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The impact of parental emotional support on the succession intentions of next-generation family business members

Roisin Lyons^a, Farhad Uddin Ahmed^b, Eric Clinton^c, Colm O’Gorman^c and Robert Gillanders^c

^aKemmy Business School, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland; ^bBrunel Business School, Brunel University, London, UK; ^cDCU Business School, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland

ABSTRACT

Drawing on social cognitive theory, this study investigates the influence of family business owners as parents on the succession intentions of their children. Measures of parental emotional support, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and affective commitment are applied to predict succession intentions. We test our research model on an international sample of 21,525 sons and daughters of family business owners. The results suggest that parental emotional support positively influences succession intentions and is mediated by two cognitive factors: entrepreneurial self-efficacy and affective commitment to the family business. The results also suggest interaction effects of gender and birth order on succession intentions. This study offers important theoretical and practical insights into the aspirations of next-generation members of family businesses.

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Succession intentions; family business; entrepreneurial self-efficacy; affective commitment; gender; next-generation

Introduction

Family business scholars have long sought to understand firm continuity across generations (Cruz, Howorth, and Hamilton 2013; Gagné et al. 2019; Long and Chrisman 2014). The successful transition of the business from one generation to another is an integral prerequisite to firm continuity (Nordqvist et al. 2013). Nurturing a transition requires the commitment of both incumbent and next-generation members, and the failure to engage next-generation members and embrace their succession intentions can place the survival of the family business in jeopardy (Garcia et al. 2019). Next-generation succession intentions – the desire to pursue a leadership role in the parental firm (Zellweger, Sieger, and Halter 2011, 521) – often only materialize when next-generation members are both willing and able to contribute to firm continuity (De Massis et al. 2014). Yet, despite the importance of intra-family succession, global studies show that succession intentions among next-generation members are low, creating a succession crisis (Sieger, Fueglistaller, and Zellweger 2016; Zellweger 2017). Given that the family business is the dominant form of organization worldwide (Cruz and Hamilton 2022), low succession intentions are alarming for incumbent and next-generation family business leaders.

Despite a succession crisis, scholars have accumulated little insight into the drivers of succession intentions among next-generation family members (Suhartanto 2022; Zellweger 2017). This lack of a theoretical understanding of next-generation members’ succession intentions is due to the ‘skew of family business literature towards incumbents rather than next-generation members’, and a focus in the succession research on ‘firm level processes and outcomes rather than on individual or family level predictors’ (Garcia et al. 2019, 225). Theoretical insights on the impact of parental behaviours on

CONTACT Farhad Uddin Ahmed  farhaduddin.ahmed@brunel.ac.uk  Brunel Business School, Brunel University London, London, UK

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their children's intentions to pursue a career in the family business remain limited (Garcia et al. 2019). This is especially important as parental behaviours and attitudes related to their children's choice of career can intensify or diminish succession intentions (Schröder and Schmitt-Rodermund 2013).

Families, and more specifically parental behaviours, matter to children as they constitute an important part of the environment for a child's cognitive development (Bandura 1999). Parents as social influencers convey information and trigger emotional reactions through modelling, instruction, and persuasion (Garcia et al. 2019). These emotional responses to stimuli can manifest as internal subjective feelings experienced and interpreted cognitively by an individual (Ashkanasy and Dorris 2017). A family's emotional climate has an impact on children's career planning, vocational identity and career decision making self-efficacy (Hargrove, Inman, and Crane 2005). Similarly, the career choice intentions of those born into a family-owned business are often a manifestation of the experiences they encounter growing up in this context (Schröder and Schmitt-Rodermund 2013; Suhartanto 2022; Zellweger, Sieger, and Halter 2011). Despite the importance of parental behaviours on career choice, there is a dearth of understanding of how the succession intentions of next generation members are influenced by the emotional support of their parents.

To address this void in the family business literature, this study is guided by the following research question: *To what extent does parental emotional support affect the succession intentions of next-generation members of the family business owners?* We draw upon social cognitive theory to explore the effect of parental behaviours on the succession intentions of the offspring of family business owners (Garcia et al. 2019). We examine the effect of parental emotional support via two individual-level cognitive factors: the next-generation family member's entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and their affective commitment to the family business. Furthermore, building on the propositions of Gimenez-Jimenez et al. (2021), in our post-hoc analysis, we investigate the interaction effects of gender and birth order to ascertain whether the proposed relationships are affected by the confluence of these factors.

This study makes a number of important contributions to the literature. First, by extending social cognitive theory to the family business context, this study advances our theoretical understanding of how parental emotional support influences the intentions of next-generation members to engage in the family business. Second, the findings further substantiate the use of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in the family business context, as results indicate its mediating effect on the relationship between parental emotional support and succession intentions. Third, our results suggest that parental emotional support plays an important role in the development of next-generation members' affective commitment, which in turn affects their succession intentions. The fourth contribution of this study is the *post-hoc* examination of the sibling birth order and gender effects in the relationship between parental emotional support and succession intentions. Although the eldest sibling may not always be the best choice for a leadership position (Calabrò et al. 2018), primogeniture has persisted as a mode of succession (Griffeth, Allen, and Barrett 2006). Many studies have examined sibling relationships at the microsystem level, predominantly focusing on how the immediate social context (e.g. the family environment) shapes sibling dynamics within Western cultures (see McHale, Updegraff, and Whiteman 2013). This study offers rich insights into how sibling birth order influences succession intentions. Finally, this study assists in the growth of more gender-specific theorization in the context of family business succession (Hytti et al. 2017; Nelson and Constantinidis 2017).

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Affect refers to lasting positive or negative emotional experiences (Gooty et al. 2010) and is linked to the affective domain, which represents a wide range of phenomena, including 'feelings, emotions, moods, motivation, and certain drives and instincts' (Corsini and Ozaki 1994, 36). *Emotions*, then, are considered to be more transient, context specific, responses to an event or entity, and can stem from social interactions (Gooty et al. 2010). However, while there has been much discussion about the constructs relating to emotion (particularly passion) in entrepreneurship literature (Cardon et al.

2009; Delgado García et al. 2015), less is known about the interplay of both emotion and affect on the succession practices of family businesses.

Social cognitive theory provides a suitable theoretical underpinning to study affect and emotion within this context. According to social cognitive theory, an individual's expectations, beliefs, and cognitive competencies are developed and modified by social, contextual, or environmental influences (Bandura 1986, 1999). These influences operate as interacting determinants of one another, with the theory placing special emphasis on 'cognitive, vicarious, self-regulatory, and self-reflected processes' as the determinants of personal psychosocial functioning (Wood and Bandura 1989, 362). Individuals are both 'products and producers of their environment' (Wood and Bandura 1989, 362), and the bi-manifestation of the subsequent person – environment interaction is the individual actor's behaviour or intentions (Garcia et al. 2019). Within this theory, behaviour is held to be determined by four factors: goals or intentions, outcome expectancies, self-efficacy, and socio-structural variables. While the earlier research of social cognitive theory focused mainly on these four factors and the internal cognitive process (Bandura 1982), later studies and theoretical contributions have explored a number of distal aspects of social cognitive theory, embracing the contextual aspects which influence social cognition and resultant action.

Derived directly from social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986) and integrating aspects of our understanding of career self-efficacy (Hackett and Betz 1981), we consider many of the propositions of Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) of relevance to our study. While retaining the major constructivist assumptions and theories of the seminal work of Bandura, the propositions held within Lent's extension of social cognitive career theory focus on specific cognitive factors pertaining to vocational choice and action. As such, this conceptualization is fitting for the academic student perspective from both a theoretical and empirical perspective (Lent et al 2002; Lent and Brown, 2019; Sheu and Bordon 2017). In turn they extend consideration to the wider external factors, noting the interplay of cognitive, personality, affective, and environmental variables in understanding complex behaviour (Sheu and Bordon 2017).

Our study examines the influence of the parent – in relation to their provision of tangible emotional support – on the child's perception of their environment, and the implication that this serves to their intentions to then take over the family business. Recently, Garcia et al. (2019) drew on social cognitive theory to offer a theoretical explanation of the career choice intentions of next generations in family businesses. They argue that succession intention is a behaviour which is thought to be affected by self-efficacy and commitment, and self-employed parents can influence their children's self-efficacy and family business commitment by providing emotional support and encouragement. Figure 1 represents the overarching logic of our study.

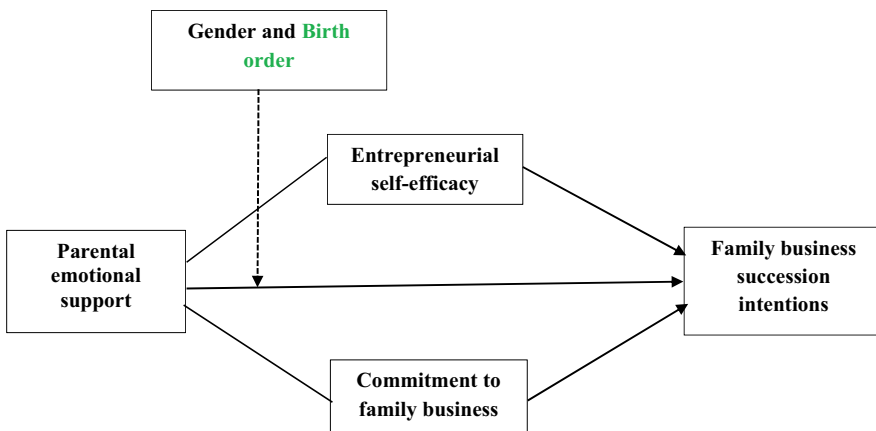


Figure 1. Summary of mediation model of next-generation family members' succession intentions.

Similar to the work of Verbruggen and Sels (2010), the outcome expectations variable was omitted from our empirical model. Theoretically and empirically, the link between entrepreneurial self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and intentions has been found in past studies, offering support to the proximal (Bandura) model of social cognitive theory (Kassean et al. 2015; Pfeifer, Šarlija, and Zekić Sušac 2016). Bandura (1986) notes that between outcome expectations and self-efficacy, self-efficacy is the more influential determinant on behaviour, while Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) also suggest that during interest formation, outcome expectations may be partly determined by self-efficacy. Instead, affective commitment is studied as a mediator in our model, as a construct which has previously been linked to social cognitive theory (Conklin, Dahling, and Garcia 2013), which we believe aligns with this study of the affective processes underpinning succession intentions.

Effect of parental emotional support on succession intentions

The vocational interests of children are deeply rooted in the family environment (Bloemen-Bekx et al. 2019). Prior research highlights the integral role parents play in nurturing, informing, and supporting their children's career choices (Sawitri, Creed, and Zimmer-Gembeck 2014; Whiston and Keller 2004). Perceived parental control and influence has been shown to influence children in their choice of career path, which includes founding one's own firm, assuming a leadership role in the family business, or working outside the company (Schröder, Schmitt-Rodermund, and Arnaud 2011). Recently, Jaskiewicz and colleagues suggested that the overlap between family and business, and the sharing of stories about and insights into the past, can increase understanding of business activities and help imprint the family's entrepreneurial legacy (Jaskiewicz, Combs, and Rau 2015). While parental attitudes towards entrepreneurship aspirations and career-specific behaviours can positively influence succession intentions (Schröder and Schmitt-Rodermund 2013; Suhartanto 2022; Zellweger 2017), perceived and experienced conditions – such as a parent's long working hours, absence from family life, and personal sacrifice to ensure business continuity – may also be detrimental to succession intentions (McMullen and Warnick 2015; Zellweger, Sieger, and Halter 2011).

Emotions-based research within the family business domain highlights the influence of emotions between family members on business decisions (Bertschi-Michel, Kammerlander, and Strike 2020; Shepherd 2016). Emotional support within a family can lead to increased family cohesion, which is associated with general benefits such as a more collectivistic orientation, unselfish behaviours, and the sharing of sensitive information (Edelman 2016). Parental supports, including encouragement, advice, and help related to children's vocational interests, contribute to the development of a self-determined motivation to join the family business (Schröder and Schmitt-Rodermund 2013). Hence, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Parental emotional support positively affects the succession intentions of next-generation family business members'

Mediating effects of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and affective commitment to the family business

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy, defined as an individual's confidence in their ability to engage in entrepreneurship and perform entrepreneurial activities successfully, is rooted in social cognitive theory (Chen, Greene, and Crick 1998; Lent, Brown, and Hackett 1994; Newman et al. 2019). When individuals receive positive feedback and realistic encouragement, it can reinforce their perceived capability of performing a particular task (Wood and Bandura 1989). Thus, a socialization process which involves reflective appraisal of the individual's behaviour by relevant or significant individuals or groups (i.e. a parent or guardian) can aid in the building of self-identity (Carr and Sequeira 2007) and task-specific

self-efficacy. Social cognitive theory aids our understanding of human actions or the intention to act, which is influenced by cognitive factors such as self-efficacy (Bacq et al. 2017). In turn, these cognitive factors are influenced by both objective and subjective environmental factors (Lent, Brown, and Hackett 1994; Tran 2016). As such, extant research has indicated that entrepreneurial self-efficacy is an important determinant of entrepreneurial intentions (Carr and Sequeira 2007; Lanero, Vázquez Burguete, and López-Aza 2015) and is considered to affect both the strength of intentions and the likelihood that those intentions will result in entrepreneurial actions (Rauch and Frese 2007).

Research examining the drivers of entrepreneurial self-efficacy draws on social cognitive theory to explain how it can develop through mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological states (Newman et al. 2019). Social persuasion can develop or strengthen an individuals' self-efficacy beliefs when it involves positive feedback and realistic encouragement, helping to convince them they are capable of performing a particular task (Boyd and Vozikis 1994; Wood and; Bandura 1989). With respect to social persuasion, research has shown that parental emotional support is directly associated with children's self-esteem (Lim, You, and Ha 2015). Parents act as 'expectancy socializers' who greatly influence their children's self-perceptions of academic and vocational competence (Eccles 1994). A socialization process which involves reflective appraisal of the individual's behaviour by relevant or significant individuals or groups, can aid the offspring in building their self-identities (Carr and Sequeira 2007) and their self-efficacy beliefs in performing a particular task. Where emotional support is absent, individuals can be discouraged from pursuing an entrepreneurial career (Dyer 1992).

Previous studies have noted the key role that parental persuasion and support has played as a precursor of their children's self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura 1986; Ferry, Fouad, and Smith 2000). Lent and Brown's (2006) theoretical extensions of social cognitive theory note that person inputs (like personality and affective states) can influence self-efficacy directly and outcome expectations indirectly. It has also been linked to career choice (Lent, Brown, and Hackett 1994), such that Lanero, Vázquez Burguete, and López-Aza (2015) recommend further inquiry into the mediating effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy on the entrepreneurial career choices of students.

Access to parental emotional support can increase perceptions of the feasibility and desirability of entrepreneurship as a viable career option (Laspita et al. 2012; Shen and Su 2017), with Bandura (1999) proposing that self-efficacy can be altered by changing emotional states. Overbeke, Bilimoria, and Somers (2015) indicate that when daughters developed a vision for the future of the company and fathers recognized and shared their vision, daughters were more likely to become successors. We propose that positive parental emotional support relating to succession will positively influence next-generation members' entrepreneurial self-efficacy. The provision of parental emotional support has been shown to indirectly affect the happiness of their offspring through the mediating effect of self-esteem (Lim, You, and Ha 2015). The effect of situational factors on entrepreneurial intention is often an indirect path through personal cognition, giving the person the scope to internalize the trigger or environmental stimulus (Krueger, Reilly, and Carsrud 2000). Related studies have found that family social support is indirectly associated with students' career choice through self-efficacy (Lent et al. 2003). Hence, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Next-generation family members' entrepreneurial self-efficacy mediates the relationship between parental emotional support and their succession intentions

It is becoming increasingly apparent that affective commitment is an important part of socio-cognition for students who are forming opinions on their chosen career. Conklin, Dahling, and Garcia (2013) found significant relationships for students between affective commitment (to the student's own course/major), career self-efficacy, and outcome expectations. We consider that this will be particularly salient in the family business context, where there are family relationships and emotionally-laden attachments. Commitment is regarded as a psychological state which drives an individual towards a certain course of action (Meyer et al. 2002). Affective commitment to a business

is referred to as an individual's 'emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement' with that business (Meyer and Allen 1991, 67). Yet, while the term commitment is itself intrinsically related to emotion in that it is a psychological state that binds entities together, it may be more fitting to consider affective commitment as a summary evaluation with both affective and belief antecedents (Ashkanasy and Dorris 2017).

According to Memili, Zellweger, and Fang (2013, 443), affective commitment is of relevance to family firms 'as these firms often rely on long-term involvement of family members through transgenerational succession'. 'Parent-founders' can promote the affective commitment of 'child-successors' by fulfilling their psychological needs (McMullen and Warnick 2015, 1379). Next-generation family members perform well in family businesses when they have positive affective commitment to the firm, and where they perceive an alignment of career interests with the needs of the family business (Dawson et al. 2015). They may express feelings such as affection, warmth, belonging, loyalty, fondness, and pleasure – feelings that are distinguishing features of affective commitment (Jaros 2007) – towards both the family and the business (Peters et al. 2012). In contexts where there is positive commitment to the family business, next-generation family members are more likely to be satisfied with the succession process and pursue a career in the family business (Sharma and Irving 2002). Successor commitment has its root in the strong emotional relatedness with the family and parents who own and run the business (Peters et al. 2012). Consistent with the arguments that a high level of affective commitment is associated with the next-generation members' intentions to engage in the family business, this study explores a mediating effect of affective commitment on the relationship between parental emotional support and succession intentions.

Parental support centred on career and succession planning – which may manifest as conversations about career choices, encouragement to look for vocational information, giving advice, and offering help with career options – is thought to contribute to the development of children's self-determined or autonomous motivation to join the family business (Schröder and Schmitt-Rodermund 2013). This may be because parental emotional commitment nurtures next-generation members' commitment to the family business (Zellweger, Sieger, and Englisch 2012). The deep socialization that some next-generation members experience from early childhood may contribute to the development of affective commitment to the family business (Cabrera-Suárez and Martín-Santana 2012). Successors' feelings of identity, business knowledge, and affection for the family business are, to a large extent, influenced by the predecessors' behaviour (Cabrera-Suarez 2005; Cabrera-Suárez and Martín-Santana 2012). Next-generation members who feel that the family business is an important part of their sense of self typically develop a desire to contribute to the success of the business, and may therefore decide to pursue a career in the business (Schröder, Schmitt-Rodermund, and Arnaud 2011). Hence, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: Next-generation family members' affective commitment to the family business mediates the relationship between parental emotional support and their succession intentions

Research methods

To test the hypotheses outlined above, we avail of the 2018 round of the Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS).¹ GUESSS has attracted significant attention from researchers interested in student entrepreneurial intentions and beliefs (Sieger and Monsen 2015). GUESSS collects information on students' entrepreneurial experience and intentions (Edelman 2016). Similar to prior research using the GUESSS dataset to study students from a family business within GUESSS (Gimenez-Jimenez et al. 2021; Zellweger, Sieger, and Halter 2011), we restrict our sample to respondents who answered that their mother, father, or both were majority owners of a business. Of the 208,237 respondents, just under 24% replied that their parent or parents were majority owners of

a business. Allowing for missing variables, our final sample size is 21,261. One advantage of a student sample is that this cohort will provide a prospective view on careers without retrospective bias (Lanero et al. 2016; Zellweger, Sieger, and Halter 2011).

We estimate the following model using ordinary least squares, as follows:

$$SI_i = \beta_1 ESE_i + \beta_2 AC_i + \beta_3 PES_i + \beta_4 X_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Our outcome of interest is a measure of succession intention (SI), which is adapted from Liñán and Chen (2009). Respondents are asked to rate their agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree): (1) I am ready to do anything to take over my parents' business; (2) My professional goal is to become a successor in my parents' business; (3) I will make every effort to become a successor in my parents' business; (4) I am determined to become a successor in my parents' business in the future; (5) I have very seriously thought of taking over my parents' business; and (6) I have the strong intention to become a successor in my parents' business one day. Averaging the responses to these statements gives us our measure of succession intention, which takes values from 1 (weak intention) to 7 (strong intention). Measure reliability, as tested via Cronbach's alpha, was high (0.972).

To measure entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE), we follow Chen, Greene, and Crick (1998) and De Noble, Jung, and Ehrlich (1999) and create an entrepreneurial self-efficacy index, which takes values between 1 and 7 by averaging the response to the following questions: Please indicate your level of competence in performing the following tasks (1 = very low competence, 7 = very high competence): (1) Identifying new business opportunities; (2) Creating new products and services; (3) Managing innovation within a business; (4) Being a leader and communicator; (5) Building up a professional network; (6) Commercializing a new idea or development; and (7) Successfully managing a business. The measure received a Cronbach's alpha of 0.925, indicating scale reliability.

Our measure of affective commitment (AC) draws on the work of Dawson et al. (2015). We average the responses to the following set of questions to create an index that also takes values between 1 and 7: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree): (1) I feel as if my parent's problems are my own; (2) I feel a sense of belonging to my parents' business; (3) I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with my parents' business; (4) I feel emotionally attached to my parents' business; and (5) My parents' business has great personal meaning for me. The measure received a Cronbach's alpha of 0.892, indicating scale reliability.

Our final key explanatory variable is an index of parental emotional support (PES). This measure, which was developed by Turner et al. (2003) as part of the Career-Related Parent Support Scale, is derived from respondents indicating their level of agreement with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree): (1) My parents talked to me about what fun my future job in their business could be; (2) My parents said things that made me happy when I learned something I might use in their business; and (3) I get excited when we talk about what a great job I might have someday in their business. Table 1 presents summary statistics for the variables used in our analysis. The overall Career-Related Parent Support Scale was devised in line with the determinants of self-efficacy theory (Bandura 1986) and was conceived to examine the effect of parental support on educational and vocational development using social cognitive/career theory. In our study, the measure received a Cronbach's alpha of 0.924, indicating scale reliability.

An exploratory factor analysis was run on the scale items, using the principal component analysis extraction with varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization. Four factors were retained. Factor loadings of over 0.7 was noted across all corresponding factors, except for one item pertaining to AC ("I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with my parents' business") which was removed from the analysis. Following this, the EFA was rerun, and all items loaded on their factors accordingly, with a total variance explained of 78.7% across the four main factors of the study. Next, a series of confirmatory factor analyses were run to report the Goodness of Fit parameters of all main variables' measurement model. They are χ^2 (df) 882047.46(15), RMSEA 1.290, SRMR 0.024, CFI 0.346, TLI 0.085

Table 1. Summary statistics.

No. of observations = 21,261	Mean	Standard deviation	Min.	Max.
SI Index	2.788622	1.883656	1	7
ESE Index	4.749777	1.35275	1	7
AC Index	3.955875	1.807301	1	7
PES Index	3.644764	2.021442	1	7
Gender (female = 1)	0.557623	0.49668	0	1
Eldest (oldest child = 1)			0	1
Age (years)	0.289169	0.453387	16	58
Work experience (has experience working in the firm = 1)	22.52238	4.817126	0	1
Firm size (natural log of number of employees)	0.477527	0.499506	0	11.09741
Parent-led (business is led by a parent = 1)	1.895003	1.557271	0	1
Performance (perceptions of firm performance) Index	0.908188	0.288768	1	7

Note: SI = succession intentions, ESE = entrepreneurial self-efficacy, AC = affective commitment, PES = parental emotional support.

for succession intentions, χ^2 (df) 4546.455(2), RMSEA 0.254, SRMR 0.039, CFI 0.940, TLI 0.821 for affective commitment, χ^2 (df) 8871.325(14), RMSEA 0.147, SRMR 0.041, CFI 5 0.938, TLI 0.907 for entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and χ^2 (df) 79628.614(3), RMSEA 0.000, SRMR 0.000, CFI 1, TLI 1 for parental emotional support. Although some results (e.g. χ^2 /df) are inflated by the large sample size, the variables are considered to be within acceptable thresholds (Hair et al., 2010). As the dependent measure, succession intentions, noted some invariance issues, also flagged by Basco and Gómez González (2022) using the GUESSS 2018 dataset, a dummy variable was created (using a value of one if the respondents indicated they intend to take over the family business at any point) to examine against the scale measure.

As can be seen from Table 1, the average level of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in our sample is relatively high, at 4.7, although the responses span the full range of possible outcomes. The mean values of our affective commitment and parental emotional support indices are somewhat lower, but these indices also have higher standard deviations. Women account for 56% of the sample, and the average respondent is 22.5 years old. Just under 29% are the eldest child in their family and about 48% have experience working in the family business.

We control for a vector of factors, \mathbf{X}_i , that are plausibly correlated with both succession intention and the explanatory variables of interest. Firstly, we control for gender, age, and whether the respondent is the oldest child (birth order dummy variable), in line with Calabrò et al. (2018). As it has been noted that the size of the respondent's parents' family business (*firm size*, in terms of employee numbers) impacts succession intentions (Zellweger, Sieger, and Englisch 2012), we take the natural log of the number of employees reported by the respondent due to the presence of a small number of very large firms.² To control for the extent to which the parents are involved in the running of the business, we include a dummy variable which takes a value of 1 if the respondent indicates that their father or mother is leading the business operationally. We also include an index of *performance* that is derived from a series of questions that ask about performance relative to competitors in the domains of sales growth, market share growth, profit growth, job creation, and innovativeness (Dess and Robinson 1984; Eddleston, Kellermanns, and Sarathy 2008). We control for the respondent's self-reported *personal ownership* stake in the business, as this could plausibly be correlated with both succession intention and perceived support of and commitment to the business. Most respondents (65%) hold no ownership stake, 23% have a stake between 1% and 50%, 6% own 51–99%, and 7% claim to own 100% of the business personally (perhaps reflecting a misunderstanding of the term 'personal'). Similarly, we include a dummy variable capturing work experience in the family business. No one in the sample was already running a business or was already self-employed.

To further alleviate concerns about omitted variable bias and unobserved heterogeneity, this study also includes fixed effects for field of study, the sector in which the family business operates, and the country in which the respondent completes the survey. Finally, we allow for within-group

correlation in the error terms by clustering the standard errors by groups defined by country and sector. By conducting our analysis in this manner, the country fixed effects can account for unobserved time invariant country level factors, such as culture. However, as our data is not a panel, we cannot include individual fixed effects and so we refrain from making causal claims (for details, see Fernández-Val and Weidne 2018).

Results

Examining for normality and bias issues, all scale measures were within recommended thresholds of skewness and kurtosis for normal distribution (Curran, West, and Finch 1996). Considering multicollinearity, the variance inflation factor for each independent variable was within acceptable threshold margins. Correlations among all variables used in the analyses are reported in Table 2. Table 3 presents our main results.

The first three columns of Table 3 examine the importance of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, affective commitment, and parental emotional support in isolation from each other on succession intentions. All three are highly statistically significant and of an appreciable magnitude (Hypothesis 1 is thus supported). The estimated marginal effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in Column 1 implies that a one-point increase in the entrepreneurial self-efficacy index is associated with a 0.15-unit increase in the succession intention index. A one-standard-deviation increase in entrepreneurial self-efficacy would increase the succession intention index by 0.2 of a unit. The magnitudes of the association between affective commitment and parental emotional support are largest. Columns 2 and 3 tell us that a one-standard-deviation increase in the affective commitment and parental emotional support indices increases succession intention by 0.99 units and 0.75 units, respectively. Thus, while all three variables are statistically significant, our results point to larger roles of affective commitment and parental emotional support in succession intentions.

Parental emotional support is hypothesized to operate on succession intention via affective commitment as a mediator. The final three columns of Table 3 show the results of tests for these mediating relationships. Columns 4 and 5 show that parental emotional support is a statistically significant predictor of both entrepreneurial self-efficacy and affective commitment. The magnitude of the relationship is larger in the case of affective commitment, with each unit increase in the parental emotional support index associated with a 0.37-unit increase in the affective commitment index. The final column of Table 3 includes all three of the key explanatory variables as predictors of succession intention. The magnitude of the association between affective commitment and succession intentions in Column 6 is very similar to that shown in Column 2. A one-standard-deviation

Table 2. Correlation coefficients.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 SI	1										
2 ESE	0.3651*	1									
3 AC	0.6290*	0.3443*	1								
4 PES	0.6258*	0.4096*	0.5691*	1							
5 Gender	-0.1738*	-0.1227*	-0.1189*	-0.1415*	1						
6 Eldest	-0.0255*	-0.0659*	-0.0475*	-0.0523*	0.0294*	1					
7 Age	-0.0962*	-0.0296*	-0.0409*	-0.0570*	-0.0121	0.0000	1				
8 Work experience	0.2444*	0.1330*	0.2941*	0.2392*	-0.1078*	-0.0613*	0.0425*	1			
9 Firm size (log)	0.3603*	0.2194*	0.2268*	0.2795*	-0.1292*	-0.0049	-0.0692*	0.0800*	1		
10 Parent-led firm	-0.0256*	0.0045	0.0320*	-0.0021	0.0165*	-0.0177*	-0.0009	0.0863*	-0.0825*	1	
11 Performance	0.4685*	0.3878*	0.4425*	0.4679*	-0.0626*	-0.0331*	-0.1223*	0.1654*	0.3732*	0.0290*	1

*Indicates significance at the 5% level or greater.

Table 3. Main results.

Dependent variable	(1) <i>SI</i>	(2) <i>SI</i>	(3) <i>SI</i>	(4) <i>ESE</i>	(5) <i>AC</i>	(6) <i>SI</i>
<i>ESE</i>	0.15*** (0.011)					0.02** (0.008)
<i>AC</i>		0.46*** (0.016)				0.35*** (0.014)
<i>PES</i>			0.37*** (0.009)	0.13*** (0.007)	0.35*** (0.010)	0.25*** (0.008)
<i>Female</i>	-0.19*** (0.023)	-0.13*** (0.020)	-0.15*** (0.022)	-0.10*** (0.017)	-0.04*** (0.023)	-0.13*** (0.020)
<i>Elders</i>	-0.00 (0.023)	0.02 (0.021)	-0.01 (0.021)	-0.03* (0.019)	-0.07*** (0.023)	0.02 (0.021)
<i>Age</i>	-0.01*** (0.002)	-0.01*** (0.002)	-0.01*** (0.002)	0.01*** (0.002)	0.00 (0.002)	-0.01*** (0.002)
<i>Work experience</i>	0.49*** (0.030)	0.12*** (0.022)	0.29*** (0.026)	0.00 (0.019)	0.52*** (0.033)	0.11*** (0.030)
<i>Firm size</i>	0.07*** (0.012)	0.08*** (0.010)	0.07*** (0.011)	0.01 (0.007)	-0.02** (0.009)	0.08*** (0.011)
<i>Parent-led</i>	-0.07* (0.038)	-0.11*** (0.031)	-0.07** (0.033)	0.02 (0.036)	0.11** (0.034)	-0.11*** (0.030)
<i>Performance</i>	0.34*** (0.016)	0.13*** (0.009)	0.21*** (0.013)	0.22*** (0.013)	0.27*** (0.012)	0.11*** (0.009)
<i>No ownership stake</i>	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
<i>Ownership stake = 1–50%</i>	0.43*** (0.031)	0.26*** (0.028)	0.29*** (0.031)	0.09*** (0.025)	0.18*** (0.028)	0.23*** (0.030)
<i>Ownership stake = 51–99%</i>	0.53*** (0.051)	0.33*** (0.039)	0.39*** (0.047)	0.19*** (0.040)	0.22*** (0.040)	0.31*** (0.043)
<i>Ownership stake = 100%</i>	0.36*** (0.050)	0.16*** (0.040)	0.22*** (0.046)	0.14*** (0.030)	0.24*** (0.034)	0.13*** (0.042)
Constant	1.13*** (0.263)	0.90*** (0.170)	0.87*** (0.196)	3.05*** (0.136)	0.88*** (0.208)	0.49*** (0.153)
Field of study fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Sector fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	21,337	21,337	21,337	21,337	21,337	21,337
R-squared	0.418	0.541	0.511	0.278	0.412	0.579

All models estimated using ordinary least squares. Standard errors are clustered by country and sector and reported in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. REF = reference category.

increase in affective commitment is associated with a 0.84-unit increase in succession intention in Column 6, versus a 0.99-unit increase in Column 2. The estimated coefficient for parental emotional support, however, is halved in Column 6 relative to Column 3, while the magnitude of the association between entrepreneurial self-efficacy and succession intention falls by an even greater degree between Columns 1 and 6. While all three remain statistically significant predictors of succession intention, these results support the hypotheses that parental emotional support has an indirect effect on succession intentions via its role in shaping entrepreneurial self-efficacy and affective commitment (Hypotheses 2 and 3 supported).

Post hoc analysis

Gimenez-Jimenez et al. (2021) argue that birth order may have a moderating impact on the relationship between family business exposure and affective commitment, but did not find significant results in their study. Their study proposed that a gendered perspective may offer more nuanced findings, as gender roles and norms play a large role in the career intentions and socialization practices of children. Following the propositions of Gimenez-Jimenez et al. (2021), this study examines the interaction effect of gender and sibling birth order to ascertain whether the proposed relationships are affected by the confluence of these factors.

The control variables included in Table 4 point to succession intention being lower for women but no different for eldest children compared with younger children. In Table 4, we investigate the potential for these factors to moderate the association between succession intentions and entrepreneurial self-efficacy, affective commitment, and parental emotional support. Column 1 allows for interactions between the dummy variable for eldest child with the indices for entrepreneurial self-efficacy, affective commitment, and parental emotional support. None of these interaction terms are significant, and their inclusion does not change the main results for the main dependent variables. Column 2 includes interactions of the dependent variables with the gender dummy variable. The interaction between gender and affective commitment is significant and negative, while gender and parental emotional support is insignificant. However, increased levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy is more strongly associated with higher levels of succession intention among women.

We explore this further in Columns 3 and 4 of Table 4, where the sample is split into younger and eldest children, respectively. For younger children, gender moderates the effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and affective commitment, as was the case in the full sample. However, there is no significant interaction term for parental emotional support. For eldest children, we find a moderating effect of gender on the affective commitment and parental emotional support associations with SI.

As noted in our methodology, and as highlighted by Basco and Gómez González (2022), the scale measure for succession intentions noted some measurement invariance, thus the study was repeated with a dummy variable using Probit modelling. Though the results using the single (dummy) item noted a difference in the strength of some relationships, and a lower overall model fit, all variables noted the same sign and significance when compared to the main study (all hypotheses still supported) ($n = 21'525$).

Table 4. Additional Analyses: The moderating effect of being eldest and of gender.

Dependent variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Sample	SI	SI	SI	SI
	Full	Full	Younger child	Eldest child
<i>ESE</i>	0.02 (0.009)	0.00 (0.012)	-0.01 (0.015)	0.03 (0.022)
<i>AC</i>	0.35*** (0.017)	0.41*** (0.017)	0.39*** (0.018)	0.46*** (0.023)
<i>PES</i>	0.25*** (0.009)	0.23*** (0.011)	0.24*** (0.013)	0.20*** (0.019)
<i>Female</i>	-0.13*** (0.020)	-0.01 (0.068)	-0.08 (0.081)	0.19 (0.113)
<i>Eldest</i>	-0.08 (0.074)	0.02 (0.021)		
<i>ESE*Eldest</i>	0.01 (0.016)			
<i>AC*Eldest</i>	0.03 (0.017)			
<i>PES*Eldest</i>	-0.01 (0.014)			
<i>ESE*Female</i>		0.03** (0.015)	0.04*** (0.018)	-0.00 (0.026)
<i>AC*Female</i>		-0.09*** (0.015)	-0.07*** (0.018)	-0.14*** (0.025)
<i>PES*Female</i>		0.02** (0.013)	0.00 (0.016)	0.06*** (0.023)
Constant	0.51*** (0.156)	0.41*** (0.150)	0.74*** (0.202)	-0.20 (0.291)
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES
Field of study fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES
Sector fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	21,337	21,337	15,167	6,170
R-squared	0.580	0.581	0.582	0.584

All models estimated using ordinary least squares. Standard errors are clustered by country and sector and reported in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Discussion and contributions

The findings of this study demonstrate that perceived parental emotional support is instrumental in the development of next-generation members' entrepreneurial self-efficacy and affective commitment to the family business, which in turn positively influence succession intentions.

The findings extend those of Zellweger (2017), who noted that positive parental attitudes or reactions towards their children's entrepreneurial aspirations increase succession intention. Previously, emotional support within the family unit has been noted to influence career decision-making and planning (Hargrove, Inman, and Crane 2005), while parental relational support leads to greater motivation to join the family business (Schröder and Schmitt-Rodermund 2013). Our study findings support Garcia et al. (2019), who theorize that higher levels of parental emotional support will increase the succession intentions of next generation family members; this study empirically finds the positive effect that this nuanced affective form of support has on succession intentions.

The results find a positive and significant direct relationship between parental emotional support and entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and that entrepreneurial self-efficacy mediates the effect of the predictor (parental emotional support) on succession intentions. This infers that family business parents may influence their children's self-perceived competence in their entrepreneurial abilities through encouragement (Dou et al. 2021) and emotional support, which in turn can affect the children's vocational interest in the family business (Garcia et al. 2019). These findings are in line with past research that suggests that entrepreneurial self-efficacy is a common precursor of succession career intentions among similar sample groups (Zellweger, Sieger, and Halter 2011).

Moreover, the results establish a direct relationship between parental emotional support and affective commitment to the family business, and that affective commitment mediates the effect of the predictor (parental emotional support) on succession intentions. Emotional support and encouragement are said to enhance a child's sense of importance and identification within the family business unit, thus improving their commitment (Memili, Zellweger, and Fang 2013), which will increase their likelihood of succession (Garcia et al. 2019). A strong positive effect of affective commitment on succession intentions also coincides with past research (Cabrera-Suárez and Martín-Santana 2012).

These findings have the following implications for theory and practice. First, by examining social cognitive theory in the family business context, this study advances the theoretical understanding of how parental emotional support influences the next generation's intention to engage in the family business. The results support the propositions that parental emotional support has both a direct effect on succession intentions, as well as an indirect effect via its influence on entrepreneurial self-efficacy and affective commitment. We extend the percept of social cognitive theory to the family business domain by evidencing that parents, through their creation of positive emotional responses to succession (perhaps by showing excitement at the prospect of working with their children), can allow their children to feel more confident and affectively committed to the family business, which in turn leads them to consider succession more intently. Our findings enrich theoretical perspectives on the role of cognitive factors (self-efficacy and affective commitment) in inducing next-generations' succession intention in the family business, thereby extending social cognitive theory logics in the succession intentions literature.

Second, the findings further validate the use of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in this context, as the results indicate its mediating effect on the relationship between parental emotional support and succession intentions. Environment and context can affect a person's cognitive and affective reasoning, a determinant of their entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Drnovšek, Wincent, and Cardon 2010). Family business owners influence their children's self-efficacy beliefs by providing emotional support and encouragement, which in turn can affect their children's vocational interest in the family business (Garcia et al. 2019). This study contributes to the literature by empirically validating this theoretical claim in the international family business context and extends knowledge of its interaction effects on other affective variables. Moreover, these findings extend the related research that

demonstrates that parental support, particularly encouragement, is associated with self-efficacy beliefs and interests in specific vocations (Ferry, Fouad, and Smith 2000).

Our study's findings suggest that when holding affective commitment and parental emotional support constant, increasing levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy predict a lower probability that the respondent intends to succeed to the family business. These findings suggest that in a scenario where the emotional support from parents and affective commitment to the family business are constant, an increasing level of perceived efficacy in entrepreneurial endeavours may, in fact, inspire the children of family business parents more towards founding their own company, rather than to take over their parents' company. Zellweger, Sieger, and Halter (2011) consider that a certain level of entrepreneurial self-efficacy is required to see family business succession as an attractive career option. However, there may be a point at which high entrepreneurial self-efficacy levels may work in the reverse and steer individuals towards their own start-up ambitions. As such, this study argues that certain tensions in the succession literature may result from a predominant focus on the direct effects of family supports without any consideration of their indirect effects through self-efficacy and commitment to the family business.

Third, this study establishes that emotional support from parents plays a key role in the development of next-generation members' affective commitment, which in turn strengthens their succession intentions. Successor commitment is emotionally connected to the family, wherein a successor's perceptions of the business as the 'home' can prompt intentions to take over (Peters et al. 2012). This study supports this line of thought by establishing that parental emotional support provided to children indeed bolsters their commitment to the family business, which leads to higher intentions to take over the family venture. Our study analysis finds that affective commitment has a positive and significant effect on succession intentions. Combined, these findings are important, as they show that entrepreneurial self-efficacy and affective commitment are both instrumental to succession intentions and can be developed through parental emotional support.

Fourth, this study examines the effect of birth order and gender of siblings on the relationship between parental emotional support and succession intentions through the additional exploratory analyses. Gender theorizing in succession literature considers processes by which gender norms, gendered expectations, and gender identities develop in the family business (Hytti et al. 2017; McAdam, Brophy, and Harrison 2020). If, indeed, the successor role requires 'a process of becoming' (Hytti et al. 2017, 681), it is still unclear how much of the gender-specific nods and biases are led by the influence of the parent as incumbent (Overbeke, Bilimoria, and Somers 2015; Salvato and Corbetta 2013). Our study finds significant negative effects of the female indicator on succession intention, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and affective commitment. When studied against sibling birth order (youngest/eldest) in our post-hoc analyses, the results indicate that firstborn daughters have weaker associations with the affective commitment – succession intentions relationship. The findings suggest that affective commitment plays less of a role in developing succession intentions for family business daughters, potentially due to a perception that succession is less likely for eldest daughters, irrespective of their loyalties to the firm. This may be related to sex stereotypes which continue to affect the selection and self-selection of family business successors by impacting both fathers' and daughters' cognitions about women's roles in society (Overbeke, Bilimoria, and Somers 2015).

Practical implications

The results of our study suggest that parents who hope their offspring will become involved in the family business may benefit by understanding the drivers of succession intentions, and the nuanced effect of sibling birth order and gender on these intentions. In addition, several factors are also noted to significantly improve the succession intentions of the respondents that could be applied practically by family business owners. An emotional attachment to the company is an important

contributor towards succession intentions (Cabrera-Suárez and Martín-Santana 2012; Garcia et al. 2019); it is therefore recommended that family business owners find positive ways to meaningfully involve their offspring in the firm context. This echoes Cieřlik and Van Stel (2017), who noted that university students who are actively involved in their parents' business are more likely to pursue a family business career. The findings of our study highlight the importance of parental emotional support; thus, it is recommended that family business owners engage in positive discourse with children about the business operations and aspirations of the company. For daughters who are not the eldest sibling, the results of our study indicate that the development of entrepreneurial self-efficacy can be used to offset the negative effects of gender. Past research has noted that, in comparison to males, females reap greater benefits from business support received internally from family (Kickul et al. 2008; Powell and Eddleston 2013). Additionally, it would appear that firstborn daughters may feel a reduced sense of affective commitment to the family business, and may perceive a lesser sense of belonging, meaning, or connection to it. Therefore, we suggest that efficacy-building support and leadership tutoring for daughters (particularly those who are later born) are particularly salient in the family business context.

Limitations and future research

This study is not without its limitations. In line with related research, we did not include outcome expectations (i.e. the imagined consequences of engaging in a particular behaviour; see, for example, Garcia et al. 2019; Zellweger, Sieger, and Halter 2011). Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) theorize that the interplay between self-efficacy and outcome expectations may be more complex than a simple additive formula, where both act in synergy to increase an individual's interest in a particular career. Indeed, they suggest that positive outcome expectations may be required to amplify self-efficacy beliefs. Given that our survey respondents came from current family businesses, we would suggest that these individuals may have neutral to positive expectations for family business succession (and success within that context); however, this suggestion requires further testing. Future research is warranted in the form of a time-lagged design to determine the outcome expectations of next-generation members of family firms.

Second, this study examines only one form of parental support (labelled as emotional support, stemming from the dimension of emotional arousal proposed by Bandura 1986), although we acknowledge that social support also incorporates instrumental dimensions (Edelman 2016). In turn, we recommend further consideration of the scholarly discourse on affect, emotion and other affect-laden constructs (Briner and Kiefer 2005; Ashkanasy and Dorris 2017). Future studies on succession intentions in the family business incorporating other aspects of social cognitive theory and alternative forms of parental support into the research design are also welcome, as parents have been considered a source of vicarious and mastery experience within family business (Davidsson 1995), and that parents as role models can motivate the next generation to take up a leadership role in the family business (Dou et al. 2021).

Third, our study focuses on one type of commitment in the model – affective commitment – and excludes normative and continuance commitment (Garcia et al. 2019; Sharma and Irving 2005), which may themselves be associated with different discretionary behaviours (Dawson et al. 2014; Meyer and Allen 1991; Sharma and Irving 2005) or discrete relationships with succession intentions. Relating to the outcome studied, while the exclusive focus was succession intentions, it could be argued that parental emotional support may also influence a child to pursue a career outside the family business or to become self-employed (Edelman 2016; Zellweger, Sieger, and Halter 2011). Fourth, although considered a wholly robust analysis, it is acknowledged that cross-sectional data are applied to measure the constructs and that more longitudinal research designs could provide better insights into the dynamics of the association between parental emotional support and succession intention. In addition, while this study applied country fixed effects to examine this large sample set, it is known that there are many cultural effects which may provide a deeper

understanding of the succession intentions of each specific national subset if studied independently. Research suggests that culture matters in shaping entrepreneurial behaviours within family business (Alrubaishi, McAdam, and Harrison 2021). Lastly, our post-hoc inquiry answers Garcia et al. (2019) recent call for research on the influence of siblings on succession intentions and extends the works of Schröder and Schmitt-Rodermund (2013) and Gimenez-Jimenez et al. (2021) by exploring gender and sibling birth order together, finding that the moderating effect of gender on the effect of affective commitment is only present for eldest children. Furthermore, our findings show that affective commitment plays less of a role in developing succession intentions for family business daughters, which may be related to sex stereotypes, resulting in daughters still being deemed second choice in family business succession (Ahrens, Landmann, and Woywode 2015; Byrne, Fattoum and Thebaud, 2019). Further research is needed to ground these findings, perhaps applying elements of Family Systems Theory to the current understanding of succession and the socio-cognitive experience of the family business.

Notes

1. GUESSS investigates students' career choice intentions around the world. See www.guesssurvey.org.
2. This transformation requires a small number of observations with no employees to be removed. Estimating the models without transforming size does not change the findings, although size is insignificant.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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