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Succession planning and continuity of family owned businesses owned by previously disadvantaged individuals

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DECLARATION

I, Vuma Sakhile Ngcobo, declare that this research article is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the Graduate School of Business Administration, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Vuma Sakhile Ngcobo 

Signed at Roodepoort

On the 10th day of February 2023

DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to my parents, thank you for placing our education as your number one priority. This research article was inspired by our unique experiences as a family.

To my father, the rough seas you have had to navigate have served as an important lesson that may, through this paper, contribute positively to previously disadvantaged communities. Ngcobo!

To my mother, thank you for the motivation and encouragement to endure. Making you proud gives me a form of joy that I cannot even begin to describe. You are the reason why I love learning.

Akwande Mafuze!

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- To all my research participants, thank you for rising to the call and most importantly, thank you for honouring the commitment. Your insights are invaluable and will contribute positively to the body of knowledge.

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ABSTRACT

Family owned businesses in South Africa are a pivotal institution. These businesses compete in several sectors in the form of small, medium, and micro enterprises, and contribute significantly to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They are also a key source of employment for masses in the country. Many of the South African businesses listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange today started out as family businesses, with some of the most notable being Anglo American and Ackermans. These businesses have been passed down several generations with some families still holding a stake to this very day. However, it is notable that most family businesses tend to struggle with succession planning and the transfer of ownership and power. Previous studies have revealed that in other parts of the world, 70% of family businesses fail or are sold before the second and third generation due to a failure in planning or the adequate execution of said plan. Consistently, this phenomenon is also common in South Africa, with several past and even ongoing high-profile succession battles over businesses and assets being observed. A common thread is that most of these battles, past and ongoing, are within the previously disadvantaged communities. The purpose of the study, therefore, was to investigate and draw insights into succession planning and continuity in family owned businesses founded by Previously Disadvantaged Individuals (PDIs). Data was collected through a semi-structured interviews with business owners with a business footprint across South Africa. The study found that a sizeable portion of small businesses did not have a succession plan in place when compared to the much larger enterprises. The study uncovered that some of the reasons these businesses did not have succession plans in place was to avoid conflict; some of the owners spent more time dealing with operational business issues, while others expressed a lack of adequate knowledge on succession planning. The study also confirmed that the existing cultural belief systems in the South African context could also to some degree, have an influence on the approach to succession planning. These influences often result in the succession process favouring male heirs over their female counterparts, and a majority of these

succession plans have no structure – all of which makes the process less effective. However, other findings indicated that education, experience, and social background had a stronger influence on poor succession planning over some of the cultural elements. The study made recommendations for various strategies that business owners can employ to close the gaps in the succession planning process. These include the corporatisation of family businesses through governance, and the utilisation of legal documents like wills, trusts and binding agreements. The findings and recommendations derived from this study will contribute positively to family businesses, particularly on the building blocks to developing and implementing successful succession plans.

Keywords: Family owned businesses (FOBs), Succession planning, Previously disadvantaged individual (PDI), Previously disadvantaged communities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Family owned businesses (FOBs) in South Africa are pivotal to the country's economic growth. These businesses represent a broad spectrum of economic sectors within the South African economy and compete in the areas of retail, farming, logistics, public transport, industrial and other service sectors. In his study of the problems and perspectives in management, Visser (2014) posited that by the year 2010, family owned businesses in South Africa accounted for 50% of the country's economic growth. Furthermore, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC, 2016) suggests that local family owned firms remained optimistic about the prospects of their growth, with 84% of these firms anticipating to continue growing in the range of 20%. However, the COVID-19 pandemic may have had a significant impact on these forecasts, even though some of these businesses exhibit the potential to grow beyond the humble beginnings of their inception. This assertion is supported by the fact that a substantial number of companies on the JSE started out as family businesses and grew organically to the stature that necessitated their listing on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Phikiso (2017) validated this claim, revealing that 60% of the businesses listed on the JSE began

as family businesses. Examples of these include Anglo American, Remgro and Pick n Pay.

Family businesses, which normally fall within the scope of Small, Micro and Medium enterprises, are not exempt from the challenges that face large enterprises. According to PWC (2016), small businesses face short term challenges that include growing revenue, cost containment, attracting and affording the right talent, corruption and many others that relate to the country's economic hardships and the shrinking disposable income of customers. Additional to these, adequate management and succession planning has also been found to be a major challenge faced by family businesses. A survey conducted by PWC (2016) revealed that only 17% of South African family owned businesses had a succession plan in place that was discussed and implemented or that had clear implementation guidelines. The lack of succession planning within South African family businesses, more specifically those founded and owned by previously disadvantaged South Africans, presents itself as a key survival and sustainability risk for these businesses that create many employment opportunities and contribute greatly to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As a result, this research report investigated succession planning as an imperative for business continuity, with a focus on businesses founded by previously disadvantaged individuals.

1.1. Background and context

Family owned businesses (FOBs), much like any other enterprise operating in any market, are faced with numerous challenges that can stem from internal operational issues and from other external market factors. One such a challenge that is often overlooked is that of succession planning that will ensure the long term sustainability and growth of the business. According to Stalk and Foley (2012), 70% of family businesses fail or are sold before the second generation, while only 10% of those that do survive the intergenerational transition are successful. In South Africa, only one out of four family owned businesses survive into the second generation, indicating that 75% of family owned businesses

effectively fail when the owner passes (Nonkwelo, 2019). Over the years, a majority of the FOBs fail due to succession battles between family members, and in the case where a successful handover has been facilitated, the business fails because of poor management by the second generation. These trends highlight the importance of adequate preparation for the eventual handover, and the need for organisations to steer away from making the founder's identity focal to its operations and continuity.

It has been found that a fair number of FOBs' leaders avoid succession planning and its clear communications because of its contentious nature, as it has often resulted in conflict between family members. Further to this, family businesses would rather not plan for succession through written legal documents, but rather follow cultural and social norms in determining succession.

The challenge of succession in FOBs is not unique to South Africa, but similar cases have erupted in other areas of the globe as well. For example, Reliance Industries, a company that was founded in 1977 in (India), traded in various sectors ranging from energy to retail. The founder of the business, Dhirubhai Ambani, died of a heart attack in 2002 without a clear succession plan or will in place. Following his passing, a long succession battle ensued between his two sons and ultimately ended with the company being split into two separate entities know as Reliance Industries and Indian Petrochemical Corporation Limited (IPCL) (Sekulich, 2018). In the case of Reliance Industries, it can be argued that the organisations split had a negative impact on the business through shareholder value destruction, considering the smaller size of the respective businesses post the split. Another global example of a succession battle with significant impact is the case of McCain Foods (Canada), where an impasse about succession between the two founders (brothers) resulted in one of the disgruntled parties starting up Maple Foods (Daglish, 1993). This split introduced a direct competitor with intricate knowledge on McCain Foods, its processes, and practices in the market.

In South Africa, a similar succession battle is currently brewing as well within the Maponya family, who are currently engaged in a legal battle over the R1 Billion

fortune that the Soweto businessperson left behind, with some of the assets in his estate falling into a state of disarray because of the conflict (Zuma, 2022). These succession battles result in a value leakage and in the most extreme cases, they result in catastrophic business failure; as is the case with the Maponya fortune dispute. The extent and outcome of this battle is still unravelling, but the impact on business operations thus far are tangible, as there has already been a consequent pause in trading activity at the Maponya Poultry Farm (Zuma, 2022).

Stalk and Foley (2012) highlight the pitfalls of succession planning, and how the inability to think of the long-term sustainability of the business can contribute to business failure. The Family Business Association of South Africa (FABASA) also recognises succession planning as a key issue that has a significant impact on the long-term sustainability and continuity of FOBs. FABASA has outlined that the governance procedures and structures that owners and their families should consider in managing succession. Further to the issue of succession, another factor that has been found to contribute to the failure rate of FOBs is the lack of instituted last wills and testaments. The context of estate planning, based on the facts provided by Gavaza (2021) highlight that over 70% of South Africans do not have a last will and testament in place. This highlights another issue that contributes to the low success rate of family businesses. The absence of a last will and testament as demonstrated in the problem statement can indirectly result in a succession battle as was the case with Reliance Industries after the passing of Dhirubhai Ambani. Estate planning is equally important because it is complementary to succession planning and has value as a legal instrument that can be used to facilitate a smooth transition, especially in a scenario where the person in question is deceased.

1.2. Problem Statement

It has been noted that succession and estate planning, more especially in previously disadvantaged communities, has been an informal process that could be subject to the laws of village politics (Nonkwelo, 2019). It has been found that

succession planning and estate planning in family owned entrepreneurial enterprises has not been prioritized by business owners because of the daily pressures of running a business, which results in them placing all their focus on the operational business needs over the strategic.

Therefore, based on the foundations presented in the background and context, the problem statement underpinning this research is the absence of succession and estate planning in FOBs within previously disadvantaged communities. Further to this problem, is the resulting value leakage/destruction resulting from such poor succession planning.

1.3. Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of succession planning and business continuity of FOBs owned by previously disadvantaged individuals; with the purpose of highlighting how FOBs fail as a result of a lack of succession planning. The intention of this research is to make contributions to the body of knowledge and make recommendations through the development of a framework that can improve how these businesses conduct succession planning to ensure the long term growth and sustainability of the business long after the owner. The study will be done through employing a qualitative research approach.

1.4. Research Questions

- Therefore, based on the issues highlighted in the problem statement and gap identified in the literature review (covered in chapter 2), this research seeks to answer the following primary question: *Why is succession planning not considered by family owned businesses?* In support of this, the following secondary research questions have been derived: *What factors influence the manner in which family owned businesses tackle succession planning?*

- *How can families ensure continuity of their business when the founders pass on, become incapacitated or retire?*

1.5. Significance of the study

The background and context in this section has clearly demonstrated the destructive nature of the lack of succession planning in the growth and sustainability of businesses. This study is significant because it looks to address this stated problem that is affecting many family businesses that are founded, owned, and operated by members of families from previously disadvantaged background. Succession is a contentious issue that has not been managed in the best viable way and is often left to unfold in an uncontrolled manner. This study has the potential to draw key insights into answering why succession planning is overlooked and to further develop a simplified framework that business owners can use to guide them through the process of long term succession planning and implementation, helping them mitigate against some of the business risks and exposures.

1.6. Limitations and delimitations

This study is primarily looking into succession planning; however, the researcher does not focus on the entire scope of succession planning, which would include various inherited institutions such as churches and royal family households, but rather, focuses on family owned businesses that have been founded by previously disadvantaged individuals. This study will cover succession planning and its relation to business continuity and investigate reasons why succession planning fails in businesses owned by previously disadvantaged individuals (PDIs). This study will not be limited to SMME’s but will look into businesses across the revenue scale.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction to Literature review

Succession planning for FOBs has been highlighted in the background and context section of this paper as one of the long-term challenges that businesses have to face. Succession is a key element that can drive the intergenerational survival and growth of family businesses. Lack of succession planning has proven to be a challenge for many businesses founded by previously disadvantaged individuals and in some cases, has led to some form of value loss either through a rapid decline in revenue and closure of the business, damage to the brand value and the loss of market share. This literature review will focus on various concepts and literature related to family owned business and several concepts related to succession planning in these businesses such as family owned business, estate planning vs succession planning, governance and other theories in relation to succession.

2.2. Definition of a family owned business/ enterprise

Poza (2010) defines a family business as an enterprise that is founded, or majorly owned and managed by an individual or group of family members. In this book, the author provides insights into FOBs, elaborating that they may be formed in sole proprietorships, private companies, closed corporations, and limited liability companies. In some cases, there is an undefined line between the shareholder, owner, and management, because more often than not, all these are the same person or related group of individuals. Some of the characteristics he used to further define FOBs include ownership of 15% or higher by two or more family members; decision making, and strategy largely defined by family members; organisational culture and values emanate or are similar to the family's value systems; and lastly, there is a heavy reliance on deep relationships between family members who are involved in the business and there is a desire by the main member of the family to keep the business within the family.

Similarly, Sabrah and Xiao (2015) define a family business as a corporation or entity whose major share is owned by one particular family, which also has an influence on the daily operations and managing of the business. Decades ago, Donnelly described a family business as "*a company that has been closely identified with at least two generations of a family, where this link has had a mutual influence on company policy and on the interest and objectives of the family*" (Donnelley, 1964, p.93 - 105) The author is effectively suggesting that a business becomes a family business when, additional to the first generation, a member of the family from a second generation is involved directly or indirectly in the business.

Based on the literature reviewed, key elements that define a family business is, firstly, the element of ownership by one or more family member, where a main member or leader of the family is present and is a dominant figure in the business. Another characteristic is family influence on the organisation's culture and strategy, as well as the participation of one or more family members, both indirectly through ownership structures, or directly through participation, in the running of daily tasks. Furthermore, an important characteristic that defines a family business is the family centred approach to decision making.

2.3. Estate vs succession planning in family business

Succession planning was defined as "*systemic, long term process of determining goals, needs and roles within an organisation and preparing individuals or employee groups for responsibilities relative to work needed in the organisation*" (Ali & Mehreen, 2018, p.2). In this article, the authors highlighted the importance of succession planning as a tool for organisational growth and as a value lever to secure or grow revenues. The authors argued that the implementation of a structured succession planning process that is supported by the relevant use of legal instruments, can promote continuity. With relevant legal instruments like a will, the risks of succession that arise because of a leadership vacuum during an unexpected transition can be mitigated against. Similarly, Paço and Fernandes (2021) described succession planning as a process of well-defined actions that

prepare and lead the transition of family leadership, both in the physical essence of leadership and from the perspective of capital ownership. In this article, the authors highlighted succession planning as being one of the key challenges faced by FOBs. They also highlighted key failures around succession planning and referenced a lack of clarity on the succession plan and a lack of adequate training, skills, business acumen and preparation, as the key reasons why succession fails. The authors proceeded to loosely define failure in the scope of immediate failure due to a succession battle, or failure within a brief time period post succession. One of the complementary concepts supported by legislation in the form of a legal document linked to succession planning, which makes succession planning possible, is estate planning.

Estate planning, on the other hand, was defined by Wahab et al. (2021) as a critical element of managing assets while one is still alive. It consists of managing assets and liabilities in one's portfolio while still alive and making use of an executor or trustee for this purpose in an event of death. Nel (2010) easily defined estate planning to be the simple task of preparing a last will and testament whilst still alive. In his article, Nel (2010) highlighted that people and business owners who have accumulated assets and liabilities leave their families and businesses in financially vulnerable positions after their passing, exposing them to financial and business risks that could have been mitigated through the instituting of the relevant legal documents.

In drawing the link between estate planning and succession planning, Lowe (2021) highlighted a common misconception made, that succession planning and estate planning are the same thing. It is unclear as to why there is difficulty in delineating the difference between the two concepts. In the article, Lowe (2021) articulates the differences between succession planning and estate planning, stating that one is directly focused on the business, handover, and continuity, whereas the latter is focused on the assets in an individual's estate. However, although estate planning and succession planning may not be the same, Lowe argues that the two are complementary to each other, further arguing that both

are important in facilitating the transfer of assets and mitigating the risk of losses either through tax or value destruction born from leadership vacuums.

2.4. Recommendations and best practice in succession planning in family businesses

Gomba and Kele (2016) focused largely on the process that the incumbent should follow and apply when selecting a successor. The findings of their study revealed that a number of factors need to influence the decision when selecting a successor. These ranged from scoping out successor capabilities and competencies, the relationship between the successor and the incumbent, consensus and support of the potential successor by the family members, the planned time of succession, the successor's commitment to promoting the interests of the business, and lastly, the gauge or appetite for risk. The authors highlighted that these factors were critical for the management and operational success of the business.

In another study, Nonkwelo (2019) acknowledged the challenges that FOBs face due to the absence of governance processes and procedures, additional to the already limiting family orientated process of decision making. Largely dependent on the size of the enterprise, the decision-making processes and practices may be informal. In these types of organisations, rules and guidance on succession are not clearly defined in the same manner that they would be in the case of large corporations. Large corporations, unlike FOBs which are generally smaller in size and have no direct accountability to external stakeholders, have the necessary governance procedures and processes in place. These organisations are held accountable through the corporate governance requirements they need to adhere to through their boards and the respective shareholders that they represent. Like others, Nonkwelo (2019) also recognises the role that FOBs and entrepreneurial SMMEs play in job creation, and thus recommended that formal policy changes to enact stronger governance practices in family business should be considered and enforced through regulations such as the companies act via a formal set of guidelines to assist in facilitating the succession planning process.

In another study, Phikiso (2019) too found that a number of factors resulted in the lack of succession planning in FOBs. These included lack of trust from the founder to successfully hand over the business to competent individuals; and the avoidance of conflict that could arise in the family because of the chosen persons for succession. Key recommendations emanating from Phikiso's study was the need for governance structures within FOBs and compliance with the legislation in relation to such successions. This includes considering elements that encourage good estate planning, adequate training, preparation for prospective successors and lastly, the importance of the incumbent and the affiliated shareholders should there be any, to choose a successor based on merit. The selected individual should in most cases be equipped with the right skills, capabilities and competencies to takeover and provide leadership to the FOB.

2.5. Past studies on succession planning

There have been conducted studies on succession planning, both globally and in South Africa. Each of these studies have tackled a specific area within succession planning and some were outlined in the discussion above. One of the studies was conducted by Nonkwelo (2019), and it looked into succession and planning in FOBs from a gender perspective. In this qualitative study, the author investigated why women are overlooked or are considered incapable of taking up a leadership role in the family business. The findings of this study were that women often get overlooked to lead and run family businesses due to gender bias and succession beliefs, which are generally geared towards favouring male heirs.

In another study, Loukas et al. (2004) looked into Greek family firms. This study was based on the fact that the family owned structure was the most common business structure in Greece. The researcher looked into the corporate governance structure, practices, and processes in Greek businesses and highlighted that corporate governance was a requirement to operate in Greek businesses, and how these governance requirements contributed positively to efficient succession planning in Greek family firms. The findings of this study indicated that 77.7% of Greek businesses had a succession plan in place as a

result of the legal governance requirements. This paper concluded that although family owned firms had some form of governance in place in Greece compared to their global counterparts, the processes were still not as well established as those of large corporates and multinationals.

Lastly, a study conducted by LeCounte (2020) also considered succession planning in family businesses. This study highlighted challenges in succession planning and how it is often overlooked in family businesses. The case touched on the challenges and subsequent decline the Dunlop tyre company faced due to the absence of succession planning, which resulted in its inability to keep the business ownership structure within the family. The findings of this research paper placed the responsibility of succession planning solely in the hands of the founding CEO or main leaders from the families that own these businesses. Having one member of the family member (normally the leader or current CEO) taking leadership of the succession can potentially lead to the avoidance of succession conflict that may arise at a later stage. The outputs of this research resulted in the development of a conceptual succession model for family owned businesses that is centred on tacit knowledge transfer, family businesses, and family business continuity as three streams were interrelated.

2.6. Theory on succession planning in family businesses

The stage model is one recommended by Singleton (2019) as a stage approach to succession planning. This process involves these four transitionary stages: initiation, selection, education, and transition. This process is more like a filtered process that starts with a wide variety of candidates with initiation in the form of on the job training and development. The second phase is the selection stage where the candidate is selected, third phase consists of various training and development required to ensure that the successor is well equipped in all aspects to achieve the desired outcomes and achieve the strategic development goal. The last phase then includes transition in which the reigns are exchanged between the incumbent and the successor. The gap within this theory is that it is

geared towards corporate enterprises and is focused on succession of roles, rather than the succession of roles and ownership, which is a key differentiator in family business succession and corporate leadership succession.

Another management theory/ model proposed by Coffman (2014) is the Family Business Succession model. This model combines two approaches surrounding business and systems theory, intertwining three relationships between the founder or leader, the business, and the family. This model then further introduces various external factors that influence the process which include access to resources and business formality. The use of family systems theory gives context on key enablers that need to be present for a family to operate cross generationally. These factors highlighted by Coffman include the owner characteristics, enterprise characteristics, business formality, family influence, access to capital, and other macro-environmental factors. By making use of this theory, Coffman was able to bring in these elements into family business planning and succession. The main limitation of these theory is that is it built on numerous assumptions, particularly around the ideal family, which is rather impractical and hard to extrapolate. Although this model recognises internal factors, it also needs to recognise elements that are specific to the family as an institution.

2.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the research articles, a family business is clearly defined within the parameters of ownership (by one or more family members), and by the participation of one or two generations. The desired intention of such businesses is the seamless and successful hand over from one generation to another. Another key characteristic of FOBs is the influence of family members on the decision-making processes in management, the execution of daily activities and the forming and crafting of the business culture and strategy. Businesses that meet this criterion fall under the scope of FBOs and not entrepreneurial enterprises. Although FOBs are entrepreneurial in nature, they still possess distinct characteristics that distinguish them from the main market.

Furthermore, the authors of the articles clearly highlight the necessity for succession planning and the value destructive nature that results should it not be executed correctly. In addition, the literature also presented the key differences between estate and succession planning, carefully highlighting that while these concepts may be similar, they are different and interlink in specific areas. Through the use of legal instruments like a last will and testament, business owners can mitigate risks that come with bad succession and estate planning. The complexities of succession planning in a family business require a longer-term view in managing succession planning and necessitates the employment of a combination of models. It is opposed to relying on only one model for the full expression of the business needs in this regard.

Regarding succession planning theory, there are many models and frameworks that are provided to supplement the succession planning process. However, these processes are more geared towards succession processes for well-established organisations and focuses more on the succession of the leadership role (CEO), rather than that of succession planning in FOBs. FOBs have a more inherent complexity by virtue of the fact that there are more stakeholders involved. Furthermore, the theory does not address issues that are related to ownership structures. The theory on succession planning is more short-term orientated and is geared to support individual roles and subsequently ends there.

Recommendations from key authors are strongly centred around owners of family businesses taking a long-term view on the succession planning process and transition. Through the detailed selection, training and preparation of successors, business owners can make significant strides in ensuring a smooth transition and cementing the future of the business through strong leadership. Another key area alluded to in the recommendations from the literature is the importance of governance within families and having the right supporting structures that can guide families on the processes and best practices that can be followed when in the succession process.

A glaring gap within all the literature reviewed was mostly around the factors that influence succession planning, particularly within the community of previously disadvantaged individuals. Authors like Gomba and Kele (2016) touched on the processes and decisions that should be considered when selecting a successor. However, they did not elaborate on factors that influence succession planning decisions. Although Phikiso (2017) highlighted a lack of trust and conflict avoidance as key issues surrounding a lack of succession planning, there remains a gap on the influence of cultural belief systems on succession planning and how decision making and indecision results thereof.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section focuses on the research methodology that was used to address the research problem stipulated in section 1.2. The term research methodology has been described as the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information to answer questions (Goundar, 2019). Further to this description, Goundar (2019) provided key characteristics of research methodology, highlighting that it is systematic, controlled, verifiable and rigorous. This section therefore outlines the research methodology, the research design applied to this research, the chosen data collection method and provides a description of the research sample.

3.1. Research Strategy

Goundar (2019) described two approaches to research strategy; saying these are either structured or unstructured. According to Dawson (2019), the structured approach relates to the quantitative research strategy, which uses structured research tools such as questionnaires and surveys to produce statistics and meaningful data to answer a research problem. It is a much faster approach to collecting data and processing insights and generally relies on collecting insights from a large group of participants. The unstructured approach to research is known as the qualitative research method. Dawson (2019) describes this method as one that looks to obtain in-depth insights based on personal experience, beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes. This method makes use of research tools such as focus groups and interviews through unstructured questions to obtain deep insights. This research approach has fewer participants but has the capability to withdraw deeper insights.

For the purposes of this research, a qualitative research methodology was applied. The reason for this selected method was to draw deep insights from the research participants on their thoughts about succession planning and their experiences around it.

3.2. Research Design

For qualitative research , there are several types of research designs that have been found to complement this strategy. These include the longitudinal study, cross sectional study, case study, comparative study and grounded theory (Bryman,2012). Motivated by the research topic and the primary and secondary research questions, a longitudinal research design was selected for this paper. The longitudinal approach, when compared to the cross-sectional approach, is a research design method that allows one to obtain data from multiple individuals at separate times. The cross-sectional approach, on the other hand, allows the researcher to collect data from multiple individuals or groups at a single point in time. The key driver for this selection is the appreciation for unique individual experiences from individuals who are experiencing or have experienced challenges highlighted in the introduction and the problem statement description. The selected design will assist in drawing multidimensional and deep insights into the problem and the research gap highlighted in the literature review.

3.3. Data Collection method

For the purpose of this study, the chosen data collection instrument was one-on-on unstructured interviews with specific questions in the form of an interview guide that was aligned to the research questions highlighted in chapter one. This research focused on ten previously disadvantaged family business owners/leaders who are based in Johannesburg and have business interests in one or more provinces in South Africa. The interviews were conducted with the research participants in person and electronically using a messaging and real time communication app (Microsoft Teams). Interviews were captured on record of which an unstructured research questions were asked that were related to the research questions. Following the interviews, the information obtained was transcribed and analysed to extract insights.

3.4. Data Analysis

For data analysis, a thematic data analysis was employed. According to Kiger and Vapio (2020), thematic data analysis is a method of analysing data that requires one to review a set of qualitative data and extract experience and behaviour-based information through various themes and patterns. The data collected from respondents was first categorised based on the responses into sub themes and then grouped into themes related to the primary and secondary research questions.

This method was selected because of its value in summarising and packaging qualitative data through patterns and similarities into themes. This approach assisted in identifying key differences between different research participants, which can then inform future areas of interest. The data obtained from the interviews was first transcribed before an analysis was conducted.

3.5. Qualitative validity frameworks

This section focuses on the qualitative validity frameworks. These are measures that were applied to make sure the research, analysis and findings were logical, sensible and could be trusted. The framework applied investigated the confirmability of the research, as well as the credibility, transferability and dependability.

3.5.1. Confirmability

Confirmability, according to Bryman (2012) is about the objectivity of the researcher. The researcher must act in good faith and not allow personal views, values, beliefs or theories influence the research or how the research is conducted to derive findings. Although Bryman, (2012), points out that absolute confirmability is not possible, for this research however, participants were allowed to fully express themselves and share their insights on the research

phenomenon. The interview guide was structured in such a manner that enables this.

3.5.2. Credibility

According to Bryman (2012), credibility refers to the trustworthiness of the research findings. This measure ensures that good practice is applied and that the research is conducted appropriately and is understood correctly by those who consume it. For the purposes of this research, the researcher utilised the triangulation method, which relies on a combination of multiple research methods that combine literature and various research methods. This was achieved by asking the research participants semi structured questions, probing responses and engaging in prolonged interviews. Furthermore, analysing the responses against experiences that have been recorded by other individuals who are faced with similar challenges related to the research topic was applied.

3.5.3. Transferability

Because qualitative research is dependent on depth rather than the number of participants, transferability is concerned with whether the findings of the study can be applied in a different context to reach a conclusion. For this study, a thick description was provided on the research methods being applied with clear descriptions on the methods of data collection being provided in section 3.4 above. Furthermore, a thick description was provided on the findings of the research. By providing a thick description on both these sections, the transferability of the findings was enhanced on this basis.

3.5.4. Dependability

Dependability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1986) refers to what would be termed as reliability in quantitative research. Dependability is concerned with the accuracy and consistency of findings over a period of time using different analysis techniques. In relation to dependability, for this research, the researcher relied on

a thick description on the data collection and analysis methods. For this particular research, interviews were transcribed, categorised and then a thematic approach to analysis was applied.

3.6. Target population and sample

According to Guest et al. (2013), sampling is the exercise of selecting individuals from a specific population for inclusion into a study or research. For purposes of this research, the target population was business owners who fall within the demographic of previously disadvantaged individuals as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993 (Act No. 200 of 1993). The selected sample of participants constituted of PDI's who currently own and operate family businesses or who have experienced business challenges arising from issues of succession. The location of the research participants was predominantly Gauteng, however, the business interests were situated across the several of the nine provinces in South Africa at the time that the research was conducted. A total of ten of these individuals were targeted. The scale of business these individuals own and operate covered the broad spectrum of businesses in terms of size by revenue and was not limited to Small, Medium and Micro enterprises but was solely focused on businesses that had an element of family involvement and participation in the business.

Participants who were approached include:

1. Participant one is male and operates in the mining and construction industry, with businesses across all nine provinces.
2. Participant two is male and runs an internet service provider, with his business generating revenue across all nine provinces.
3. Participant three is male and operates a consultancy business that provides niche strategy consulting services across South Africa.
4. Participant four is male and runs an advertising agency, with business interests all across South Africa.

5. Participant five is female and operates an industrial welding business in South Africa and Swaziland.
6. Participant six is female and operates a specialist consulting service in the health industry. She is located in Johannesburg but provides services across all nine provinces.
7. Participant seven is male and operates a hospitality and tourism business.
8. Participant eight is male and operates a small business in the retail industry.
9. Participant nine is male and operates in the public transport and retail business space, running a long-distance transport service and operating a small spaza shop.
10. Participant 10 is male and operates a bottled water business and is also operating a small logistics consultancy in Johannesburg with smaller operations in 8 provinces.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

It is important to adhere to the rules provided by the University of the Witwatersrand and also practice a good code of conduct when working through the research project. It is important for a researcher to comply with research ethics standards; therefore, this section will therefore cover some key ethical considerations and provide mitigating measures on how these issues will be managed.

Ethical Issues 1: Deception

Deception happens when researchers fail to provide full context and information to research participants about their identity, and disclose fully why they are conducting the research and the associated institution they are representing. In addition, it includes the use of dubious means to obtain information from participants.

Mitigation: For this research, the researcher disclosed all relevant information to all participants beforehand regarding the course, the study, the institution and all

relevant organisations represented. Further to this, once consent was provided, research participants were asked to sign a consent form granting the researcher permission to interview them and a written agreement to participate as a research participant. Furthermore, ethical clearance was sourced from the university by completing the necessary training to ensure compliance. This includes external training conducted on ethics through various executive workplace programs.

Ethical Issue 2: Confidentiality

The second ethical issue was around confidentiality. Confidentiality refers to matters being discussed and the level of secrecy that needs to be observed for a host of reasons. Based on the nature of the research topic and the research participants, some of the matters and thoughts on succession needed to be kept confidential to avoid matters around conflict for other interested parties in the business.

Mitigation: To eliminate the challenge highlighted; all research was to be treated with a level of confidentiality. In the outcomes of the research, participants were not named directly and associated with specific responses. In addition, research participants will be made to sign confidentiality agreements to ensure that their information is protected. This will also be aligned with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA). In the event where the participants were comfortable with the information being shared, this was considered within the confidentiality agreement. Furthermore, consent was obtained from the participants to record the interview.

3.8. Limitations

Key limitations during the conduction of this research were related to both administrative limitations and methodological limitations. The administrative limitations were around the availability of research participants and their commitment to participating in the research. A few individuals did not arrive at their scheduled slot or failed to confirm or make themselves available for the interview. These individuals were replaced.

Regarding methodological limitations, there was a lack of trust from some research participants, with one participant indicating that they were afraid that their business strategy and dealings would be disclosed in the research. All research participants were reassured during the interviews that all information would remain confidential and that the participants and their business names or industry of interest would not be mentioned directly in the final report.

Research participants were sourced from all ethnic groups that fall under the scope of previously disadvantaged individuals, these include Coloured, Indian and African individuals. Several participants failed to honour their commitments to research interviews for various reasons. This resulted in the lack of representation from other people who form part of the PDI grouping other than those of African descent. Although this was the case, it did not have an impact or induce a limitation on the research findings.

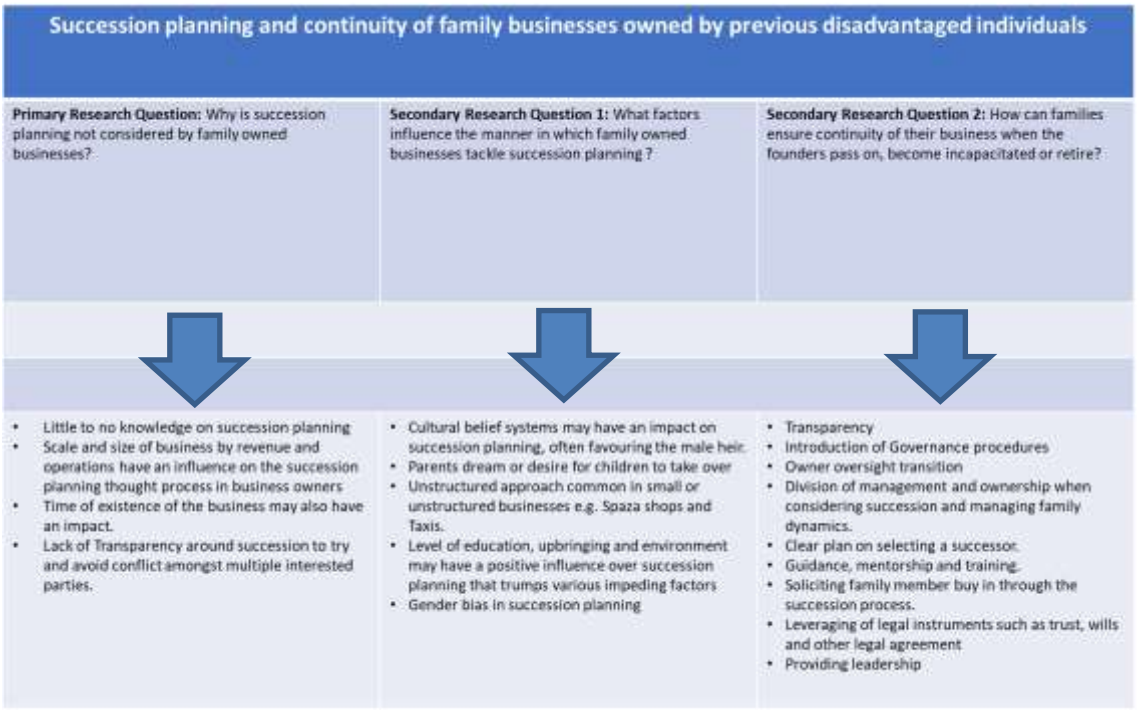
3.9. Conclusion

In conclusion, this section provides an overview of the design, process and various techniques that were applied in this research study. It also provides the key considerations around ethics and various considerations relating to confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability and how each of these were supported or mitigated during the course of the study.

4. FINDINGS

This section of the study focuses on the findings of the study. The study sought to answer three research questions namely 1) Why succession planning is not considered by founders of family owned businesses? 2) What factors influence the manner in which family owned businesses tackle succession planning? 3) How families can ensure continuity in their business when the founders pass on, retire or become incapacitated? Insights were drawn through a specific list of questions that were asked to the respondents during the interviews. This section reveals that there are several reasons why respondents do not consider succession planning and highlights several factors that influence succession planning. In addition, this section also provides some deep insights into what respondents highlighted as key interventions that founders and owners could consider to improve on the succession planning process. The findings are summarised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Summary of findings in relation to research questions.



Source: Own

Multiple insights and findings have been drawn from the research participants in relation to the three research questions. For purposes of this article, the findings will be summarized based on the research questions as highlighted in Figure 1. Sub-themes/ insights will be expanded upon as well.

4.1. Reasons why owners of family business are not proactive in planning for succession

This section of the findings focuses on the primary research question which sought to answer why succession planning is not considered in family owned businesses. Respondents were asked questions directly relating to their views on succession planning, regarding whether they had started thinking about it and whether they had experienced any challenges if they had started implementing a succession plan. Respondents provided several insights as to why they have neglected this business continuity tool, highlighted a lack of knowledge on the topic, a lack of transparency arising from an element of mistrust, conflict avoidance amongst interested, and affected family members and other interest parties. Other insights were indirectly drawn from the responses of the participants, such as scale and size of the business having an impact on the level of strategic thinking that they were able to apply when considering the day to day operational issues that consumed most of their time. Two key variables that indicated the level of thinking about succession planning that was employed by the respondents were the scale of the business in terms of revenue and the time in which the business had been in existence.

4.1.1. Little to no knowledge on succession planning.

A key insight drawn from the research, more common in the smaller sized businesses or specialized skills businesses, was the lack of knowledge about the topic of succession planning. One female participant indicated that she had no knowledge on the succession planning process or how to initiate it. The business of this respondent was a relatively young business of less than 5 years old that generated revenue below the R5 million mark.

One of the key findings of this study was the lack of knowledge on succession planning. When considering the two variables (time in existence and size by revenue), a common trend emerged indicating that succession and continuity was not a strategic imperative at that time.

It can be argued, based on the findings, that one of the key determinants on whether a business owner plans for succession is the age of their business and the revenue generated. Further to this, was experience, knowledge and background, which will be further elaborated upon in section 4.3.

Lastly, in some of the businesses, the owners lacked the knowledge on how to identify, select and develop a successor. This indicated the inherent lack of knowledge around the various aspects of succession planning.

4.1.2. Lack of transparency as a means of conflict avoidance

Conflict avoidance emerged as a key theme around succession planning. Some research participants revealed that succession planning was something that they felt needed to be treated as confidential, especially in scenarios where there are multiple related stakeholders who have a vested interest and ambition to grow or take up more strategic roles within the business. Respondent 1 highlighted that the lack of transparency was a means of conflict avoidance , with the root cause stemming from a potential lack of trust between the main business leader and the potential successors. In extreme cases, that succession could result in a hostile takeover or even murder in the most extreme case, and therefore, respondents noted that transparency was a potential risk.

Additionally, respondents referenced the lack of transparency to conflict avoidance. This was more prevalent in cases where there was more than one potential successor. Some respondents generally kept their succession plans confidential to avoid conflict between siblings (their children). They were, however, aware of the risk that came with doing this, especially in the event of the uncontrolled implementation of a forced succession plan.

Mitigation measures around this that were mentioned by some of the research participants who have been more successful in implementing or executing a succession plan included:1) the introduction of governance processes, 2) the use of legal tools and instruments to supplement the succession planning process, and lastly, 3) open and continuous engagement on succession to solicit stakeholder buy in over an extended period. An insight around stakeholder buy-in shared by a research participant below:

> Participant 3: "*I think we need to defend the spirit that we need to be a bit more empowering in terms of successors so that really you know when they buy into this vision of being part of the family business, they really truly understand the opportunities and the challenges in the business*."

The mitigation measures shared by the research participants will be expanded upon under section 4.3, which delves into the findings around what family business owners can do to ensure continuity through succession.

4.1.3. Scale and size of business has an impact on level of thinking on the succession planning process.

The scale and size of the business in terms of revenue and size of the operations was also found to have an influence on whether the business owner or family leaders think of succession planning. Respondents indicated that their businesses at the end of the fiscal year generated an annual revenue in the range of R 500 000 and R 1 000 000 000 as illustrated in Table 1. The participants who were generating revenue below R 5 000 000 indicated that they had not thought about succession planning. The reasons for this were either because they thought that the business was not big enough or they were still in the aggressive growth phase of the business and were thus more concerned with the day to day operational issues rather than the long term strategic issues, therefore relegating succession to a non-priority.

In contrast, the larger businesses grossing double the revenue or more indicated that they had a succession plan in place or had at the very least applied their

minds to it, providing some in-depth insights regarding the selection of a successor, training, development and the retention of talent (both within the family and external candidates). In addition, these participants also had some governance plans and procedures in place to guide the succession process. This was primarily because in the larger organisations, there was a greater level of accountability required from the leader of the family. In addition, there was also a greater level of governance at play in the background, thus forcing them to think longer term.

Table 1: Estimated revenue & succession thinking

Participant	Estimated annual revenue	Succession plan in place or at least initiated?	Ethnic Group
Participant one	R 1 000 000 000	Yes	Zulu
Participant two	R 67 000 000	Yes	Zulu
Participant three	R 11 000 000	Yes	Zulu
Participant four	R 6 500 000	Yes	Ndebele
Participant five	R 5 000 000	Yes	Swazi
Participant six	R 850 000	No	Swazi
Participant seven	R 220 000	No	Zulu
Participant eight	R 360 000	No	Xhosa
Participant nine	R 150 000	No	Pedi
Participant ten	R 16 000 000	Yes	Tswana

Source: Own.

Another key insight that is very close to the size and scale by revenue is that of the history and period of existence of the business. Generally, relatively newer businesses founded after 2018 were concerned with trying to survive on a day to

day basis and therefore did not view succession planning as an immediate focus point. It is important to note this because some of these businesses are in a period wherein their businesses are most likely to fail (75% failure rate within the first 5 years) as indicated by Olawale and Garwe (2010).

4.2. Several factors influence thinking on succession planning and continuity.

This section focuses on secondary research questions sought to solicit insights and identify the factors that may influence the way family owned businesses tackled succession planning. Respondents were asked what their views were on succession planning. This question was further probed with a secondary question that asked how their cultural and religious backgrounds influenced their thinking on succession planning and continuity within their family business. Respondents provided a range of responses of factors which they thought influenced thinking on succession planning and these were summarised into cultural belief systems, gender bias, parents' desire for children to be successors, level of education, business experience (corporate), upbringing, and the associated environment.

4.2.1. Factors that have an influence in the way business owners tackle succession planning

4.2.1.1. Cultural belief systems

Cultural belief systems are defined as "*ways of life of a specific group of people, including various ways of behaving, belief systems, values, customs, dress, personal decoration, social relationships, religion, symbols and codes*" (South Africa History Online, n.d.). The current research's group of participants represented several cultural groupings in South Africa, namely: Zulu, Swazi, Ndebele, Pedi, Tswana and Xhosa.

Respondents revealed that culture, to a certain degree, can have an influence on ones thinking on succession planning. This factor came through quite strongly in

the interviews. For example, the participants of Zulu origin indicated that the customary practice among Zulu people was for the oldest son to take over, with the last-born son if any, to take up the responsibility as an alternative. Quite similarly, in the other cultural groupings, a similar view and approach was taken in the implementation of succession. In addition, as opposed to succession being planned for by the family leader or business leader, the expectation was for family members to somewhat know who was destined to take over based on cultural beliefs and practices. This approach to succession is often the root source of conflict and succession battles should the family business leader pass on or become incapacitated.

Another critical insight from a cultural approach to succession planning in family owned businesses is that it excluded female candidates, often sideling capable and competent female successors. This finding will be expanded upon under the gender bias section as these two findings are interlinked.

This approach to succession based on cultural beliefs and practices seemed to be more prevalent in generally unstructured businesses such as spaza shops and the taxi transport business for example. One respondent in the taxi industry responded to say that for him, succession was not a priority, saying *"Sizobona Phambili"* which can be indirectly translated to "*we will cross that bridge when we come to it*". This response suggests that succession and continuity for smaller businesses and other subsistence businesses is not an imperative or strategic issue and may in future impede growth or continuity of the business should the founder pass on. It also highlights the possibility of superstitious beliefs, in which some forbid one to plan for death as it is seen as if they are speaking it into existence.

Although culture may have an influence on succession planning, some respondents mentioned that factors such level of exposure to such issues in childhood and upbringing, level of education, business and corporate experience and the size and scale of the business also affected one's likelihood to prioritise this business tool. For example, participant nine, who is educated to a Masters degree level and has parents who are business owners, indicated that his parents

played an influential role in his thinking about succession planning, which is not influenced by cultural beliefs.

4.2.1.2. Gender bias, favouring male successor over females.

Other respondents highlighted gender to be one of the other factors that may have an impact on succession planning. Respondents mentioned that the expected norm or what was expected was for the male heir to take over the reins. One respondent mentioned that women are often overlooked, even in cases where they have shown that they are competent and capable of managing and growing the business. This was because, in some cases, the business owners wanted to keep the business in the family amongst those who share the same surname and mentioned concerns surrounding what would happen should their daughters choose to get married someday.

Although the preference among some respondents was to favour male successors, respondents indicated that background, education and knowledge could again have an influence in facilitating a change in the thinking around the gender bias in succession planning.

> Participant 2: "*yes I'm Zulu but I've been exposed from a very early age to different cultural perspectives right from an early age, so business should never really be limited to a man should be this woman should do that a woman shouldn't so now from that perspective I think I've been pretty consisten*t."

4.2.1.3. Influence of the level of education, upbringing and environment impact on succession planning.

Through the interview phase of this study, several respondents indicated that one of the key factors that determine how one approaches succession planning is their level of education and exposure in terms of upbringing, life experiences, upbringing and environment. Environment refers to the social environment and community. A key finding amongst respondents, was that they were able to

overcome the traditional way of succession planning and implementation, which was normally unstructured. They indicated that education had an impact on how they thought about succession. Other participants indicated that the level of exposure and life experiences either in their childhood or corporate environments also gave them an appreciation for planning and implementing succession in a structured and methodological way, making use of various legal instruments and structures to support and implement the process.

4.2.1.4. Parents' desire for children to be successors.

A key finding in this research was that the parents' dreams and desires for their children can also have an influence on how they think about succession planning, and in some cases, how they prepare their children for it. Participant three indicated that he played an active role in his son's life in preparing him for succession through assisting him gain the relevant experience. This worked out in favour of the respondent because there was an alignment between him and his son. Participant one had a unique perspective, his view was that a business owner would be lucky if their children were interested in taking over the business, he did however, caution against parents forcing their children to take over their businesses, stating that they should instead allow them to follow their own dreams. However, although participant one was in favour of having a successor being one of his children, he also cautioned around forcing children to be a part of the business, but to rather allow them to follow their own dreams. Several other respondents agreed with this view, highlighting that often the expectation from owners for their family members or children is for them to take over, whereas in some cases there is no interest or capability, therefore emphasising on the need for alignment and the relevant buy in from related successors or potential candidates.

The general view was that family businesses needed to move away from taking an unstructured approach to succession, but to rather identify and develop potential successors (particularly from a management and operational

perspective, and not ownership). Furthermore, some participants suggested that successors should be appointed on merit, rather than family relations.

4.3 Ensuring continuity of family businesses.

The secondary research question 2 (SRQ2) sought to solicit insights on what FOBs can do to ensure continuity through succession should the founder choose to retire, become incapacitated or pass on. Specific questions were asked, particularly on what they think business leaders should be thinking about when planning for succession, and what they think business owners could do to improve the succession planning and implementation process. Key insights drawn from research participants can be summarised into three themes, namely governance, training and development, and leveraging on legal instruments and legislation.

For purpose of this section, the insights were grouped into themes and expanded upon in detail.

4..3.1. Introduction of Governance procedures and principles including Transparency

Multiple research participants, particularly the three participants who have had significant success in business and in the implementation of succession planning, suggested that the process could be improved through the introduction of governance procedures and principles.

> Participant one: "*it is also critical to introduce governance to corporatize and start treating family businesses more professionally and applying the right governance processes and procedures to ensure that succession is handled seamlessly and smoothly*."

Most important of these suggestions put forward by the participants was the establishment of an advisory board. Family businesses in South Africa tend to have poor governance procedures in place to oversee the business and develop

and guide successors to ensure that the transition is seamless (Coleman, 2021). Considering the complexity around the process of succession and transfer of management and ownership, having a governing body in place would be a useful consideration. In some cases, one participant suggested that perhaps succession should take form as one of the responsibilities of the advisory board was to ensure that the succession process is neutral and brings in a new accountability structure.

> Participant 3: "*So what we have done from a business point of view, we have established what are called you know a board of advisors. Basically, got a couple of people who bring different skills from finance to strategy and marketing to assist us. My son sits in all those meetings quarterly with our board of advisors so that he also to be mentored from a governance point of view and held accountable to a neutral set of individuals*."

Participant ten indicated that he had also constituted an advisory board to ensure that there is some form of institutional knowledge and guidance within the business to support the succession planning process and introduce some accountability in the business. Participant two indicated that he was in the process of establishing an advisory board as well, for similar reasons cited by the other two successful candidates. He also noted that a governance board has the potential to add additional value when considering growth plans and aligning those to the business' continuity in the long term.

Further to implementing governance procedures, other participants raised the need to practice certain principles of governance highlighted in the King IV, such as transparency. Transparency is defined as "*the unambiguous and truthful exercise of accountability such that decision making processes and business activities, outputs and outcomes (both positive and negative) are easily able to be discerned and compared with ethical standards*" (IODSA, 2016,p.18). Transparency from a family business perspective would entail open and frank conversations about succession planning with the identified successor and other interested stakeholders to ensure that the intentions of the lead or controlling family member of the business are supported by the broader family. The

participants who have had relative success in succession alluded to transparency as a mitigation measure to the conflict. In turn, this can inject continuity into the business, more especially during the transfer phase which many family businesses struggle with.

4.3.2. Identification, retention and development of talent

A critical insight that was common around succession was around the identification of a potential successor and subsequent development. This includes both internal (family members) and external candidates who are not family members but employed by the family business.

> Participant 1: "*we need to get to a point where we understand that the business is actually bigger than you as an individual therefore your successor does not necessarily have to have a direct relation to you. You have to understand that the business can grow and become bigger than you*."

In some cases, depending on the size of the business, this consideration can also include external candidates. What was a key highlight from the research participants was the attrition rate of employees. One is quoted below.

> Participant 1: "*How do you find a successor who is currently employed in the business if you cannot retain talent in a highly competitive job market*?"

Research participants suggested that succession should be viewed as an iterative process and should not be something that is explored only when there is an element of uncertainty in the business. Participants suggested that succession and the preparation of a successor should be a continuous process that involves training and preparation through education and practical hands on experience within the business over a period. This in turn will ensure long term stability and contribute towards simplifying the succession process. This approach would apply to candidates who are family members and those who are not. In the event that an external candidate is being brought in, this would then

rely on the candidate having sufficient experience and meeting the requirements of the position that they are scheduled to occupy.

A key element of this process in training and development is the provision of continuous feedback. Succession planning needs to have a strong element of mentorship to it. Participants noted that preparing a potential successor through training and provision of regular feedback has the potential to enhance and improve the succession process, thus making it more effective.

> Participant 3: "*my son receives regular feedback, you know to say your dad is happy. It becomes important in succession planning as it is planting a seed. It also shows that the family is cooperating in the succession planning process which will enable it to be effective and efficient and most importantly you know successful*."

4.3.3 Managing the transition.

A key insight on managing the transition is surrounded by principles mentioned in several parts of the research. This responsibility according to several participants, falls on the owner of the family business. According to these participants, part of managing the transition would involve instituting processes to identify and prepare the successor. Once they are confident of the successor, they suggested that they would have to transition into a role as a chairperson to transfer institutional knowledge and provide continuous support to ensure there is alignment between the incumbent and the broader group of stakeholders. The key insight is that succession requires a hands-on approach, further to this, having in place a will or a trust can also assist in managing the transition in absentia should it come to that.

4.3.4. Separation of management and ownership in succession planning.

Another key finding that erupted was the need for leading family business owners and founders to separate the concept of ownership and management in

succession. This means that if owners are unable to find a suitable successor within the family, they can choose to hand over management control of the business to an external person and then transfer ownership of the business. According to the research participants, this approach can secure the long-term success of the business through the employment of competent and capable individuals who can drive the growth of the business.

Quite often, in family businesses, ownership and management are seen as two indivisible concepts. Separating the two will have positive benefits for the business.

> Participant 1: "*Separating the two concepts of ownership and management so ownership can remain within the family however the running of day-to-day operations and long-term strategic growth of the business does not necessarily remain with them but rather the handpicked successor*."

4.3.5. Utilisation of legal tools and instruments to facilitate succession process.

Research participants almost unanimously agreed that having a last will and testament in place for the business owner to supplement and support a clear succession plan was critical in ensuring that a succession plan was properly implemented should they not be able to do this themselves. In addition, it also serves as a useful guide for the family to navigate through the transfer if the controlling family member or founder is not there to facilitate the process.

The second legal structure that some participants referred to was a trust. A trust is defined as "a legal entity created by a party through which a second party holds the right to manage the trust or assets for the benefit of a third party" (Kenrick, 2022). Trust becomes useful in managing ownership and assets when there is potential conflict amongst various family members or when the potential successors are considered as minors. Trust may also be useful when

implementing asset protection plans or in the controlling of which assets are to be passed on to potential successors.

Other respondents referred to the use of other legal instruments such as agreements and memorandums of understanding as a legal and governance instrument. These agreements become useful in partnerships and new businesses that are being founded by family members who are investing capital into a business venture. Participant 7 used the Memorandum of Agreement option, covering areas and providing governance processes/guidance to be followed in the event of a resignation or succession need.

> Participant 7: "*I think everything has to be laid out in black and white, so that things are contracted things and documented, so that in the future, there's no confusion about who owns what and how things must be split should someone die or want to be bought out*."

4.3.6. Exercising good leadership principles

Several participants referenced taking leadership and ownership of the succession process as the responsibility of the business founder, owner or family leadership. This means that business leaders had to be more proactive in managing and driving the conversation and planning of succession in a responsible and structured manner. One of the participants noted that taking leadership when it comes to succession planning means taking a proactive approach to succession and planning in intricate details for various possibilities and scenarios. Another participant mentioned that business owners need to understand that the business is bigger than them, and in doing so, they should plan for succession with the longevity and sustainability of the business being at the forefront. In his view, business owners understanding this and taking the necessary steps, was a sign of good leadership.

One participant said that planning for succession is an act of love as it is an action that can provide the family with stability through averting potential conflict and

succession battles. When asked what business owners could do to improve the succession planning and implementation process, a participant responded to say:

> Participant 9: "*Because as much as we are going into the future, we want to solve as many of the future problems as possible for the next generation. Let it come from a good place. Let it not come from a place of. Go about succession planning with love and empathy, let love lead and the process*."

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Discussion of findings

The aim of the study was to gain insight into succession planning and continuity in family owned businesses founded by previously disadvantaged individuals. The research sought to gain insights by answering three research questions, consisting of one primary research question and two secondary research questions.

5.1.1. Findings in relation to theory

For this study, two research theories were referenced. These were Singleton's stage model and Coffman's family business succession model.

Singletons stage model simply maps out the succession process in various stages that include initiation, selection, education and transition. Each stage highlights specific tasks and activities that the incumbent and the nominated successor(s) need to transition through as they prepare for the handover. Based on the findings of this research, several participants indicated that succession was a process that needed to be procedural. Several research participants mentioned the importance of managing the transition properly through the adequate identification of a successor, and taking them through substantial training, development and mentorship. This finding is mostly aligned with the process suggested in Singletons succession model. Although the Singleton theory and succession model are, to some degree, aligned with the findings of this research, there was a clear gap, particularly around one of the most critical stages of succession planning. This is the stage of identifying a successor. Furthermore, following the stage model would be difficult when one has little to no knowledge on succession planning. Therefore, when considering succession planning, especially in the event that there is no knowledge or background on the subject, a good place to start would be for business owners to educate

themselves on succession planning, then identify a successor, all before initiating the rest of Singletons succession model.

The second theory referenced was the family business succession model by Coffman. The model put forward by Coffman suggests that succession planning should be viewed as a system, meaning that there are various inputs, people and factors that go into succession planning as highlighted in Figure 2. This model covers various aspects such as the owner's characteristics, business characteristics (size and revenue), business formality (considering informal family business and subsistence business in South Africa) which speaks to corporate governance as mentioned in the findings in section 4, family influence, and access to capital. In Coffman's theory, these factors, depending on whether they are strong or weak, play a significant role in facilitating the succession planning process. In addition, Coffman further combines the stage model and the factors, thus illustrating that the succession model is made up of various moving parts and needs to be viewed holistically rather than in isolation. He further refers to having a written succession plan, which suggests that the use of legal instruments may have a role to play in managing the succession process. It is, however, important to note the challenges in the South African context when considering the use of a will in succession preparation in previously disadvantaged communities.

Coffman's theory of systems thinking in succession planning is the most complete, however, in the South African context and that of previously disadvantaged communities, there is a critical contextual gap considering that Coffman's study was conducted in the United States. The particular gap is the role of strong cultural belief systems and gender bias and how these can influence the thinking around succession planning. Coffman's model does not consider that these factors that can either enhance or impede succession planning in family businesses and as illustrated in the findings. As was evident in this research's findings, these factors can to some degree have a negative impact on the succession planning process.

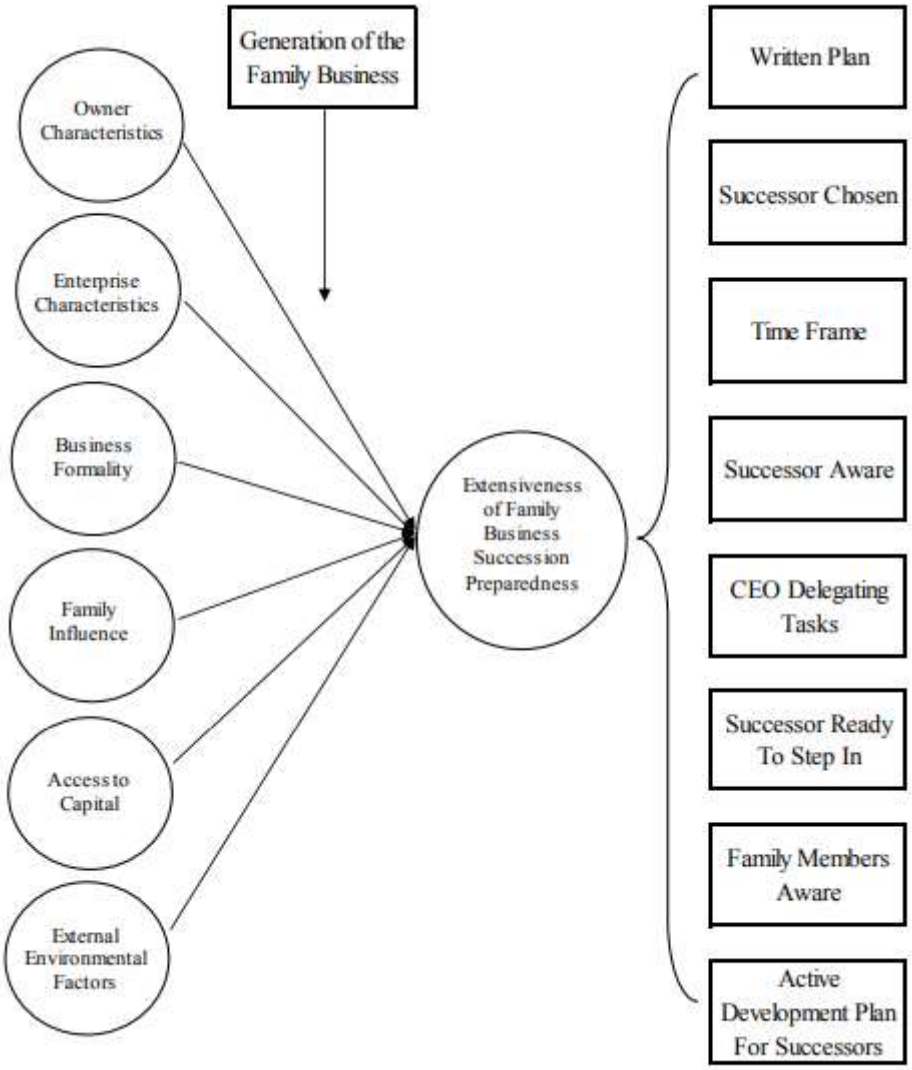


Figure 2: The family business succession model (Coffman ,2019)

5.1.2. Discussion of findings (primary research question)

The first research question was "*Why is succession planning not considered in family owned businesses?"* Several interesting insights were solicited from family business owners who had achieved relative success in planning for succession and those who have not had success nor started planning for it. The study found that family business owners do not plan for succession for several reasons, these include reasons such as the size and scale of the business, wherein owners considered succession to not be a matter of importance as they were still buried with everyday operations of the business. Results indicated that the businesses

generating larger revenues were better structured and more equipped to tackle succession as a matter of strategic importance. Secondly, the time of existence of the business was another factor, and it related to the time the business had been in operation, it was noted that a young businesses did not consider succession planning as a strategic imperative but were rather consumed with operational issues and stabilising the business as opposed to long term growth and strategic matters such as succession. Although this was the case, the study also revealed that new business ventures have the opportunity to set themselves up to manage long term succession issues through agreements such as a memorandum of agreement/ understanding (MOA/MOU). Thirdly, was the impediment of little to no knowledge and understanding on the subject matter of succession. Lastly, was the emerging theme of conflict avoidance amongst family members and interested parties resulting in the matter of succession not gaining adequate traction.

5.1.3. Discussion of findings (secondary research question 1)

The first secondary research question aimed to solicit insights on the factors that had an influence on how previously disadvantage individuals think about succession planning. The study found that several factors have an impact on how business owners considered succession planning, these included: cultural belief systems, superstitions, and gender bias which resulted in business leaders favouring male heirs over female heirs. Another interesting finding was that succession planning and implementation was generally weaker in businesses that were smaller. Insights revealed that although there may be a practice of cultural beliefs, customs and the influence of other factors when it comes to succession, the level of education, experience, upbringing, and social environment had an influence on how they viewed succession and opted to tackle it.

The findings related to this research question suggests that previously disadvantaged business owners, especially those running smaller businesses may require a lot more support and development in how they plan for succession.

It is most likely that these businesses would be the ones that could gain significant value should they apply more corporate governance and systems thinking methodology in how they run and develop their businesses.

5.1.4. Discussion of findings (secondary research question 2)

The second secondary research question aimed to solicit insights and suggestions from business owners on what they thought could assist in making succession planning more effective in its implementation and planning. Several findings were made, including the need to be more transparent in the tackling of complex issues around succession. This transparency could directly mitigate the arising conflict challenge. In addition, the general conclusion was that family owned businesses were under governed, therefore necessitating the need for the corporatisation of family owned businesses through the introduction of governance processes. Some suggestions included introducing an advisory board. Other findings included the importance of the concept of dividing the concepts of management and ownership. In addition, research participants suggested that when looking for a successor in a family business, they should not force their children to be part of the business if they are not interested i but should rather consider other competent and capable individuals to grow the business. Other suggestions included having the necessary guidance, training, and development programmes in place to support potential candidates. In addition to mitigating the conflict avoidance issues, findings indicated that soliciting family members' buy in and alignment on the vision and succession plan was imperative to ensuring business continuity in the long term. Lastly, the research findings also presented overwhelming support for the implementation and use of legal instruments and tools such as agreements, wills, and trusts.

5.2. Managerial recommendations

It is recommended that business owners consider the following when addressing succession or developing succession; (i) the development of processes and methodologies for selecting and training a successor, (ii) to make use of legal

documents such as agreements, wills and trusts, (iii) to solicit stakeholder buy in and alignment on long term vision and business growth, and lastly, (iv) governance should form the foundation of the business to support and supplement decision making. Reasons are highlighted in figure 3 and elaborated further upon below.

Figure 3 highlights the key stakeholder groups, legal instruments and considerations that family businesses can consider. These include governance, legal instruments, family and the successor(s). All these feed into succession planning and have the potential to make the succession process more efficient and robust. In terms of family, this model suggests that business owners or family leaders should take up the responsibility of aligning family members on the vision and succession plan. This goes a long way in addressing issues around trust and arising conflict and solicits stakeholder buy in.

The second input is related to putting plans into biding legal documents. Several legal instruments are available to support this process to ensure that the plans are executable, even in absentia. Tools that can be used from a legal perspective include wills, trusts and memorandums of understanding and agreement.

The third input refers to governance. Implementing strong governance procedures and establishing an independent governance board. This assists in holding the family accountable and brings in an element of transparency. Governance has the potential to support and facilitate the implementation of all three of the other inputs.

The last input is around the successor and is primarily focused on the preparation and development of the selected successor through development, training and education by the incumbent. Furthermore, going for a methodological approach to selecting a successor as opposed to using the lineage and hereditary approach is a key transparent process that owners need to apply.

One consideration that the family business leader needs to consider is possibly separating business ownership and management when selecting a successor. This enables one to choose a successor from a wider pool of talent.

A large portion of responsibility in managing and facilitating these inputs in the succession planning process would lie in the hands of the family business leader.

Figure 3 illustrates the various touch points that business owners should consider when implementing, developing, or executing a succession plan.

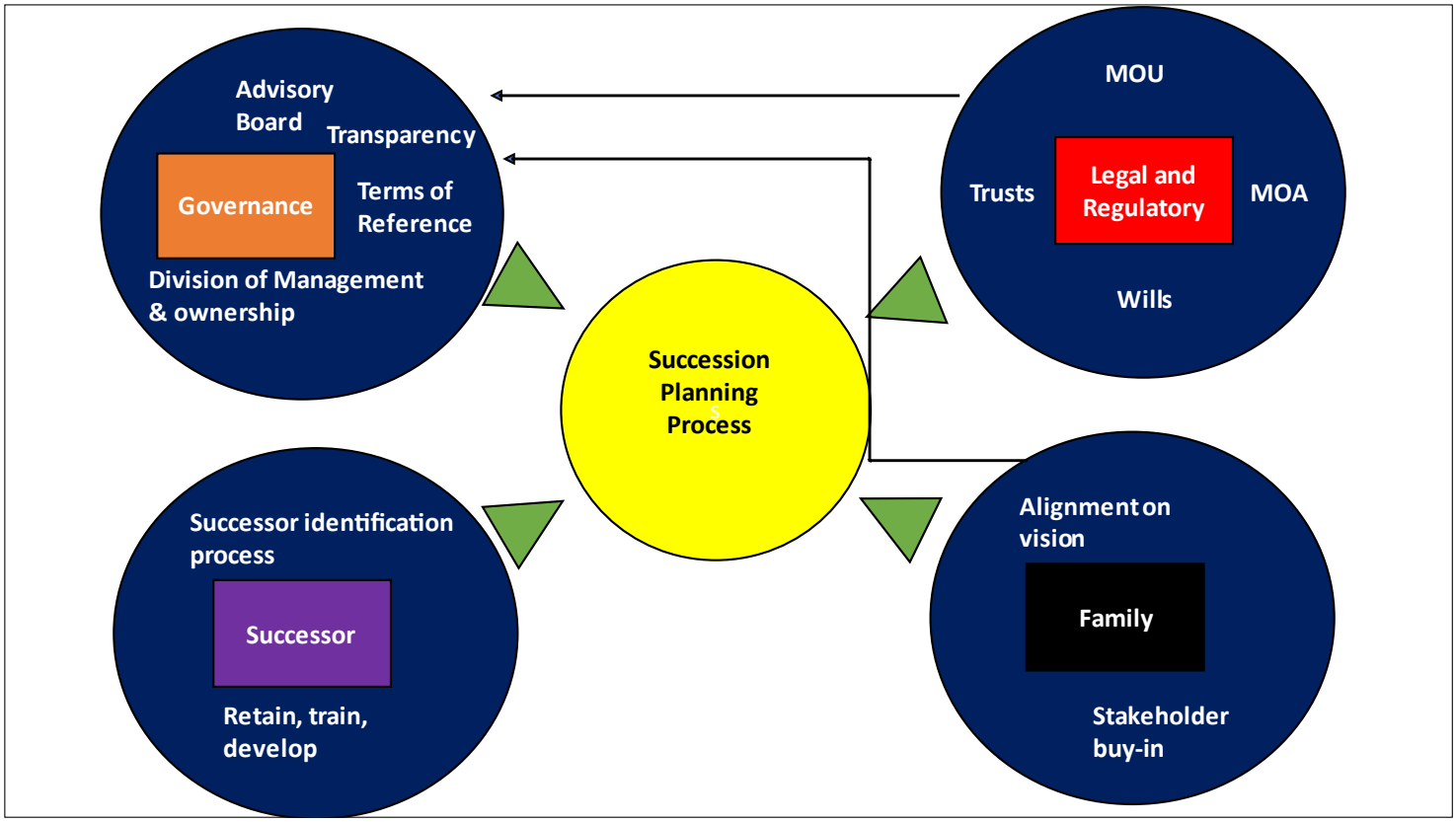


Figure 3: Key inputs and stakeholder groups into robust succession (Source: Own)

5.3. Recommendations for future research

The following section makes recommendations on areas to consider for future research.

The first recommendation is to research succession planning as an imperative for business continuity in the small unstructured businesses. This would assist in better understanding how succession is understood and managed in small unstructured businesses like the taxi industry and spaza shops. The

unstructured, low income businesses tend to have relatively little governance and focus more on operations rather than long term strategy as illustrated in the research. Exploring this phenomenon further would contribute effectively to the body of knowledge.

The second area recommended for future research is succession planning for small business owners in the minority PDI groups not covered in this research, as they may bring in different nuances on succession planning and continuity not mentioned in this research.

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7. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent and interview guide



Research conducted by:
Mr. VS Ngcobo (606817)
Cell: 073 634 0755

Dear participant,

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Vuma Ngcobo, an MBA student from the Wits Business School at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore succession planning and continuity of family businesses owned by previously disadvantaged individuals

Please note the following:

- This study involves a semi-structured personal interview. Your name and that of your company will not appear in the final research report and the answers you give during the interview will be treated as strictly confidential. You cannot be identified in person based on the answers you give.
- Your participation in this study is very important to me. However, you may choose not to participate, and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.
- The interview will take about 1 hour of your time.
- The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. I will provide you with a summary of the findings on request.
- Please contact my study supervisor, Dr. Tebogo Umanah (tebogo.umanah@gmail.com) if you have any questions or comments regarding the study.

Please sign the form to indicate that:

- You have read and understand the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

_____ _____

Participant's signature Date

Interview Guide

Introductory Questions

1. Please tell me about your business, its founding history, and operations?
2. How long have you been operating the business?
3. What is your estimated annual revenue?
4. What is your current ownership structure of your business?
    a. Are there any family members involved in your business either in terms of ownership or employed in operations?
5. What is your strategic vision for your business over the next 10 years?

Main Questions

1. What are your views on succession planning within a family business?
2. Have you started thinking about succession planning in your business?
    a. What are your beliefs (based on culture or religion) on succession planning?
3. What should business leaders be thinking about when planning for succession?
4. What are some of the challenges you have experienced in your succession planning journey?
    a. Have you experienced any of these challenges and how has it affected your business if at all?
5. What can be done to make succession planning more efficient and effective in its planning and implementation?

APPENDIX B

Ethic Clearance Certificate

[OFFICIAL]

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number: WBS/BA606817/261
This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below)

Project title	Succession planning and continuity of family businesses owned by previously disadvantaged individuals
Investigator / Researcher	Mr Vuma Ngcobo
Nature of Project	MBA (Research Article)
Decision of the Committee	Approved, provided stakeholders and participants are guaranteed confidentialty.
Issue Date of Certificate	25 09 2022
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project / research report
Chairperson	Prof Anthony Stacey ☎ +27 11 717 3587 +27 82 880 4531 anthony.stacey@wits.ac.za

Declaration by Researcher

One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

01/10/2022
Date:

APPENDIX B

Professional editors' certificate

EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE

DECLARATION BY LANGUAGE EDITOR

08 February 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: The declaration of Language Editing of Dissertation

I hereby declare that I have edited the Masters of Education dissertation of **Vuma Ngcobo** entitled **Succession planning and continuity of family owned businesses owned by previously disadvantaged individuals**. I found the written work to be free of ambiguity and obvious language and grammatical errors. All changes made and suggested by me were up to **08 February 2023**. It is the responsibility of the student to further address any comments made by the editor and the supervisor. Additionally, the final responsibility to ensure the absolute correctness of the dissertation at submission stage lies with the student.

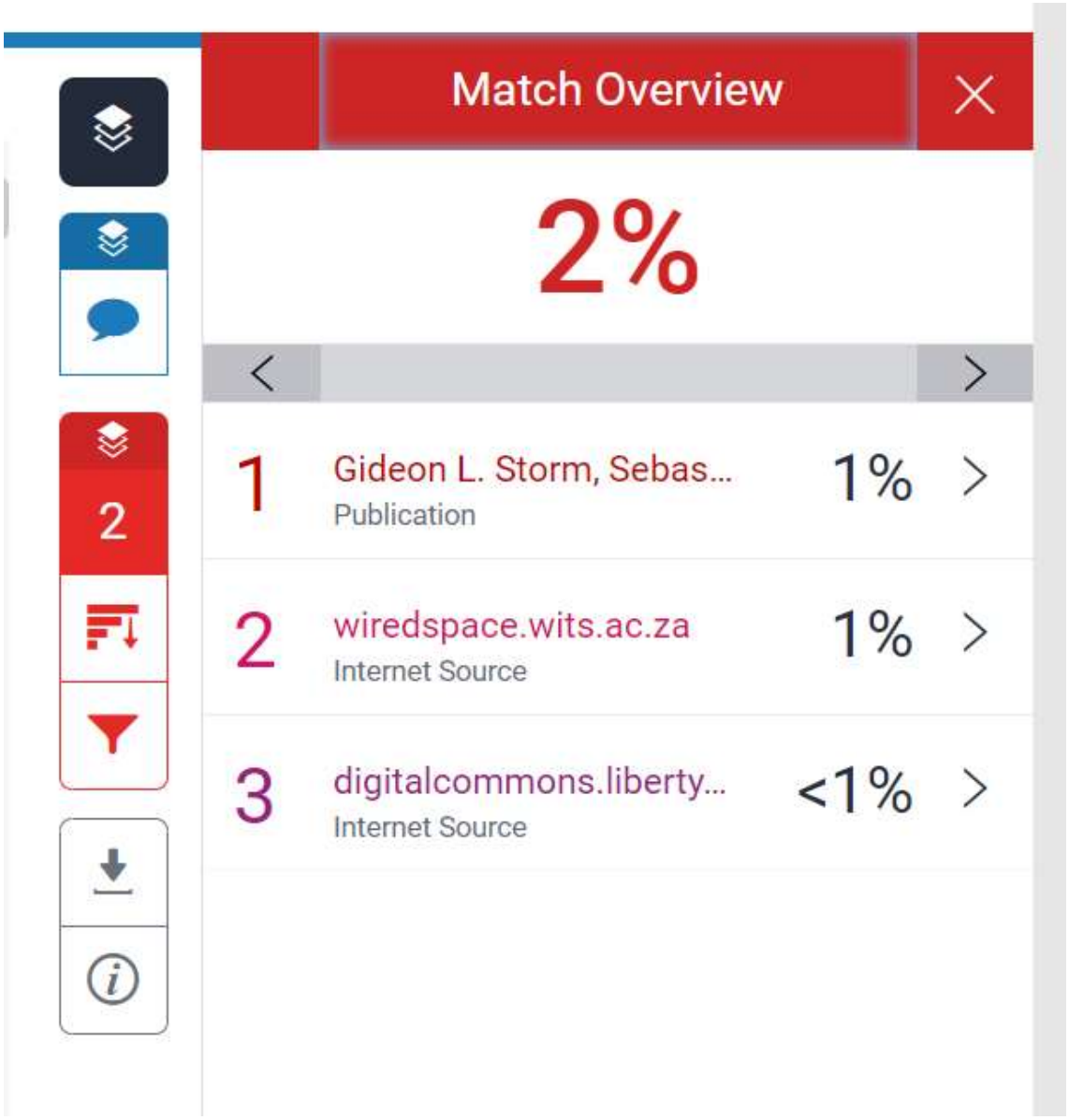


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APPENDIX C

Turn it in similarity report


Match Overview
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