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Original Article

Grounded theory and succession in family businesses: an overview and some directions

Grounded theory e sucessão em empresas familiares: um panorama e algumas direções

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study aimed to analyze research on succession in family businesses that applied Grounded Theory (GT) method and propose a research agenda.
Methodology: A systematic literature review was conducted using Scopus and Web of Science databases. Data analysis was carried out using two distinct approaches: the first explored the conceptual and theoretical aspects of the studies, while the second focused on the application of the GT method.
Findings: The studies examined succession from different perspectives, identifying four thematic clusters: Family Businesses, Successors, Family, and Grounded Theory. This research explored succession stages and processes, successor development and leadership, family roles and influence, as well as intergenerational communication, conflicts, and decision-making. Based on these clusters, a research agenda was developed that offers insights into the field of family business succession through the application of the GT method. Despite the extensive literature, studies that generate theories or strictly adhere to the fundamental principles of GT remain scarce.
Research implications: This study highlights research opportunities through the application of the GT method, contributing to a deeper understanding of the succession process in family businesses and the formulation of sustainable business policies.
Originality: This study outlines pathways for future research in this field based on the four identified thematic groups, addressing research gaps, providing insights, and fostering ongoing investigations to support the development of family businesses.

Keywords: Grounded theory; Family business; Management transfer; Family management; Successors

RESUMO

Objetivo: O artigo teve como objetivo analisar estudos sobre sucessão em empresas familiares que aplicaram o método Grounded Theory (GT) e propor uma agenda de pesquisa.
Metodologia: Uma revisão sistemática da literatura nas bases de dados Scopus e Web of Science. A análise dos dados foi realizada em duas abordagens distintas: a primeira explorou os aspectos conceituais e teóricos dos estudos, e a segunda se concentrou na aplicação do método GT.
Resultados: Os estudos analisados abordaram a sucessão sob diferentes perspectivas, identificando quatro clusters temáticos: Empresas Familiares, Sucessores, Família e Grounded Theory. As pesquisas exploraram estágios e processos de sucessão, o desenvolvimento e liderança de sucessores, papéis e influência familiar, além de comunicação intergeracional, conflitos e tomada de decisão. Com base nos clusters, foi elaborada uma agenda de pesquisa com insights para o campo da sucessão de empresas familiares por meio da aplicação do método GT. Apesar do rico corpo de literatura, estudos que geram teorias ou aderem estritamente aos princípios fundamentais da GT são escassos.
Implicações da pesquisa: Apresenta oportunidades de pesquisas por meio da aplicação do método GT, contribuindo para a compreensão aprofundada do processo de sucessão em empresas familiares e para a formulação de políticas empresariais sustentáveis.
Originalidade: O estudo aponta caminhos para pesquisas futuras neste campo, a partir de quatro grupos temáticos identificados, abordando lacunas de pesquisa, fornecendo insights e promovendo a continuidade da pesquisa na área para impulsionar o desenvolvimento de empresas familiares.

Palavras-chave: Teoria fundamentada; Empresa familiar; Transferência de gestão; Gestão familiar; Sucessores

1 INTRODUCTION

Family businesses are predominant worldwide (Sharma et al., 2012), and represent a significant proportion of global business structures (Gagné et al., 2021). Research conducted in 2017 by the Family Firm Institute indicated that this profile accounts for more than 70% of global GDP (De Massis et al., 2018).

Research dedicated to family businesses has grown exponentially over the years from various perspectives (Kammerlander, 2022; Xi et al., 2015) and significant advances have been made (Daspit et al., 2021). Themes related to socioemotional wealth (Berrone et al., 2012), governance and performance (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006), agency relationships (Schulze et al., 2001), innovation (De Massis et al., 2015; Rondi et al., 2019; Zybura et al., 2021), and entrepreneurship (Aldrich et al., 2021), among others, are present in the family business literature. In addition, studies have focused on comparisons between family and non-family businesses (Miller et al., 2007; Stewart & Hitt, 2012; Zahra et al., 2004), because of various differences (Daspit et al., 2021).

Studies on family businesses employ theories such as agency theory, resource-based view, and identity theory (Kammerlander, 2022). Despite progress in recent decades, new questions have emerged and remain unanswered. Solutions may arise from different theoretical perspectives and new methodologies (Kammerlander, 2022).

Scientific production in the social sciences, particularly in business, encompasses diverse methodological approaches - quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods (Lo et al., 2020). The choice of research method is related to the research proposal, as the questions addressed differ (Sale & Thielke, 2018).

Among the research possibilities, Grounded Theory (GT) is a qualitative method (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) capable of generating explanatory theoretical models of social phenomena through systematic data analysis (Tarozzi, 2011). GT is a method that uses comparative analysis to develop theory. Data collection is systematically and continuously analyzed to construct a data-based theory. The procedures of GT are conducted to develop a well-integrated set of concepts, aiming to provide a comprehensive view of the social phenomena under study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

This approach offers a variety of possibilities and is applicable to studies of family businesses (Handler, 1990; Hopfer & Maciel-Lima, 2008). Several reasons make the use of GT particularly useful for organizational studies, as the method allows the examination of subjective topics by capturing their complexities, such as changes, decision-making, behaviors, socialization, and others, enabling a broad and better understanding of the factors involved in a “specific substantive issue” (Locke, 2001, p. 95).

Succession is a theme related to family businesses that has been investigated with various focuses over the years. Defined as the transfer of management/leadership to a family member of the next generation (Cadieux et al., 2002; Sharma et al., 2001), succession involves various actions, stages, or milestones (Cater & Justis, 2009).

A low rate of successful succession can have diverse implications for business continuity and performance (Gagné et al., 2021). Metrics expressing the success (or failure) rate of the generational renewal process are important; however, it is crucial to understand the factors influencing these numbers and data. Thus, possibilities for effectively supporting the process have been developed (Coopmans et al., 2021). The complexity of the succession process makes it one of the most challenging aspects of a family business (Daspit et al., 2021).

Because of the dynamic nature of the family business succession process and considering the GT method as a timely qualitative approach for deepening the understanding of aspects related to the phenomenon, the research question guiding this study is as follows: What are the scenario and possibilities that Grounded Theory generates for the field of studies in family business succession? The objective is to analyze studies on family business succession that applied Grounded Theory (GT) method and to propose a research agenda.

The proposal goes beyond the limit of identifying the main themes addressed in the phenomenon, and advances with the development of a research agenda based on the application of the GT method. The aim is to stimulate the deepening and understanding of relevant elements in the succession process, allowing the development of efficient strategies and practices that strengthen and promote the continuity of family businesses. The goal is to encourage refinement and methodological rigor, particularly regarding the use of the GT method.

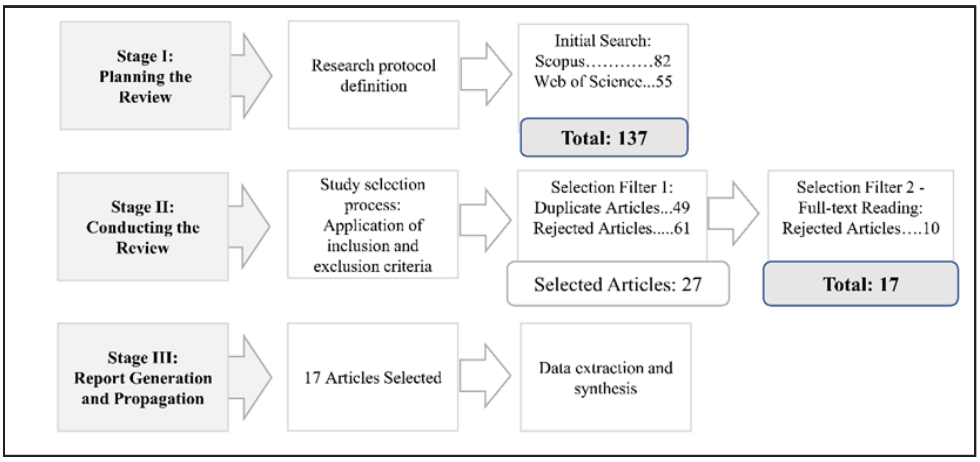
2 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) to map and evaluate intellectual territory through the application of methodological principles that make it transparent and reproducible, with the aim of providing knowledge in fields and subfields through theoretical synthesis (Tranfield et al., 2003). The basic principles of a systematic literature review are transparency, clarity, focus, equality, accessibility, consolidation, wide coverage, and synthesis (Thorpe et al., 2005). This process allows neutralizing bias and produces reliable results, as the adopted procedures, values, and assumptions are explicit (Tranfield et al., 2003).

Scientific rigor for conducting a systematic review is essential. This work follows the three-stage structure presented by Tranfield et al. (2003): i) review planning, ii) review conduct, and iii) report generation and dissemination. The planning stage involves analyzing the research needs and defining the review protocol. The review conduct stage refers to the process of study selection, quality assessment, data extraction, and synthesis. The third stage is the process of presenting evidence through the issuance of reports and recommendations.

The selected databases were Scopus and Web of Science. Searches were conducted on April 19, 2023, without time limit, using a variety of keyword combinations: "grounded theory" and "family business" or; success*; succession; "management transition"; "management exchange"; "management change"; "management transfer"; "family management" for title, abstract, and keyword fields. The selection criteria were articles published in peer-reviewed journals, addressing family business succession directly or indirectly, stating the use of the Grounded Theory (GT) method in the body of the text, and that the file was accessible in digital format. Articles excluded from the selection process were duplicates between databases or did not meet any of the inclusion criteria. We utilized the Start and Atlas.ti software for this process. Figure 1 shows an overview of the article selection process.

Figure 1 – Stages of Article Selection in the Systematic Review



Developed by the authors based on Tranfield et al. (2003)

Among the 17 articles selected for analysis, 13 (76.5%) were published in journals classified by the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) or CiteStore as Q1 (5) or Q2 (8), while the remaining were classified as Q3 (3) or Q4 (1).

We conducted the analysis of the selected articles using two distinct approaches. The first explored topics related to succession in the management of family businesses, including objectives and key results, regardless of the companies' field of activity. We carried out a thorough reading of the articles using RStudio/Bibliometrix software to support the understanding of the overall conceptual structure of the articles. Bibliometrix is a tool developed for "comprehensive analyses of scientific mapping," whose maps aid in understanding the cognitive structure (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017, p. 959).

In the initial stage of the discussion, we adopted two criteria. In the first group, we considered studies that aimed to develop a theory, in which GT procedures go beyond data analysis and coding. The substantive theory originates from research data and is specific to phenomena in a context or place (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Formal theory was developed for a formal or conceptual area, involving the generation of abstract concepts that can be applied more broadly (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). In the second group, we included articles that adopted GT procedures as an analytical data technique while using other research strategies.

The second approach explored the method of the studies, particularly regarding aspects related to the application of GT. The discussion was based on the fundamental principles of the method from the following main approaches: 1) Classic or Glaserian, 2) Straussian, and 3) the Constructivist approach, whose representatives are Barley Glaser, Anselm Strauss, and Kathy Charmaz (Tarozzi, 2011). For Strauss and Corbin (2008; 2015), some of the central factors for the application of GT are the absence of a pre-conceived theory as a background. According to them, sampling should be chosen on theoretical grounds, data collection and analysis are interrelated processes, concepts are the basic units of analysis, analysis involves constant comparisons, writing theoretical memos is part of the coding process, and categories must be developed and related. Additionally, we analyzed the adopted method approach in the studies, criteria for theoretical sampling selection, data collection instruments, and software used as support. Finally, we constructed a research agenda and grouped it into four main themes.

3 SUCCESSION IN FAMILY BUSINESS MANAGEMENT USING GROUNDED THEORY: AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section explores the themes of emphasis and contributions to the literature found in studies addressing the management of family businesses applying Grounded Theory (GT) as a method or analytical data technique. Studies have aimed to develop theories, also referred to as models or constructs (Breuer, 2012; Cater et al., 2016; Kudlats et al., 2019; Leiß & Zehrer, 2018; Murphy et al., 2019; Salvato & Corbetta, 2013; Solomon et al., 2011; Strike, 2013; Suzuki & Kino, 2021; Wagner et al., 2022; Wilmer & Fernández-Giménez, 2015). In some cases, there are limitations regarding the application process or method description (we present the details in the next section). Others made partial use of the method, highlighting its application only when describing the data analysis and interpretation process coding (see Table 1).

The issues and objectives proposed in the works were quite heterogeneous, but all focused on understanding phenomena related (directly or indirectly) to succession in family businesses. Theories have been developed to explore and discuss topics such as subjective experiences of decision-making (Wilmer & Fernández-Giménez, 2015), mindsets in the context of succession in family farming (Wagner et al., 2022), transitions from predecessor to successor (Breuer, 2012) and intergroup relationships in multifamily businesses (Kudlats et al., 2019).

Studies have also addressed the role of advisors in building successor leadership (Salvato & Corbetta, 2013), variables (and their relationships) that help explain the development of successors in the transition from followers to leaders (Cater & Justis, 2009), the social functioning of the farm succession process (Bertolozzi-Caredio et al., 2020), the dynamics of successor leadership teams (Cater et al., 2016), socioemotional wealth in next-generation members (Murphy et al., 2019), sustainable successions (Liu, 2018) and others, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Themes and focus of GT application in the investigated studies

Authors	Main Theme	Purpose of GT application
Wagner, Mair e Bitsch (2022)	Mindsets in the Context of Succession in Family Agriculture	TD
Suzuki e Kino (2021)	Transition in the Behavior and Mindset of Successors	TD
Kuddlats, McDowell e Mahto (2019)	Intergroup Relations in Multifamily Businesses	TD
Murphy, Huybrechts e Lambrechts (2019)	Socioemotional Wealth Among Family Members	TD
Leiß e Zehrer (2018)	Intergenerational Communication	TD
Cater. Kidwell e Camp (2016)	Dynamic Team in Family Businesses	TD
Wilmer e Fernandez-Giménez (2015)	Decision-Making of Livestock Farmers	TD
Salvato e Corbetta (2013)	Advisors in Building Successor Leadership	TD
Strike (2013)	Consultancy in Family Businesses	TD
Breuer (2012)	Transfer of Personal Objects from Predecessor to Successor	TD
Solomon et al., (2011)	Complexities of Succession in Family Businesses	TD
Bertolozzi-Caredio et al., (2020)	Stages and Dynamics of Succession	AT
Tran et al., (2020)	Socioemotional Wealth	AT
Liu (2018)	Inheritance of Family Businesses – Sustainable Successions	AT
Claßen e Schulte (2017)	Conflicts in Family Businesses	AT
Cater e Justis (2009)	Development of Successors - From Followers to Leaders	AT
Nunns e Cameron (2004)	Women in Family Businesses	AT

TD = Theory Development AT = Analytical Technique

Source: Compiled by the authors

In 11 studies, the authors declared the development of theory. However, in some cases, it became possible to observe limitations or sensitive points in the description or application of the GT method. Wagner et al. (2022) address the information processing of key actors in the context of agricultural succession. They present an arrangement of factors that contribute to understanding how individuals filter and process information. The results refine the construct of mindset from previous research by adding contributions about stakeholders, information flow, and time.

Wagner et al. (2022) highlighted information flows, the successor's experience gain during personal development, and the predecessor's desire for the successor's education and training. They illustrated the knowledge-based competencies for successful cases. This study demonstrated that successful predecessors share responsibilities with the successor and value their opinions and experiences. Predecessors are also described as sources of help for their successors and not necessarily as guides or mentors (Wagner et al., 2022).

Suzuki and Kino (2021) researched manufacturing companies that had existed for approximately half a century. The objective was to explore the transition process in the behavior and mindset of successors during the management of small and medium-long-standing manufacturing companies throughout the succession life cycle. They conclude by stating that successors continue to face dilemmas (such as crisis management) after taking over from their predecessors. However, this process builds confidence, and autonomous business strategies develop over time.

The central construct in the work of Kudlats et al. (2019) was trust within and between families. The goal was to examine why some multifamily businesses can avoid or manage conflicts between groups, and how multifamily businesses can function harmoniously. For the authors, trust in the context of a family business is a fundamental component for groups to successfully work together. The higher the level, the lower the chances of process and task conflict. The study demonstrated that "trust leads to cooperation, enabling families to engage in participative actions, resulting in business growth" (performance) (Kudlats et al., 2019, p. 755). While succession is not explicitly addressed in this study, the highlighted element (trust in family business) is relevant to the discussion of business succession, and its results contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon.

Using life course theory as an interpretative lens, Murphy, Huybrechts, and Lambrechts (2019) explored the sense of belonging and identity – socioemotional wealth in next-generation family members. The aim was to investigate how and why socioemotional wealth originates and develops among individual members of the next-generation family through critical life events and experiences with the family business. For the authors, the continually built and internalized mental model throughout the life course represents the core for individual construction and is capable of inducing their way of thinking, feeling, and acting, influencing their life paths (Murphy et al., 2019). This result showed that socioemotional wealth develops and strengthens among next-generation family members; they strategically use and remain protective of this wealth, which plays an implicit compass role for future actions and decisions (Murphy et al., 2019).

Leiß and Zehrer (2018) aimed to develop a typology of communication patterns in the succession of family businesses. To achieve this, they explored how intergenerational communication between predecessors and successors impacts family and business. The study emphasized that communication is an important component in planning family business succession. The results showed that there is no ideal communication strategy: succession is based on various communication patterns over time. The occurrence of a positive interrelation generates satisfactory results for the family business, and an intergenerational communication process should be carried out to prevent conflicts and enhance the competencies of members and the business (Leiß & Zehrer, 2018).

In the realm of leadership, Cater et al. (2016) examined the dynamics of successor leadership teams using insights from family dynamics, the succession literature, and the theory of conflict in family businesses. The aim was to understand how social dynamics among team members affect the performance of the successor leadership team and how it affects the long-term performance of the business. After analyzing the data, they presented a process model of successor team dynamics in family businesses composed of 10 propositions divided into four groups. Overall, they emphasized that the successor team should have roots in the history of the family business, and the most important aspects for the formation of the successor team are predecessor leadership, task division, development of team members' skills, the existence of a social hierarchy, and property division.

In addition to leadership, Salvato and Corbetta (2013) proposed a grounded model of successor leadership development guided by advisors. The main findings were that the consultant plays a key role in the leadership-building process, as they promote, nurture, and strengthen leadership skills in successors, balancing opposing forces and threats by acting as a model for the successor, endorsing the successor's leadership, or stepping into an advisory role at the appropriate time (Salvato & Corbetta, 2013).

The theory developed by Wilmer and Fernandez-Giménez (2015) focused on the decision-making of livestock farmers. The objective was to identify and describe distinct patterns in farmers' decision-making processes regarding drought and succession planning. The results presented three patterns related to succession: 1) "rural landowners with succession plans"; 2) "those expecting succession but recognizing financial barriers for their children's return to livestock farming"; and 3) "those without heirs (potential or interested), but discussing conservation as a strategy for the continuity of farm" (Wilmer & Fernández-Giménez, 2015, p. 525). The first one identified a potential successor, and some already have financial and labor responsibilities on the farm. In this group, decisions focused on maintaining the heritage of the farm. In the second one, even with a possible successor, the fear that livestock farming would be insufficient to support another family prevented action. In the third one, the family made efforts to maintain the financial sustainability of the property so that future external managers could continue operations. According to Wilmer and Fernández-Giménez (2015), low risk tolerance due to the responsibility for maintaining a family legacy and the perception of the lack of financial opportunity in the sector/activity for the next generation are some of the elements influencing succession planning.

Breuer's (2012) described the development of a theory of predecessor-successor transitions in social contexts. There was no detailed methodological description of

GT application until the theory's conception. Still, the research began with a previous work whose scope expanded over time, allowing the theory to be applied to various phenomena related to transfer (a broader theory). Breuer's theory of predecessor-successor transitions in social contexts demonstrates that owners' who desires to perpetuate the business to their successors can adopt numerous strategies. For the author, predecessors who want to preserve the object - in this case, the family business - seek successors who resemble their attitudes. The process can occur in three phases: planning/preparation, execution (including rituals), and rework, or in three types of standard structures: abrupt succession, where the predecessor's term and the successor's term begin simultaneously; succession with a gap, where there is an interval between the end and the beginning of the term; and overlapping succession, where there is coexistence of the predecessor's and successor's terms.

In the analytical process of the Grounded Theory method, data can lead to other research questions (unforeseen areas) beyond the initial study proposal (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Murphy et al. (2019) started their research with the life and career experiences of next-generation family members as the research focus. However, as codes emerged from the data, significant information regarding socioemotional wealth and life course theory surfaced, prompting redirection for the study.

A similar shift occurred in Strike's (2013) study, which initially investigated how consultants add value to family businesses. However, based on the data, the focus was revised to examine the subtle and sophisticated counseling process of the most trusted consultants in family businesses. The restructured goal was to analyze how the most trusted consultants subtly captured and directed the attention of family business members, fostering an environment of collective attention. While succession is not the main focus of Strike's analysis, it is indirectly related, as consultants may be involved in succession planning or assistance. Key findings revealed that the existing trust between the consultant and family members allows the redirection of attention to relevant issues that may not be priorities. Consultants subtly challenge assumptions, raising concerns about problems or failures to avoid negative situations, including succession planning (Strike, 2013).

The objective of Solomon et al. (2011) was to understand the complexity of succession in family businesses. They explored family business owners' life stories regarding their experiences, how they perceive their businesses and families, the relationship between them, and how they approach succession. The results demonstrated that individuals' attachment to the business and confidence in the business's performance or interpersonal relationships are significant influences that can either constrain or facilitate succession in family businesses (Solomon et al., 2011). The remaining studies adopted GT as an analytical technique rather than as a method for developing a theory. An overview of the succession-related results is presented.

To understand the dynamics of succession in family farming in extensive livestock farming in two marginal areas of Spain, Bertolozzi-Caredio et al. (2020) explored social origin factors related to the individuality of the successor and farming family involved in the succession process. The study outlined the succession process in three stages across four dimensions (individual, family, institutional, and contextual): Stage 1 - Potential, involves the family recognizing an individual as a potential successor; Stage 2 - Willingness, is determined by the individual development of the potential successor's willingness to take control of the farm, if willing; and Stage 3 - Effective Succession, where the successor takes leadership. The results indicated that succession is a multidimensional process, and individual and family dimensions have the most significant influence on the "construction" of the successor (Bertolozzi-Caredio et al., 2020).

Socio-emotional wealth was the theoretical approach used by Tran et al. (2020) to examine the business structures, property extensions, and management goals of large family forest landowners. The main themes emerging from the research data were a sense of history and pride, the maintenance of property rights and income from investments, the preservation of family legacy, and continuous learning. The results also suggested that socio-emotional wealth is considered in the management decisions of the investigated population's generations (family forest landowners).

Liu (2018) proposed to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework for the complete consideration of all potential factors affecting the inheritance of family businesses. According to the author, succession in family businesses is influenced by various factors such as ownership structure, leadership style, family traditions, succession planning, and the qualifications of the successor, which can generate stability and facilitate the sustainable development of the family business (Liu, 2018).

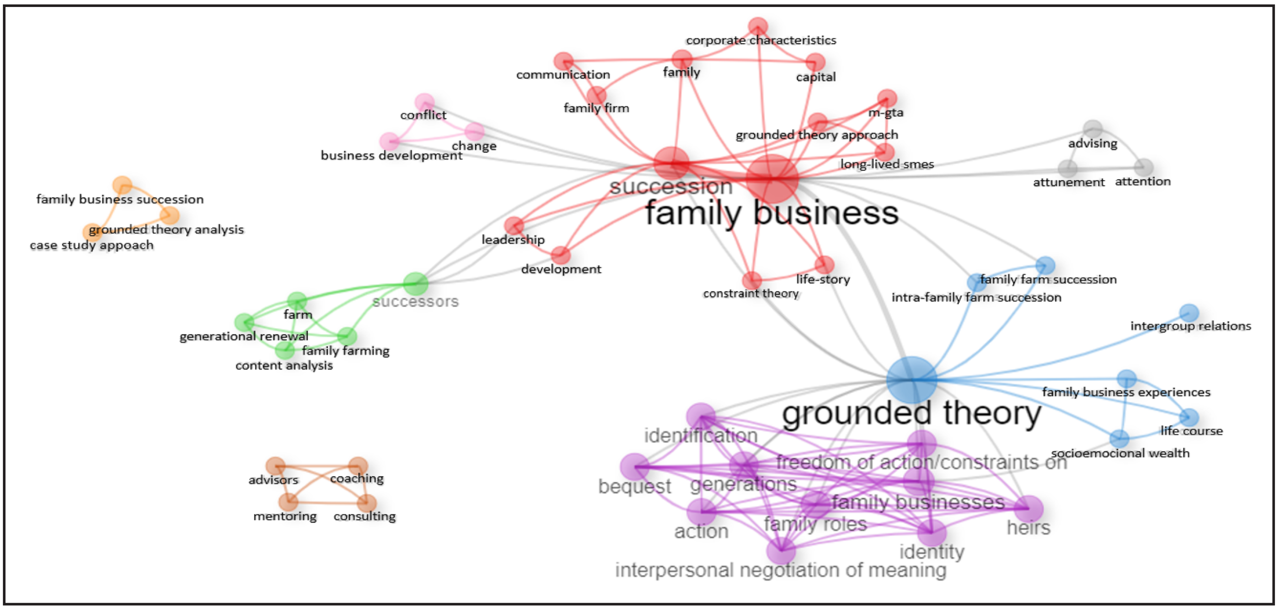
Regarding successor development, Cater and Justis (2009) examined variables (and their relationships) that help explain the leadership of a family business successor. They explained the leadership of a family business successor through six variables included in a four-stage succession framework: positive relationships among parents and children, long-term orientation, cooperation, knowledge acquisition, manager-builder role, and risk-taking propensity.

Claßen and Schulte (2017) addressed the factors driving changes in family businesses, considering their specific characteristics. The study aimed to develop an understanding of how conflicts caused by the specificities of family businesses - familiarity - impact changes in businesses. They analyzed whether and how conflicts can cause, promote, accelerate, or hinder changes in family businesses. As a result, they claimed that there are three different types of conflict: open (social), latent, and the risk of future conflicts as drivers of change, with the latter aiming to prevent conflicts. In general, this study identifies conflict as an opportunity for positive changes and can be considered a driver of positive exit options for the business. The results indicated that the family system can function as a catalytic converter to accelerate changes in the business, and the family's self-perception and previous experiences influence change behavior.

Nunns and Cameron (2004) analyzed the participation of women in family businesses. The aim was to identify women's attitudes towards working in family businesses and compare them with the existing literature. According to the authors, the decision to work in a business arises for various reasons. In the cases investigated, family business is seen as a positive dimension of family life, and no reports indicate conflicts in family roles as required by the business. Factors such as attachment and desire to help parents are considered motivators for involvement and persistence in the family business (Nunns & Cameron, 2004).

The literature addressing the succession of family businesses integrates different geographical and cultural contexts into its analyses, allowing for a multicultural appreciation of the phenomenon, which can be interpreted as useful in enhancing knowledge (Bizri, 2016). It is important highlight that these studies were subjected to a specific context of collection and analysis, and addressed substantive aspects. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing these findings. Figure 2 presents a thematic map of the main topics covered in the articles based on keywords.

Figure 2 – Thematic map of articles by keywords



Developed by the authors with Biblioshiny/RStudio software

The analyzed articles addressed succession from various perspectives and focuses, which we grouped into four main thematic clusters: Family Businesses, Successors, Family, and Grounded Theory. In the Family Businesses cluster, research engages in discussions related to succession processes, generational transitions, governance/leadership, decision-making, conflict management, and family relationships in the business context. The Successors cluster includes topics such as preparation, development, professionalization, and challenges. The Family cluster encompasses discussions on intra-family dynamics, business relationships, and the succession process. In the GT cluster, aspects related to the method and its applications are considered.

4 APPLICATIONS OF THE GROUNDED THEORY METHOD

The majority of studies adopted qualitative approach of single and multiple case studies. This characteristic highlights the lack of alignment in some works with the foundational principles for applying the GT method, that the theory should originate from the collected data, and the research should persist until theoretical saturation is achieved (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Among these studies are Cater and Justis (2009), Strike (2013), Cater et al. (2016), Vincent Ponroy et al. (2019), Tran et al. (2020), and comparative case studies (Salvato & Corbetta, 2013). Case selection is guided by the principle of choosing those that offer the greatest opportunity for discovery and theoretical insights into the phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The sampling process must be planned and strategic in order to meet the study objectives. Non-random/intentional sampling was adopted based on selection criteria, such as the occurrence of succession in the company (Cater et al., 2016; Cater & Justis, 2009; Leiß & Zehrer, 2018), diversification of companies in sectors (Leiß & Zehrer, 2018; Salvato & Corbetta, 2013), types of activities performed (Bertolozzi-Caredio et al., 2020; Wilmer & Fernández-Giménez, 2015) function/position in the companies (Claßen & Schulte, 2017; Solomon et al., 2011; Tran et al., 2020), family structure and social relationships (Murphy et al., 2019; Salvato & Corbetta, 2013; Strike, 2013), and gender (Bertolozzi-Caredio et al., 2020).

“Theoretical sampling is the analytical instrument, typical of GT, that allows choosing cases until their complete saturation” (Tarozzi, 2011, p. 154). The point of data saturation is reached when new evidence no longer emerges, owing to the level of redundancy in the information, and consequently, no further substantial additional knowledge is generated. Murphy et al. (2019) initiated the study with a sample of six participants, but they only achieved theoretical saturation after the inclusion of 12 participants in the study. To reach data saturation, Bertolozzi-Caredio et al. (2020) conducted interviews in three phases, Cater et al. (2016) in two rounds, and Claßen and Schulte (2017) reached saturation with the twenty-first interview.

The primary data collection instrument consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews (primary data) (Claßen & Schulte, 2017; Strike, 2013), while other authors also included complementary documents in the analysis (secondary data) to support and triangulate the findings, such as books and company reports, newspapers and magazines, websites, and transcripts of official speeches (Cater et al., 2016; Cater & Justis, 2009; Murphy et al., 2019). Justifications for choosing the method include the possibility of comparing and contrasting experiences (Salvato & Corbetta, 2013), gathering hidden information (Bertolozzi-Caredio et al., 2020), and capturing multiple perspectives (Kudlats et al., 2019).

The interviews were conducted in person. Cater et al. (2016) used phone interviews and email for data collection, considering the extended duration of the research. Solomon et al. (2011) and Murphy et al. (2019) developed a life history interview protocol following chronological order, where narratives are presented in chapters. Claßen and Schulte (2017) formulated questions in a global context to avoid socially desirable responses. In addition to interviews and the use of secondary sources, direct and indirect participant observation methods were employed (Strike, 2013; Wilmer & Fernández-Giménez, 2015).

The stages of data collection and analysis in GT must occur in continuous interdependence (simultaneously), and a constant comparison method must be performed at all levels of analysis (Tarozzi, 2011). This process constantly prompts new questions regarding data. Bertolozzi-Caredio et al. (2020) and Tran et al. (2020) reported that as new topics emerged, they addressed them in subsequent interviews. Strike (2013) overlapped data collection and analysis, adding new guiding questions to the research themes that emerged as important. Cassia et al. (2012) presented a situation in which they addressed potential biases in retrospective primary data and critically compared responses from various respondents.

In the GT method, the coding stage can be organized in different ways depending on the chosen approach. Studies were identified that performed the coding process as proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2008) in open, axial, and selective coding (Bertolozzi-Caredio et al., 2020; Cater et al., 2016; Cater & Justis, 2009; Leiß & Zehrer, 2018) and by Charmaz (2006) in initial, focused, and theoretical coding (Murphy et al., 2019; Solomon et al., 2011; Wilmer & Fernández-Giménez, 2015). Other studies did not clearly specify the approach used or the key authors for applying the GT method (Tran et al., 2020), and structured the data into 1st and 2nd order categories (Kudlats et al., 2019; Solomon et al., 2011; Strike, 2013).

Coding, the process of structural organization and ordering of data identifies subjective and recurring patterns, fundamental consistencies, meanings, themes, perceptions, and views (Cater et al., 2016; Cater & Justis, 2009; Claßen & Schulte, 2017; Leiß & Zehrer, 2018). The process is complex as it typically involves the analysis and interpretation of a significant amount of qualitative data.

To assist with data organization and management, the authors used software as support. The main ones identified were MaxQda (Claßen & Schulte, 2017; Tran et al., 2020), Nvivo10 (Bertolozzi-Caredio et al., 2020; Cater et al., 2016; Salvato & Corbetta, 2013), ATLAS.ti (Kudlats et al., 2019) and the R Package RQDA (Wilmer & Fernández-Giménez, 2015).

Several authors have conducted checks for validity, reliability, and reproducibility. In Claßen and Schulte (2017), a group of qualitative researchers analyzed data and categories independently and deviations were resolved through consensus discussion. Salvato and Corbetta (2013) used the second author as a critical reviewer and the interrogator of the first author in emerging findings to ensure internal and external data validity. Strike (2013), to ensure did not adopt the informants' perspective, regularly met with a colleague who assumed the role of a "checker" of the analyses to improve theorization. This analysis suggest future research directions for studies related to succession in family businesses and GT.

5 RESEARCH AGENDA

Literature has extensively discussed the theme of succession in family businesses. However, owing to its complexity and dynamism, there are still numerous research opportunities, especially through the application of the GT method, which allows for in-depth investigation of phenomena by generating grounded theories.

From the identified clusters—Business and Family, Successors, Family and Grounded Theory—insights have been generated for the field of family business succession through the application of the GT method. These indications consider the use of GT to generate theory or merely the coding of data.

Business and Family:

•Exploring the succession process in family businesses with diverse structures, such as blended families, where children from previous relationships are integrated into the family and have an interest in the family business or in cases of intra-family ruptures due to conflicts.

•Analyzing the implications generated by personal/family expectations and motivations in the succession process of small family businesses.

•Investigating the effects of late and unplanned succession in family businesses.

•Examining the management process in situations of shared succession among siblings.

Successors:

•Investigating strategies and practices aimed at the development of the next generation, including training programs and experiences.

•Analyzing situations in which successors engage in additional professional activities alongside managing the family business, that is, dedicating themselves partially to this function.

•Examining the context in which women are chosen as successors in family businesses, especially in rural settings.

Family:

•Understanding the factors that exist in family dynamics aiming to deepen knowledge about internal family aspects influencing succession.

•Identifying and understand the main conflicts that may arise during the succession process, such as differences in opinions and interests of family members.

•Analyzing emotional issues, affective bonds, and family resilience during the succession process.

Grounded Theory:

•Developing an unstructured support guide to assist future researchers in applying the method for the development of substantive or formal theories related to social phenomena and exploring the GT development process for enhanced quality, transparency, and ethics.

The research areas outlined in the clusters provide insights that can enrich the study of succession in family businesses. They represent a part of the vast research landscape offered by the GT method, paving the way for discussions that can contribute to the development of future practices and policies.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS AND THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The results revealed that the GT method is a valuable approach for studying succession in family businesses. Through grounded data analysis and theory construction, it is possible to generate opportunities for exploration and an in-depth understanding of the patterns and dynamics within this specific process and business context. By exploring the scope of articles addressing the family businesses succession through GT, this study identified four thematic clusters (Business and Family, Successors, Family, and Grounded Theory) and, based on them, provides theoretical and practical insights for future research. Understanding the research topics and the methodological processes adopted in the studies allows for reflection on existing scenarios in the field of study, potentially promoting and contributing to the improvement of future strategies and practices that strengthen family cohesion and assist in creating an environment conducive to the continuity of family businesses.

Few studies have aimed to develop a theory or faithfully follow the fundamentals of the GT method based on the main approaches. Some authors have used different denominations (such as theoretical models or constructs) for what is defined as a theory using the GT method. Most articles used the method partially, focusing mainly on data analysis and coding, whereas others lacked detailed information on the steps taken until the conception of the theory.

Regarding the application of the method, this study contributes to the generation of relevant and high-quality knowledge by exploring the fundamental principles of GT. The level of detail encouraged in this research for future work contributes to the development of theories that can support policies for successful succession. These results indicate a promising field of study at the intersection of succession in family businesses and the use of GT. The application of GT in research on succession in family businesses offers unique potential for in-depth exploration. Therefore, continuation of studies in this area is encouraged to promote the sustainable development of family businesses, coupled with public policies that encourage young individuals to take on the succession of organizations.

7 DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)	√	√		
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review	√	√	√	√
5. Definition of methodological procedures	√	√	√	√
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