■	■			Medium
Case 3	●	●	●		Entrepreneurial preferences by predecessors or previous generation	Entrepreneurship-centric imprinting	Exemplary (positive or negative) out of the FB experience The presence and power of the "father figure" (successor gets power and freedom to make decisions/implement projects; predecessor accepts changes) Education relevant to FB future Support diversity among siblings (e.g., education, hobbies, etc.) Facilitate entrance (subordinate)	Siblings spent time during childhood/adolescence in FB Siblings did previous work outside the FB	■	■	■			Medium
Case 1	●	●	●		Siblings' free-will preferences by predecessors and previous generation	Free will-centric imprinting	Business/Top management team or professional support The presence and power of the "father figure" (successor is mentored and supported by predecessor) Education relevant to FB future Persisting past entrepreneurial models/Professional and moral examples	Siblings spent time during childhood/adolescence in the FB Sickness/death of a core (e.g., predecessor) family member				■	■	Low
Case 6	●	●	●		Siblings' free-will preferences by predecessors and previous generation	Free will-centric imprinting	Business/Top management team or professional support The presence and power of the "father figure" (successor gets power and freedom to make decisions/implement projects) Education relevant to FB future Discourage entrance into the FB (encourage self-made siblings) Facilitate entrance (management position)	Siblings did previous work outside the FB Siblings travelled abroad/did a stay abroad			■	■		Low

● High influence ● Medium influence ● Low influence

Figure 1: Types of family imprinting for nurturing willing successor



Note: P1.1, P1.2, P2.1, P2.2, P3.1, P3.2, P4.1 and P4.2 depict the corresponding propositions offered in the Discussion section.