

Business Leader's Behaviors in the Case of Retirement and Successor's Acceptance: A Men/Woman Comparative Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The problematic issue of successor's acceptance in a family business has not yet reached researchers' attention. This comparative case study put the emphasis on how men/women predecessors will bring their business people toward successors' acceptance. The results reveal that, when predecessors put their confidence into themselves, they will adopt, in turn, different behavioral strategies than their own. In doing so, the successor's acceptance process by company personnel differs depending on the predecessor's gender. This study shows the importance to take into account the predecessor's gender in future

studies on family succession of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

Keywords: *Behavioral Strategies, Family Business, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SME)*

INTRODUCTION

Family businesses seem to be very important in the economic, social, and cultural development of nations (Aronoff and Ward, 1994; Astrachan and Shanker, 2003; Deloitte and Touche, 1999). On the other hand, there is actually a great concern for those business owners, whether in Quebec, Canada, United States, or other industrialized countries. Indeed, near from 50% of the business owners are over fifty and they are facing the dynamic of transferring their businesses to their successors (Allouche and Amann, 2000; Cadieux, 2004; FFI, 2003; Richer, St-Cyr and Youssef, 2004; Sharma, 2004). For example, according to recent studies by Bruce and Picard (2005, 2006) on Canadian business leaders, 41% of them will transfer their businesses in the next five years and 71% in the next ten years, but only 35% said that they have a selling or transferring plan.

However, most researchers agree that succession is a long and complex process where success is mainly based on several factors, among others, on the predecessor's willingness to withdraw (Brown and Coverley, 1999; Lansberg and Astrachan, 1994) or to be disengaged (Cadieux, Lorrain and Hugron, 2002) the predecessor's ability to keep good relations with the successor (Davis and Harveston, 1998; Fiegenger, Brown, Prince and File, 1996; Lambrecht, 2005; Morris and al., 1997; Seymour, 1993; Vera and Dean, 2005; Ward, 1987), or the way such that the predecessor will bring his/her successor to be accepted as future leader by the human resources within the

enterprise, particularly by the management team members (Barach, Ganitsky, Carson and Doochin, 1988; Bayad and Barbot, 2002).

Despite of all that has been accomplished on the problematic succession of family business during the last three decades, only few researchers have been interested in the singularity of this succession process when the predecessor is a woman (Cadieux and Lorrain, 2002; Cole, 1997; Sharma, 2004). According to Industry Canada and Canadian Statistics reported by Richer and St-Cyr (2007), more than 40% of the family business leaders who encountered succession problems are women. In addition, since the study conducted by Hisrich and Brush (1984) until those carried out by Buttner (2001), the overall work done within the field of women's entrepreneurship on women's leading mode shows that the women entrepreneurs' behaviors toward their employees and business associates differ from their men counterparts. On the basis of these findings, we can formulate the following research question: What is the difference between women and men predecessors in their acceptance of the successors' organizational skills? The objective of this study is to understand and describe how family business leaders, whether they are women or men, will bring the employees to accept their successors when they retire.

Theoretical Context

There is a lack of scientific works examining the process of successors' social integration. The following subsection discusses about this succession process on the basis of the understanding of the few researchers who have studied it until now.

Family Business Succession

The leadership or property transfer is often part of the family business succession process (Hugron, 1992). The leadership transfer is defined as a dynamic process during which the predecessor's roles and functions and his/her successor (a member of the family) evolve in an

overlapping way (Handler, 1990) in order to transfer to the successor management and life philosophy, responsibilities, attitudes, authority, power, and leadership (Cabrera-Suárez, 2005; Hugron, 1992; Lajeunesse, 1989; Longenecker and Schoen, 1978). In general, the process of leadership transfer, presented in the form of model, takes into account four distinct phases. In the initiation phase, the predecessor initiates his/her successor to the day-to-day business leadership in developing his/her interest. This initiation phase goes to the integration phase where the successor, chosen not only for his/her competences and interest (Haddadj and Andria, 2001) but also for his/her confidence and especially for the quality of the relationship between him/her and the other actors within the organization, (Barach and al., 1988; Dumas, 1992; Lansberg and Astrachan, 1994; Morris and al., 1997), introduces himself/herself more officially into the enterprise, gets familiarized, and works with the predecessor and the employees (Churchill and Hatten, 1987; Hugron, 1993; Lajeunesse, 1989). In the phase of joint leadership, the successor proves his/her competence by taking some specific roles while working with the predecessor (Cadieux, 2004) who is transferring to him/her the philosophy of life and management, the responsibilities, and the power (Hugron, 1993; Lajeunesse, 1989) until there is a complete withdrawal at the disengagement phase (Cadieux, 2004). However, to lead the business in an autonomous way, it is important that the successor be accepted by the organization's members (Barach and al., 1988).

Successor's Acceptance

First, it is to be noted that the successor's acceptance concept did not particularly attract researchers' attention. The few interested authors rather treated this notion of productivity appreciation, self-acceptance, without looking sufficiently on the acceptance of a new person by their peers. For example, based on the studies of Beer (1981) and Hartenian (1991), Poudrier (2000) defines acceptance as

congruence between the organizational objectives and those of the person evaluated. For Longenecker and Nykodym (1996), studying the concept in a context of supervision, the collaborator's acceptance increases when the supervisor and the collaborator have a common perception and understanding of the objectives. Murphy and Cleveland (1995), as far as they are concerned, mention that the agreement on tasks accomplishment and common perception of the performance standards are two essential factors of the acceptance process.

In the context of the family businesses, the important studies which elaborate on the concept of successor's acceptance are those of Sathe (1985) and Barach and al. (1988). According to Sathe (1985), the success of managerial transfer is determined by the level of successor's acceptance. This acceptance would occur when the company's members perceive the successor's beliefs, values, and behaviors as compatible and conform to the organizational culture. For Barach and al. (1988), before the predecessor retires from the organization, he/she must be assured of the successfulness of his/her successor's acceptance. Thus the predecessor should make such that the successor adheres to the organizational culture of the family business and develops the necessary competences to play effectively his/her role as organizational leader in order to satisfy the expectations of the organization's members and to gain their confidence and their respect (Barach and al., 1988; Bayad and Barbot, 2002; Mouline, 2000; Sathe, 1985). Unfortunately, these few scientific researchers emphasizing the importance of predecessor's implication in the process of successor's acceptance and the congruence of the values and behaviors, are talking very few about the behavioral strategies adopted by the predecessor to legitimate the managerial transfer.

The Relational Behavior of Women Business Leaders

There is a lack of research on managerial behaviors and the direction of women as predecessors, but the literature on women's

entrepreneurship sheds some light on the characteristics of their behavioral strategies related to leadership. Several studies on women's entrepreneurship examine their managerial behaviors. The results of these studies show certain specificities regarding the behavioral mode of men and women entrepreneurs (Belcourt, Burke and Lee-Gosselin (1991); Brush, 1992; GCEF, 2000; CWBR, 1999; Lavoie, 1988; National Foundation for Women Owners Business, 2004; Proulx, 1995; Putnam, 1993; Robinson, 2001). First, unlike men, women prefer personal contact to the detriment of a greater formalization, which implies growth. Second, women are more interested than men in the social dimension of the work and to pursue economic objectives whereas men prefer entrepreneurship and supervision role rather than collaboration. Third, women adopt a participative management style, which aims at integrating work and family. Overall, women entrepreneur is viewing the business world as a system of interrelationships rather than a structure divided in two distinct entities: economic and social spheres, which do not meet (Brush, 1992). From the women point of view, business matters are an integral part of all their activities (Brush, 1992; Buttner, 2001; Putnam, 1993).

A case study by Buttner (2001) based on the relational theory developed by Miller (1986), Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver and Surrey (1991), and Fletcher (1998), particularly when considering women entrepreneurs' behavioral style, reveals that these women use a relational approach when working with employees and customers. Relational theory stipulates that women have a sense of connection allowing a more personal relationship with employees and customers (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Miller, 1991) putting an emphasis on individual growth and development which are favored in a context of relationship where there are interactions. The interaction dimensions are protection, mutual skills, self-achievement, and teamwork creation. Concerning protection, the supportive women contacts help or assist. By mutual skills, the women enable the employees to achieve and

contribute to the realization of the business activities. The dimension of self-achievement refers to the use of relational skills to improve her professional growth and work effectiveness. Team creation is the basic condition to which group life can evolve. However, relational theory does not involve all women nor stipulate that only women subscribe to it (Buttner, 2001). From a relational point of view, these competences make this theory a framework to clearly express the behavior of women business leaders because one cannot talk about an organization without addressing these fundamental characteristics: the relationship and trust with others, as well as the skillfulness to take care of others and contribute to their well-being (Buttner, 2001; Chaganti, 1986; Hirisch and Brush, 1984; Robinson, 2001). In accordance with these authors, Rosener (1994), quoting the concept defined by Burns (1978) and developed by Bass (1985), claims that compared to men, it is easier for women to adopt a transformational leadership style which leads to a more globally transformation or integration of the collaborators' personal objectives and interests.

Moreover, the study conducted by Riebe (2005), supported by the studies carried out by Buttner (2001, 2002), Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and van Engen (2003), Eagly and Carli (2003), Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001), Fletcher (1998), Gilligan (1986), Hegelsen (1995), and McClelland (1979), which is related to 27 successful business leaders, shows that to succeed these interviewed women entrepreneurs adopted behaviors to motivate and retain employees, established a friendly family relation with the employees, suppressed the hierarchy, and emphasized interdependence, collegiality, and empowerment. Finally, some researchers noted a difference between leadership styles (Bass, 1991), others concluded that gender does not influence leadership styles, but these results are questioned (see Bass, 1990; Cole, 1997; Davidson and Cooper, 1987; Powell, 1990; Vikinas and Cartan, 1993; Van Engen, van der Leeden and Willemsen, 2001; Vecchio, 2002, 2003).

Research Objective

As Salganicoff (1990) mentioned in his study, this feminine approach seems more appropriate for the family business management because people with these characteristics are more apt to deal with the business and family well-being. Furthermore, the capacity of women to connect with others and their propensity to favor the development of their employees will lead the predecessor to support the successor's acceptance. In short, even if the literature on family business does not clearly indicate the behavioral strategies adopted by the predecessor to support the successor's acceptance by its employees and even less the differentiation of strategies by gender, it remains that the research conducted on women's entrepreneurship predicts that women and men predecessors adopt different behaviors in this regard.

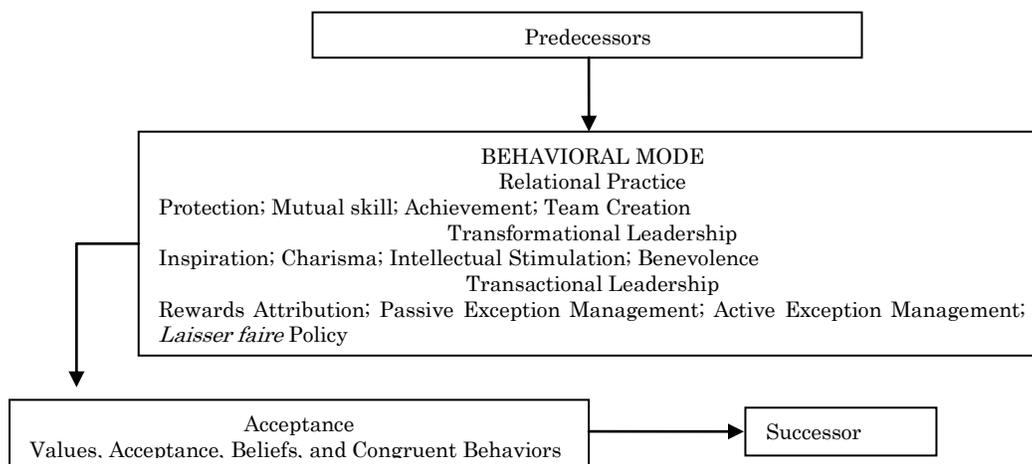


Figure 1. The relation between the predecessor's behaviors and the successor's acceptance by the business members

As postulated in the theoretical model (see figure 1) below, the men/women predecessors in our study adopt a behavioral model centered on relational practices (Buttner, 2001) and transformational and transactional leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1994) to gain their successors' acceptance by the business members. Inversely, which model will be used by both? We will attempt to answer this question in which follows.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

In order to understand the leadership behaviors adopted by men/women predecessors to gain their successors' acceptance by the business members, we designed a methodology described as follows. The exploratory and multi-sites case study strategy (Hlady-Rispal, 2002) has been used since the phenomenon belonging to new problems for which few empirical studies were done (Grenier and Josserand, 1999) can exist only in the context in which it evolves (Yin, 1994). We choose the theoretical sampling procedure given the scarcity of women business leaders in managerial transfer. The following criteria were examined: succession process from the first to the second generation began and possibly completed; succession mother/father-daughter or mother/father-son; manufacturing or sales service sector of 10 to 250 employees; the employee selected must have worked in the enterprise with the owner manager either before or while the successor entered in the business. A total of 110 companies led by women and 44 led by men were selected in Quebec.

A first series of calls and verifications using the Internet made it possible to eliminate 89 women and 29 men. Of the 21 women and the 15 men contacted, according to the criteria, seven companies (four women predecessors and three men predecessors) in the process of first generational transfer when at least one family member has the control

on the property and management (Cadieux, 2004) were retained. Two women predecessors have already transferred the business to their successors. The five others, affirming their intention to transfer the business, are at an advanced stage of the process. The number of interviews performed, the SME feminine and masculine profiles in taking into account the foundation date, the sector of activities (two manufacturing and four services), the number of employees (from 15 to 150), the successors' gender (three women successors and four men successors), the turnover (from two to seven millions), the transfer condition, and the percentage of actions held are presented in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 Profile of Women Business Leaders

Women predecessor	Nature	Montage	Terroir	Binette
Foundation date	1987	1988	1991	1986
Sector of activities	Services	Services	Manufacturer	Services
Number of employees	59	50 to 150	32	26
Successors	Daughters	Sons	Sons	Sons
Turnover	3 to 4 millions	2 to 3 millions	3 millions	6 to 7 millions
State of transfer	Finished	Joint partnership	Finished	In process
Actions	Pred.: 0% Succ.: 33% Other shareholders with option of repurchase: 66%	Pred.: 33% Succ.: 0% Other shareholders with option of repurchase: 66%	Pred.: 52% Succ.: 48%	Pred.: 50% Succ.: Son: 25% Daughter: 25%
Number of interviews	3	4	4	4

Table 2 Profile of Men Business Leaders

Men predecessor	Cérami	Sanite	Jetpur
Foundation date	1975	1980	1999
Sector of activities	Retail business	Services	Manufacturer
Number of employees	15	20	46
Successors	Daughters	Sons	Daughters
Turnover	2 millions	6 millions	5 millions
State of transfer	Nearly finished	In process	In process
Actions	Pred.: 100%	Pred.: 100%	Pred.: 63%; Succ.: 6% Three other employees: 31%
Number of interviews	4	4	4

DATA COLLECTION

The data collection was performed from February 2004 to April 2006. Data were collected using 27 semi-structured interviews which averaged an hour and a half in time duration. The three guides used to conduct the interviews were structured according to the following elements: enterprise presentation, succession process, competences transfer process, leadership behaviors, and successor's acceptance. These interviews took place with seven predecessors, seven successors, and 13 employees in order to triangulate the data.

After having explained the research objectives to the participants and obtained their agreement to record the interviews, the 27 individual interviews were recorded and transcribed for a first analysis allowing us to bring the necessary adjustments during the subsequent interviews. Then seven cases of enterprises were recorded. The sequential thematic technique (Paille and

Mucchielli, 2003) was privileged to analyze the interviews using QSR NVivo software (version 2.0). First, its flexibility allowed us not only to redefine and organize hierarchically the various topics of the conceptual framework related to the succession process (Hugron, 1992; Lajeunesse, 1989), the dimensions of the relational theory (Buttner, 2001), the transformational and transactional leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1994) and the acceptance (Barach and al., 1988), but also to add emergent themes during the analysis. We needed to proceed to the corpus de-contextualization and re-contextualization (Paille and Mucchielli, 2003) in rebuilding a new structure with the coded themes, which we used to support the final results. Regarding the themes validation, it was based on their recurrence, their consistency, and their importance for the respondents. To satisfy the data corroboration requirement (Yin, 1994), we compared the various points of view expressed by the respondents on the same subject.

RESULTS

How do men/women business leaders, who decide at the end of their careers to retire and to yield their business to their successors, getting their successors accepted within the enterprise they have created? To answer this question, we need to look at the pragmatic analysis of the respondents' discussions which will determine the suitable factors for the characterization of leadership behaviors for the successor's acceptance, whether the predecessor is a woman or a man. These behaviors, in the form of leadership strategies, will be compared to the dimensions of acceptance.

Inter-case analysis: women predecessor behaviors

Although the women predecessor journey and history differ in their business creation and management, when it comes to bring the successor to gain acceptance, there are many similarities at the behavioral level. Even if some dimensions that we cannot find in the literature have emerged during the analysis, bringing an important contribution to the theoretical level (confidence, "maternalist" leadership, and collaborative work), the other behaviors are similar to feminist practices known as relational (Buttner, 2001; Fletcher, 1998) and the

dimensions of the transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1994). These behaviors regrouped in categories for the final analysis are protection and mutual skill. They are presented and defined in table 3.

Protection

All the interviewed respondents' statements indicated to us that the four women predecessors understood that to adopt protectionist behaviors (Buttner, 2001) while exercising their functions with their successors allowed to the latter to do less errors and to be more easily accepted. Thus, in the transfer process of the philosophy of life, the philosophy of management and responsibilities (Hugron, 1987), all four women predecessors created occasions, even successors can agreed, to consolidate their confidence. They protected them from any resistance, insecurity, adversities, and possible damage coming from the other company members.

Table 3 Business women leaders – acceptance behaviors

Protection	Scan the environment in order to determine useful information for acceptance; protect from adversities and damages to which the successor would be exposed; protect from personal and financial insecurity; support
Capability skill	Encourage the successors to academic formation; internally form and test: mentorship and friendship; rely on consultants; use their expertise; develop the capacity to be an expert and learner; initiate special projects; develop employees
Confidence	Trust mutually; build self-confidence; express pride; build internal and external successor's visibility; show and gain respect; posit successors and accept mistakes
"Maternalist" leadership	Show empathy; show kindness; express tact and gentleness; link rational and emotional
Collaborative work	Practice collaboration, interdependence, and communication

They scanned the environment to determine useful information for the successors and support them in the daily tasks. Moreover, according to their

statements, the determining factor for acceptance is that almost all predecessors proceeded in preparing with care and in a non-casual way the employees for the successors' installation: "*At the beginning, she protected me much against the partner and employees (E3W-Int-Succ, 61¹). Then it was performed kindly. [...] I then protected them (E4W-Int-Pred, 56²). You give more chance to your children. You protect them more (E3W-Int-Empl-A, 157³)*".

Capability Skill

Successors were trained by women predecessors in order to achieve the objectives related to their responsibilities. They put the emphasis on their internal formation, especially making sure about the contribution of professionals or consultants practicing a primary teaching based on empathy enabling them to be challenged in their capacity of experts and learners. "*I integrated it quietly, I presented her to my suppliers and to everyone and I saw how [...] they accepted her (E1W-Int-Pred, 62). Therefore, since the purchase, we began to establish the HACCP standards [...] and I was mandated to do everything into the factory with the assistance of a consultant [...]. It is good for the successor's acceptance (E3W-Int-Succ, 24)*".

Confidence

Almost all respondents indicated that women predecessors showed a great confidence in their successors in leaving their place to them and in respecting them; a mutual trust, in fact. Women predecessors contributed especially to build their successors' internal and external visibility, and to clearly express their tolerance to error. Not only P1 often asked assistance to her daughter, promoted her within the enterprise as well as to the suppliers and associations, but also and more especially P2 said to us that she is always supported by the

¹ Third company of business women leaders, interview of successor, discourse number 61.

² Fourth company of business women leaders, interview of predecessor, discourse number 56.

³ Third company of business women leaders, interview of employee A, discourse number 157.

knowledge of her children, collaborators, and friends for her personal growth and effectiveness. This way of doing reinforces self-esteem and confidence while making it possible for the successor to gain acceptance. “[...] *Even if errors are made, it is not serious, [...] because if we do not have the owner's confidence, that does not mean that the others will put their trust in you* (E4W-Int-Succ, 71). *She trusted him much. [...] and she consulted him much and respected him [...]. It takes much effort to invite the employees to accept somebody* (E2W-Int-Empl-A, 101)”.

“Maternalist” Leadership

Almost all respondents mentioned that women predecessors adopted a “maternalist” leadership style. P1, P2, and P3 offered assistance in supporting their successors to evaluate their emotion regarding their position, leading them to adopt better solutions (Buttner, 2001; Fletcher, 1998), as stated by an employee: *“Because Mrs Guimond is more humanitarian, more mother, she knows how to present her son to us so that we will accept him well* (E2W-Int-Empl-A, 47)”.

Collaborative Work

Collaborative work is an integral part of the business fundamental values of P1, P2, and P4. According to one successor, the predecessors recognize the importance to stress their successors’ collaboration and cohesion with the employees in an interdependent manner which would facilitate successors’ acceptance: *“They like the spirit of family which exists and also the possibility for them to speak with us anytime knowing that they will be listened [...]. It will facilitate acceptance* (E3W-Int-Succ, 83)”.

Determinant Factors of Successor's Acceptance According to Business Women Leaders

In order that the successor succeed in making his/her business entry, it is essential that the organization's members accept and agree to work with the successor. According to the intra-case analysis of business women leaders, there is successor's acceptance when: a) women predecessors positioned their successors so that they can easily climb up the ladder, while acquiring know-how and experience internally; b) successor's values and behaviors are compatible with the business (there is successor's engagement); and c) the successor gains as much confidence and respect from women predecessors as other business members.

According to the employees, the most important factor for successor's acceptance is the predecessor's positioning aspect which allows the successor to easily climb the ladder without shock. P1W, P2W, and P4W gently pass the word to convince the employees to approach the successors concerning tasks. Almost all successors followed a similar progression which is characterized by the successor's entry in the basic functions of the business. He/she familiarized himself/herself with each department, therefore with the employees, while starting at the bottom of the ladder and fulfilling precise tasks to gradually reach the highest levels before joint-leadership: "*She obtained all levels according to SPA standard and she made herself known. I gently pass the word* (E1W-Int-Pred, 24). [...] *She has not radically imposed Ignace.*

It was done gradually and then better accepted (E2W-Int-Empl-A, 29)". Moreover, during the acceptance process, the successors involved in the company as early as their childhood had to learn, as much from their mother as from the employees, the structures, values, beliefs, and vision of the business, as well as to adopt behaviors expected by the business members (Barach and al., 1988). According to the respondents, [...] "*What she did is that she was always returning at the fundamental values and objectives pursued* (E3W-Int-Succ, 61).

Fidel has the same values as the business, which is favouring acceptance (E3W-Int-Empl-A, 109)”.

Inter-case Analysis: Predecessors' Behaviors

As shown in table 4, the discourse analysis of the companies' respondents led by the predecessors indicates that men present themselves as models to follow, while inspiring the successors in leading them to show their ability, in empowering them, and in holding meetings with them.

Capability Skill

Proceeding in the same way than women, the predecessors saw all the importance for successors to acquire knowledge by internal and external formation, and by internal experiences in carrying out special projects. This is why S2M⁴ obtained a Baccalaureate of Business Administration and S3M got a Master in Operational Research. We can see that the academic profile of these children facilitated the transfer of know-how and, in some way, the transfer of how to manage. To concretize these transfers on the technical point of view, women preferred the contribution of consultants while their men counterpart privileged a more concrete process which includes a pedagogical approach by which the successor is learning in observing how the mentor, who can be the predecessor, and the coaches, most of the time the predecessor's collaborators, act. This way of doing largely facilitated acceptance: “*Caroline had two coaches. She had her father, founder of several businesses, and actually one of the business leaders. And she had the control on the administrator side. [...] For others, this gives acceptance (E3M-Int-Pred, 81)*”. The predecessors prefer friendship given that the internal formation is provided by other

⁴ Successor of the second company of business men leaders

employees. Here is an example. As for S2M and S3M: *“I coached a few in various tasks (E2M-Int-Empl-B, 88)”*.

Table 4 General View of Men Business Leaders’ Behaviors

Capability skill	Acquire knowledge by academic formation and external and internal formation; put the emphasis on mentorship; internal formation and experiment, specifically at the levels of know-how and direction; put the emphasis on friendship; internal formation and experiment, specifically at the level of know-how; initiate special projects
Inspiration	Transmit the enterprise’s vision, to be a model
Reliability	Show interest and investment; make evidence related to work; show initiative
Work	Initiate predecessors and successors meetings in order to have constructive discussions; initiate management meetings to examine current problems; examine miscommunication (at the exception of Jetpur)

Inspiration

The predecessors are perceived not only as a source of inspiration for their successors regarding the business vision, but also as models to follow, which has facilitated acceptance. Here are some examples of what successors say about this: *“My father communicated to me his ability of doing good work, even if I do not like his way of being harsh with us. I must imitate him (E1M-Int-Succ, 28). Andy and I have the same business vision which makes it easier to follow, so there is no other model (E2M-Int-Succ, 106). [...] He is the model (E3M-Int-Empl-B, 198)”*.

Reliability

Almost all business leaders required from their successors to cross some steps, while showing their level of interest, involvement, and initiative. These steps which demonstrate that the successors have the ability to accomplish the required tasks would be viewed as proofs or initiation rites that they must realize and cross successfully. It is what the respondents think: *“And I think that I had proven myself reliable and that he could trust me when he was gone, and it is good for acceptance (E1M-Int-Succ, 19)”*. It also happens that S1W and S3W often work in the weekend and sometimes very late in the night to complete some important tasks in order to prove to others their interest and involvement in the business.

Work

It is often performed in a way such that the predecessors and the successors meet to discuss about the objectives, the procedure to follow, and the difficulties encountered.

Determining Factors of the Successor’s acceptance by the Men Business Leaders

The three predecessors organized themselves so that their successors can be accepted by gently introducing them so that they can climb the ladder, while taking care that they prove themselves, that their values, beliefs, and behaviors are compatible with those of the enterprise, that they gain confidence and respect of the employees, and especially that they show interest, initiative, and involvement.

First, acceptance depends on how successors climbed the ladder. Unanimously, the respondents recognized that it was necessary to proceed to the successor’s introduction slowly, using patience, and without dropping steps; in other words, to climb the ladder slowly so that the employees can adapt themselves to the change. In the case of men particularly, successors needed to climb the ladder not at any

price, but by proving their reliability and by showing clearly their interest, initiative, and involvement. For P1M⁵, it is necessary that S1M initially washes the floors to be accepted: “[...] *But, Monique is more docile. To be accepted, I told her that she must wash the floors in front of the employees, to start at the bottom. I did it myself. It is necessary to work hard to prove yourself strong to them (E1M-Int-Pred, 320⁶)*”. Sharing the same vision than P1M, P2M and P3M made all the necessary so that S2M and S3M do not drop steps, share the same conviction than the predecessors in order to be accepted by them, and then to be accepted by the employees: “[...] *that was done naturally. For the father, she needs to prove her involvement, but there is still a long way to go (E2M-Int-Empl-B, 184)*”. A Jetpur’s employee says about this: “*Firstly Caroline needs to be integrated slowly but surely, but she has to prove what she is capable to do [...] we accepted her as she is (E3M-Int-Empl-B, 63)*”. Second, we noted that the successors’ values and behaviors must be in conformity with those of the business members in order to gain confidence and respect, and then to be accepted. According to S2M: “*He educated her well, he communicated her good values, so I do not have any problem with this (E3M-Int-Empl-B, 65)*”. “*She pulls up her sleeves and she is not afraid to soil her hands. In my view, she is an owner of a good value. And it is easy for us to work with her (E1M-Int-Empl-A, 147)*”.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study we used the relational framework developed by Buttner (2001) to understand the predecessors’ behaviors toward the successors’ acceptance. We think that this model non-exclusive to women can serve as framework for the study of the men/women

⁵ Prédecesor of the first company of business men leaders

⁶ First company of business men leaders, interview of predecessor, discourse number 320.

entrepreneur behavior and of some works by Bass and Avolio (1994) related to the transformational and transactional leadership. We noted that, even if Buttner (2001) argues that this relational model at four fundamental dimensions is perfectly adapted for the studies on women entrepreneur, our findings clearly indicate an improvement of the Buttner's model since other dimensions emerged during the data analysis of our study. Moreover, it is important to mention that these same dimensions, supposedly adaptable - since according to Buttner (2001) the relational framework is not only applicable to women - do not apply to all men cases and that it is preferable in the future to dissociate the leadership behavior of women from those of men. This observation is also applicable to the transformational leadership dimension (Bass and Avolio, 1994).

One of the major theoretical contributions of our study refers to how the sample of women proceeded in the successor's acceptance process. It clearly emerged that women provided the successors with the ability to lead in an atmosphere of confidence whereas the predecessors especially stressed the need to prove their ability before confidence. These results lead to conclude that there is a fundamental difference between the way to proceed of men and those of women. For men, the process seems to take more time given our results indicate that the predecessors who have in general more difficulty in trusting their successors, man or woman, have tendency, as mentioned by Lajeunesse (1989), to test their competences in putting them under conditions to prove their ability to themselves first and then to the employees. In other words, the predecessors seem to adopt a management style of the type lead-evaluate-recognize. It is only when confidence is established that the men predecessor can accept the man/woman successor, allowing then to the employees to do so. Besides, the study conducted by Lorrain., Powers and Koffi (2005) points out the difficulties of men predecessors to trust. When met by the researchers, the successors denounced the lack of confidence on the

part of their fathers. This lack of confidence encourages the successors to do not express this propensity to protect their offspring, propensity which we detected in women. So, at least in our research, a new fundamental element has emerged distinguishing women from men in the acceptance process, that is, confidence. Indeed, according to some authors who worked on the concept of non-entrepreneurial organizations, the confidence, considered as the primary element of the collaboration established by the organizational leader, is the key to success (Herzog, 2001; Katzenbach and Smith, 1994; Tarricone and Luca, 2002). Moreover, according to the study performed by Cadieux et al. (2002) on the family business succession led by women, it seems that the relationship mother entrepreneur-children would be usually different than those father entrepreneur-children. Mothers would know better their children, their abilities, as well as their potential. According to some authors (Cadieux and al., 2002; Dumas, 1992; Salganicoff, 1990), in general, children's education is the mothers' responsibility rather than those of the fathers. There is less doubt that they can make confidence into them without asking so many questions. Contrary to the men, the women adopt what we call a "maternalist" leadership style which is specific to the women in our study and near from the benevolence dimension (transformational leadership; Bass and Avolio, 1994) that the relational framework is not clearly taking into account.

The results indicate that, in general, women predecessors have some assets allowing a leadership style centered on interpersonal relations and their successors' development and supportive people favoring offspring's acceptance which indirectly lead to a successful managerial transfer. Among some women predecessors, it seems to exist a model known as feminine (Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Eagly and al., 1992; Eagly and al., 2003) which derives from a feminine style known as relational, collaborative and interactive, and which is proposed by the relational (Buttner, 2001; Fletcher, 1998; Miller, 1991)

and transformational (Bass and Avolio, 1994) framework making it possible for the woman predecessor to bring her successor to gain acceptance of others. The ability to protect is favoring the successor's acceptance by examining the environment, an in-depth analysis to determine important information and realization of activities intended to protect from damages and to support his growth. The capability strategies incite the women predecessors to enable successors using mentorship and inspiration. Building successors' confidence and charisma, and stressing the respect also contributed to acceptance success. Furthermore, the predecessors also deployed strategies related to the collaborative work, while remembering that all occurred within a framework called "maternalist" leadership. Inspired by the past studies examined, we think that the findings of the present study can bring some responses to our research question. So the challenge to get more sustained responses will lead us toward a procedure allowing to identify and to characterize, in the form of model, a set of acceptance strategies which women involved in a transfer process will use to better ensure the continuity of their businesses. Once finished, the new model developed will benefit as much as to the predecessors as to the successors and, especially, it could be applied to other contexts.

Regarding the determining factors of acceptance, Barach and al. (1988) and Sathe (1985) argue that the successor's acceptance is obtained when the successor's beliefs, values, and behaviors are in conformity with the organizational culture of the business and depending on the way at which the successor is beginning into the business as well as the level of confidence and respect who is accorded to him/her. Our results support partially these assertions. However, they clearly indicate, which was not revealed by our theoretical framework, that a smooth integration is the most important factor for the successor's acceptance. To begin at the bottom of the ladder allows to the successors to familiarize themselves with each department and

socialize with the other business members, while doing precise tasks to climb the ladder gradually.

One of our fundamental findings is about the fact that this way to gain acceptance for successors was a determining factor for the acceptance of young business people. Even if, according to some authors (Hugron, 1987; Kets de Vries, 1993; Lajeunesse, 1989; Longenecker and Schoen, 1978; Rosenblatt, de Milk, Anderson and Johnson, 1985; Richer and al., 2004), a precipitated or imposed beginning at the lead by either the predecessor or the successor himself can be a great source of difficulties which can ruin the process, we had never known which correlation or relation these elements can have. In our study, we understood that it was not enough for the successor to enter at “the bottom of the ladder”, but that it seems essential to use strategies (for example, to tell some special words, to do it gently, to go step by step) to gain the successor’s acceptance.

Finally, as all scientific research, this research has some limitations. The primary one is related to the research strategy. Of course, all the seven businesses selected correspond to the criteria generally attributed to SMEs. However, as mentioned by Santiago (2000), since the business size has an influence on the succession process, what types of leadership behaviors would the predecessors of large businesses adopt to gain the successors’ and even the rescuers’ acceptance if they do not have successors? In the same way, Cadieux (2004) as well as Richer and St-Cyr (2001) argue that the successors’ life partners have one or more roles to play during the succession process. Which behaviors would they adopt for their offspring’s acceptance? In the case of rescuers, would they intervene? And how would they proceed? These are all elements that we have not considered and that probably could have brought a larger understanding of the succession process. Here again, we do not have all the responses. In addition, the theoretical sampling procedure on the seven cases of businesses selected, four cases of woman and three

cases of man, is far from being representative of the whole situations for a reliable generalization, even if, according to Yin (1994), four to ten cases are sufficient for a comparative case study. So it would be very interesting to pursue the research with a greater number of cases.

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