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Conflict Dynamics and Emotional Dissonance during the Family Business Succession Process: Evidence from the Tunisian Context

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Abstract: This article aims to understand how emerging conflicts evolve and generate negative emotions during family firms’ succession process. Relying on previous research on emotional dissonance and conflict, we conduct a single longitudinal case study by interviewing the successor, the predecessor, and other family members in a family firm in the Tunisian context. The results show that emotional dissonance plays a critical role in conflict escalation between successors and predecessors. Family systems and cultural factors explain challenges in managing emotions; however, emotions associated with family events can facilitate the evolution of the succession process by resolving conflict. This study thus reveals *how* and *why* emotions and conflicts arise during the succession process.

Keywords: family business, succession process, conflict, emotions, emotional dissonance

1 Introduction

Family firms are the dominant form of business organisation in the economic landscape (De Massis et al. 2018) and have generated strong interest among the

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academic community. The issue of succession remains one of the most studied topics in the family business field (Daspit et al. 2016; De Massis, Chua, and Chrisman 2008; Steier, Chrisman, and Chua 2015). This is undoubtedly due to the fact that succession is one of the most critical event in the life cycle of family firms (Ahrens et al. 2019; Calabrò et al. 2018; Campopiano, Calabrò, and Basco 2020).

Recent research has highlighted that the succession process can be a source of conflict due to goal diversity between interested family members (Caputo et al. 2018; Frank et al. 2011; Qiu and Freel 2019). The conflicts associated with the succession process can spread throughout the family and the business system, often generating (negative) emotions between the predecessor and successor(s) (Bertschi-Michel, Kammerlander, and Strike 2020; Kellermanns and Eddleston 2004; 2007; McKee et al. 2014). Indeed, succession is more than a rational process (Holt and Popp 2013; Shepherd 2003; Stanley 2010) and necessarily involves emotions (Salvato and Corbetta 2013). The succession process, and the way succession has been prepared, will change the roles – and involvement – of the family members in the firm, leading to emotional dimensions, especially for the predecessor, who will have to deal with difficulties in delegating responsibilities or even separating from the company and permanently disengaging (Bah 2009; Filser, Kraus, and Märk 2013).

Although emotions have become an emerging topic in the family business field (Astrachan and Jaskiewicz 2008; Stanley 2010; Zellweger and Astrachan 2008),¹ several gaps remain in our understanding of emotions in this context (Brundin and Härtel 2014; Shepherd 2016). In particular, the role of emotions during the succession process is not well understood (Bertschi-Michel, Kammerlander, and Strike 2020; Umans et al. 2020). The complexity of emotional dynamics in family firms compared to other types of organisations has been emphasised (Rafaeli 2013; Morgan and Gómez-Mejía 2014), but the interplay between emotions and conflicts in the succession process has not been adequately understood. Bee and Neubaum (2014) call for more research to better understand expressed and unexpressed emotions in the family business context. They underline the important roles of emotional expression and regulation for family members' behaviour and stakeholder perceptions. Among the relevant studies on this topic, Labaki, Michael-Tsabari, and Zachary (2013a) emphasise the potential of emotional dissonance to understand the dynamic of family business, but without providing empirical evidence.

We propose to mobilize the conflict and emotion literature to better understand the dynamics of conflicts and emotions during the family firm succession process. The aim of this research is twofold: (1) how conflict and emotional

¹ This is witnessed in the increasing number of special issues and reference journals dedicated to this topic (for example, the present special issue, the *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, the *Family Business Review*, and *Long Range Planning*).

dissonance interact with each other and (2) what the main factors are which determine the expression of emotions. To address these questions, we conduct an exploratory longitudinal single case study to better understand this phenomenon and address the current theoretical gap (Langley and Abdallah 2011) through an analysis of the different involved relationships: individual, interpersonal, and organisational.

Our article contributes to family business succession research in several ways. First, our findings extend the understanding of conflict dynamics during the succession process, (Caputo et al. 2018; Kubiček and Machek 2020; Qiu and Freel 2019), by emphasising the role of emotional dissonance. We show how conflicts impact emotions and vice versa. On one hand, the presence of conflict between family members can generate tensions and negative emotions. On the other hand, we emphasise that the expression of these emotions can increase tensions between individuals. It is also important to note that the inability of the successor to clearly express his/her emotions involves frustration and finally, an accumulation or escalation of conflicts. Second, this research aims to understand why successors don't have the ability to effectively express emotions (emotional dissonance) by exploring several individual and contextual factors. Third, we contribute to the body of research that calls for a better understanding of context (Gedajlovic et al. 2012; Krueger et al. 2021; Wright et al. 2014) by focusing on the Tunisian context and considering the cultural, religious, institutional and economic dimensions that can influence a family firm's behaviour (Carney, Gedajlovic, and Strike 2014; Stough et al. 2015; Sharma and Manikuttu 2005; Wright et al. 2014).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Conflicts and Emotions in Family Firm Succession

Family firm succession is a process characterised by the intertwined and interdependent evolution of the functions and roles of the predecessor and the successor (Handler 1990; Le Breton Miller, Miller, and Steier 2004). Different phases are distinguished that can be characterized by an evolution of the respective roles of the predecessor and the successor (Cadieux 2007; Fattoum and Fayolle 2008; Morris et al. 1997; Schleppehorst and Moog 2014). During the integration phase, the successor executes and respects the decisions of the predecessor. During the joint management phase, the successor becomes more confident and participates in decision-making; the two actors jointly manage the family business. This suggests the need for the predecessor and successor to adjust their respective roles and interactions (Handler 1994): This role change enhances the potential for conflict due to the absence (or lack) of concessions and/or a shared vision of the family

firm's management or strategy (Frank et al. 2011; Zellweger and Kammerlander 2015). Moreover, the predecessor's resistance to 'letting go' is a decision charged by emotion because the founders have a feeling of attachment towards their companies (Bah 2009). The decision of disengagement is often accompanied by psychological and emotional effects (Pailot 2014), such as uneasiness, strain, and fears (Bertschi-Michel, Kammerlander, and Strike 2020; Handler 1990).

Conflicts in the family firm succession process become a central question, given the interactions between the family and professional spheres as well as their impact (Caputo et al. 2018; Frank et al. 2011). These conflicts may result in a real threat to the economic value of the company and the family atmosphere (Davis and Harveston 2001), and the divergence of interests between family members may lead to conflicts over family property and create a need for coordination and consultation (Zellweger and Kammerlander 2015). Harvey and Evans (1994) suggested that these varied conflicts arise from three different spheres: from within the organisation, from the family or the family members involved in the company, and from the external stakeholders.

The first level of conflict concerns only one of the spheres. In this case, no interaction is observed between the spheres. A family conflict does not, for example, directly lead to dysfunction within the company. The second level of conflict involves two different entities. The combination of different sources of conflict makes the resolution of these conflicts more complex. The third level of conflict involves all the actors: the family, business, and external stakeholders. Because of the complexity of these conflicts, Harvey and Evans (1994) suggested using external consultants and experts for effective resolution. The interaction between the different levels of conflict generates tensions, which can be defined as the inability of individuals to cope with work and family demands and needs (Carr and Hmieleski 2015; Werbel and Danes 2010). Tensions can be accompanied by nervousness, sleep problems, and health concerns (Grandey and Cropanzano 1999; House and Rizzo 1972). Thus, these conflicts and the emergence of tensions can jeopardise the evolution of the succession process, or even cause ruptures between the actors involved in the family transition.

Recent literature has emphasised the importance of diversity of conflicts, but in what way these conflicts evolve – and can become reinforced – still deserves attention. In this regard, it appears that emotions have to be taken into account. Previous studies distinguish between different types of conflict in the family business field (Caputo et al. 2018; Kubíček and Machek 2020; Qiu and Freel 2019). Conflict of interest arises from people's actions in pursuit of their own interests that potentially diverge between family members. They can lead to conflicts over family property and create a need for coordination and consultation (Zellweger and Kammerlander 2015). Conflicts can occur between family and non-family

shareholders and/or between majority and minority family shareholders (Qiu and Freel 2019). Finally, work–family conflict refers to pressure that an individual experiences from having to simultaneously fulfil incompatible or hardly compatible roles at work and at home (Lee 2018). They originate both at home and at work. This type of conflict occurs when work demand interferes with family responsibilities and vice versa (Frone, Russell, and Cooper 1992) and has consequences on the way family members can participate to the business (Carr and Hmieleski 2015). It is related to role conflicts, where family members are also encountering family relations within the business (Caputo et al. 2018). Task and process conflicts involve differences in perspectives and disagreements between individuals about defining strategies and the assigned objectives (Jehn and Mannix 2001) and how these objectives should be achieved (Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale 1999). This refers to differences in perspectives about how resources should be deployed to reach the objectives. A high level of task and process conflicts inhibit development and goal attainment (Kellermanns and Eddleston 2007) and can also intensify role ambiguity, rivalry, and uncertainty (Jehn 1997). Finally, relational conflicts represent personal animosities and incompatibility (Kellermanns and Eddleston 2004) which complicate the achievement of organisational tasks (Jehn 1997; Jehn and Mannix 2001). Succession conflicts are often a source of relational conflict (Danes et al. 1999). These conflicts reduce goodwill, mutual understanding, and respect for group members (Jehn 1995). Hence, we contend that conflict can be considered an antecedent of negative emotions such as anger, frustration, hatred, animosity, and annoyance (Barki and Hartwick 2004; De Dreu and Weingart 2003), which are frequently accompanied by hostility and aggression (Barki and Hartwick 2004). For example, founders can feel negative emotions such as anxiety and regret when they lose control of the business control and perceive that they lack a viable successor (Bee and Neubaum 2014).

2.2 Emotional Dissonance in Family Business Research

Emotion can be defined as a complex state of consciousness that is usually abrupt and momentary and is accompanied by physiological signs (Claudon and Weber 2009). In the field of family business research, Shepherd (2016, 1) defines emotions as: ‘[...] *subjective feeling states that have a clear cause or object, are short in duration, and are focused on a specific target*’. They can represent both negative and positive affective states (Plutchik 1994) that can be expressed and/or experienced in similar or differing ways. Scholars refer to the concept of emotional dissonance to describe the process leading to a separation between felt and expressed emotions (Abraham 1988; Hochschild 1983). This process respects

professional, organisational, and behavioural norms (Hochschild 1979; Rafaeli and Sutton 1989; Sutton 1991). This is the case in the healthcare context (Mishra and Bhatnagar 2009) for nurses to maintain a professional distance with patients but also respond to their psycho-social and physical needs (Afsar, Cheema, and Masood 2017). This can also be extended to other job contexts, as highlighted in the literature review of Labaki, Michael-Tsabari, and Zachary (2013a, p. 751), including “*flight attendants and bill collectors (Hochschild 1983), convenience store clerks (Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988), medical representatives (Mishra and Bhatnagar 2009), IT professionals (Rutner, Hardgrave, and McKnight 2008), police detectives (Stenross and Kleinman 1989), Disney employees (Van Maanen and Kunda 1989), call centre workers (Lewig and Dollard 2003)*”, to which we can add studies on call centre employees (Molino et al. 2016). These norms constitute a set of rules governing the expression of individuals in a group (Diefendorff et al. 2011); however, in a professional setting, such rules can lead to feelings of inauthenticity (Burch, Humphrey, and Batchelor 2013). In organisational context, recent research shows that emotional dissonance plays a mediating role between work–family conflict and intention to quit (Kundu and Gaba 2018).

With specific reference to family businesses, scholars confirm that the expression of emotions depends on several factors (Labaki, Michael-Tsabari, and Zachary 2013b). They confirm the absence of significant research on emotional dissonance in the context of family business and highlight that family business researchers often indirectly evoke some evidence of emotional dissonance. For example, depending on succession process stage and the successor’s willingness to manage the paradox of control and autonomy, successors mobilize different strategies to adopt/express emotions (Radu-Lefebvre and Randerson 2020). These authors identify two groups of strategies. The first are ‘defensive strategies’, when the successor is motivated by self-conformity and self-protection motives and tendency to accept the predecessor’s control. The second are ‘confrontational strategies’, adopted when the successor rejects the predecessor’s control and seeks personal autonomy. Brundin and Sharma (2011) introduced the concept of ‘emotional messiness’ to underline the presence of contradictory emotions and emotional confusion due to misunderstanding and mismatched expectations between family members. The authors suggest that these contradictory emotions can lead to emotional dissonance. Extending these insights, Labaki, Michael-Tsabari, and Zachary (2013a) argue that family members do not express their emotions in the same way. Building on accounts from the literature, the authors suggest that it depends on their level of involvement in the family business, on the family characteristics (Kepner 1983), as well as existing norms to deal with conflict situations (Tagiuri and Davis 1996) or delicate discussions (Lansberg 1988). According to these social and family norms, successors have to adapt their emotions to express

only what is expected (Radu-Lefebvre and Randerson 2020) by changing inner feelings (Lively and Weed 2014). So, it will be interesting to shed light on the ability of individuals – in particular the successor – to express their emotions; this ability will be crucial to understand the development of emotional dissonance, and the risks associated with it.

More than the identification of emotional dissonance, it is crucial to understand the interplay between emotional dissonance and conflicts that arise in the succession process, and how the inability to express feelings and emotions can accentuate tensions and conflicts between family members. To do so, it is necessary to track the evolution of conflicts and emotions during the succession process and to understand how the inability to express feelings and emotions can accentuate tensions and conflicts between family members.

3 Methods

To further investigate our theoretical contentions and bring the debate forward we need to collect detailed information on the different steps of the succession process and understand the actors involved. To do so, we decide to identify and map the interactions between the two main actors (successor and predecessor), and to complete the perspective by taking into account other members of the owning family. Such a qualitative approach, and more precisely, the case study is appropriate to study the phenomenon in depth, considering the specificities and differences in situational contexts (Yin 2009).

3.1 Data Collection and Sample Characteristics

The data were derived from an in-depth, longitudinal, single case study of the succession process in a family firm. The choice of a single case study was justified by the revelatory aspect, the possibility of extreme exemplars, and the opportunity to have access to terrain for an unusual research question (De Massis and Kotlar 2014) to persuasively describe a phenomenon (Siggelkow 2007). Several studies have contributed to the family business literature by using single case studies (DeAngelo and DeAngelo 2000; Dyck et al. 2002; Salvato, Chirico, and Sharma 2010). It was particularly difficult to find an appropriate case study for our research question. First, we needed the insight from different actors affected by the conflicts and emotions during the succession process (successor and predecessor), who are not often available. In addition, the research question requires becoming involved in the intimacy of the family members and their personal lives. This represents a difficulty

in obtaining data from family firms, particularly in the context of a sensitive subject such as conflict and emotions (Kellermanns, Dibrell, and Cruz 2014). Second, some participants granted us only one interview and subsequently refused to participate in the investigation and provide us with additional information. Nevertheless, family business literature calls for longitudinal data to understand the dynamics and evolution of this phenomenon (Kellermanns, Dibrell, and Cruz 2014).

Separate interviews were conducted with the predecessor and successor to highlight convergences as well as differences in views and interpretations. When disagreements occurred in the way the story was told and the versions provided by successors and the predecessor diverged, we conducted a third set of interviews with a family member and/or a third person familiar with the details of the succession process. This method allowed us to ‘benefit from several points of view, to multiply the insights in order to cross-reference the information and thus to limit the risk of rationalization ‘a posteriori’ (De Massis et al. 2013; Nutt 1993). Triangulation of information sources was important to gain a complementary view of the accounts provided by the predecessor and successor, but also to strengthen data credibility (De Massis and Kotlar 2014; Patton 1990).

Data were collected using the following two methods: (1) Narrative story: This tool enabled us to understand the dynamics of conflict during the succession process over time. Some researchers underline that narratives are an important tool in qualitative methods that can improve research in family business’ field (Fletcher, De Massis, and Nordqvist 2016; Hamilton, Cruz, and Jack 2017; Payne 2018; Wilson et al. 2014). (2) Ten semi-structured interviews: Data were collected using face-to-face interviews, with an average interview duration of 50 min, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interviewees were asked open-ended questions, giving them the opportunity to express themselves freely. When the case was still in the succession process, we were able to hold interviews with the predecessor and the successor over different periods (in the years 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019). These additional interviews allowed us to follow the evolution of conflicts over four years. This enabled us to both obtain a better understanding of the case study (Johansson, Li, and Tsai 2014) and to study the sequentiality of events over a time axis in order to interpret the particularities of the succession process (Payne, Pearson, and Carr 2017) and the evolution of each actor’s role (Table 1).²

We also collected additional data via non-participant observation (Chirico and Nordqvist 2010; Jaskiewicz, Combs and Rau 2015; Kotlar and De Massis 2013) after obtaining the CEOs’ agreement. We were able to observe interactions between

² Two interview guides were developed for this purpose: one for the predecessor and the other for the successor. This strategy allowed us to obtain a wealth of information regarding the accounts of the two stakeholders involved.

Table 1: Summary of interviews.

	Predecessor	Successor	Successor mother	Brother's successor	Predecessor's friend
Profile	65 years old, high school education, training in France	Male, 35 years old, single, Bachelor's level education	58 years old, homemaker, high school education	26 years old, football teacher and coach	68 years old, bank manager
Interviews					
2016	1	1			
2017	1	1			
2018		1	1	1	1
2019		1		1	
Total	2 interviews	4 interviews	1 interview	2 interviews	1 interview

individuals during family business meetings. It is important to note that we took notes during discussions between family members which were charged with emotions.

3.2 Case Study Summary

The predecessor worked for a multinational company specializing in marine topography before utilizing his experience to launch his own company in this sector in 1981 (one of the first companies in this sector). This company was successful in entering local and international markets in neighbouring countries. After dropping out of university, the successor joined the family business on a full-time basis in 2010. Conflicts between father and son lasted for several years, which led the successor to leave the family business and go to work elsewhere. Following the illness and death of the predecessor in 2018, the successor officially took over the family firm.

3.3 Data Analysis

Interviews have been recorded and fully transcribed. We treated verbatim transcriptions according to 'Gioia methods' (Corley and Gioia 2004; Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2013). This method allowed us to establish an understanding of the emotions and conflicts during complex processes (Langley and Abdallah 2011).

Figure 1 provides a summary description of the data structure and Table 2 provides some illustrative verbatims. The raw data was coded in compliance with a first-order coding style that was very close to the verbatim transcriptions of the interviews. In this step, we used open coding to categorize information relative to the characteristics of the family members and the nature of their relationship (profile, background, behavior, disagreements, conflicts, tension, and emotions) by taking into consideration chronological representations related to family events (marriage, birth, sickness, death) and business events (reorganisation of firm structure, recruitment) over the studied period. A second coding that allowed increased abstraction was realised through several interactions between theory and data. According to Reay (2014), in this approach, ‘*Researchers show their analytical work using boxes and arrows that identify data extracts grouped according to first-order*

Table 2: Illustrative quotes related to conflicts and emotions.

Conflicts

- ‘*My relationship with my father was not perfect; it was each for himself, and we do not get along. The problems with my father have been around for a long time (even before I officially joined the company)*’ (Successor)
- ‘*My father forced me to choose this specialty (topography), and I regret having accepted. I wanted to choose another specialty, but he insisted that I chose this branch to work with him in our company. Ahhh, I regret it*’ (Successor)
- ‘*With my father, we shared the work perfectly, but we had disagreements about the way we do the work. You should never contradict my father. For example, he refuses to grant me advances for expense reports; he asks me to advance the costs and then request a reimbursement*’ (Successor)
- ‘*I work only during the summer in the family business; I advised my brother to leave the business because my father is too authoritarian. He wants his decision to be respected without accepting our opinions*’ (Brother’s successor)
- ‘*My son is stubborn; he wants to work in his own way! However, he does not master the technical aspect*’ (Predecessor)

Emotional dissonance

- ‘*If you show him that you are not satisfied, he becomes angrier! So, you hide your feelings*’ (Successor)
- ‘*My father is able to make you a scandal in front of everyone; if you react, he becomes more aggressive, so you must hide your anger*’ (Brother’s successor)

Emotions

- ‘*When my father came back from traveling abroad, I gave him the invoices, and we did the calculations. He said to me, “What the hell is all this? That’s exaggerated. That’s too much money!” And finally, he called me a thief! I was shocked and had trouble accepting it. I was very angry! My father called me a thief*’ (Successor)
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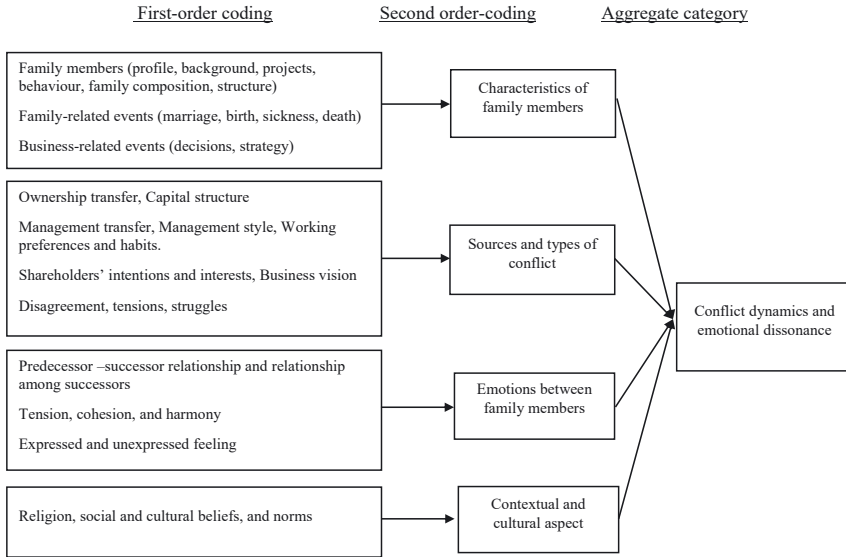


Figure 1: Data coding structure.

codes that are then grouped into second-order themes at a higher level of abstraction' (p.99). We matched our primary codes against existing concepts and theories (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2013). We categorized primary codes into two groups: information related to conflicts that occurred between family members over the studied period and information related to the emotions expressed by the actors.

We start with an analysis grid created manually to facilitate the double coding of the data; thereafter, the first individual analyses were compared to choose the categories to be retained. NVivo 12 software was used to facilitate the coding process.

4 Results

Since our main objective was to understand the dynamics of conflict by exploring the emotional dissonance during the succession process in family firms, we focused our analysis on two main themes. The first explored the evolution of conflict between the predecessor and the successor, while the second related to the presence of emotions during the succession process. Our analysis considered interpersonal relationships and organisational-level relationships.

4.1 The Dynamics of Conflicts

The case study observations highlighted how frequently conflicts occur in this family firm during the succession process. The successor confirmed that conflict existed even before he joined the family business, stating, *'I never had a good relationship with my father, even when I was a student'*. Though this personal conflict did not have any relation to the family business sphere at that time, the successor's later integration into the family business was difficult since the relationship with his father was not based on trust and mutual respect. At the beginning and during the initiation phase of the succession process, when the successor was solely an executor of the predecessor's instructions, we noted an absence of conflict. Conflicts only appeared when the successor took more responsibility and began to control the company's activity more closely.

The data analysis showed that there were two levels of conflict: organisational and interpersonal. The first level concerned the successor and the family business employees who, according to the successor, demonstrated opportunistic behaviours via overestimations of expenses related to travel, accommodation, and meals: *'When I started controlling costs and managing business travel, tensions arose with employees'* (Successor). This was also confirmed by the successor's brother: *'The employees are not trustworthy, because they took advantage of my father's absence'*. However, regarding the second level of interpersonal conflict, his father claimed, *'My son refuses to learn, He is a simple executor. He does not make any effort to learn or to help me in the technological aspect. He is not talented'* (Predecessor). Thus, after the successor's integration into the family business, we noticed that personal conflicts essentially became professional conflicts (task and process). Employees took advantage of this conflictual situation between the father and his son to dismiss the successor, who was attempting to exercise strict control over them, and they complained to the predecessor by questioning the successor's behaviour. Under the influence of his employees, the predecessor accused his son of stealing: *'When my father came back from traveling abroad, I gave him the invoices, and we did the calculations. He said to me, "What the hell is all this? That's exaggerated. That's too much money!" And finally, he called me a thief! I was shocked and had trouble accepting it. I was very angry! My father called me a thief'*. (Successor)

Following this accusation, successor refused to work while his father was engaged in other projects, *'I was on the move, so I asked my son to go to work. He said, "No! you have to pay me first!" He stays with us; the result was that my main client was not happy because he had a delay in delivery, and therefore, I had to pay a penalty! My son refuses my orders'* (Predecessor). The relationship between the

father and his son further deteriorated and resulted in a rupture that lasted for one year: the successor left the family business to work elsewhere.

The case highlighted the difficulty of building or maintaining a relationship of trust between the predecessor and successor. This may explain the escalation of conflicts: *'Even outside the family business, I do not trust my son anymore! I gave him the responsibility of renting out two apartments, but the clients did not pay three of their monthly instalments'* (Predecessor). Events outside the family business may, therefore, accentuate work conflicts, which may explain the issue of conflict escalation during the succession process.

The results show that conflicts appeared in the family system and subsequently spread to the professional sphere.

4.2 Emotions and Emotional Dissonance during the Succession Process: Fuel for Conflict?

The process of succession is frequently emotionally charged, and the successor and the predecessor are usually the main actors affected by these emotions. The particularity of this case lay in the presence of negative emotions before the beginning of the succession process, but also the evolution of these emotions during the succession process. The predecessor experienced feelings of frustration following the failure of his son in school: *'I mobilised my network to offer my son the opportunity to attend a prestigious engineering school. Unfortunately, he failed to graduate and finish his studies'* (Predecessor). He confirmed that even after his integration in the family business, the son did not show a willingness to learn the details of the family business work. These factors had a major influence on the father's behaviour and perception towards his son. The predecessor had always expressed his dissatisfaction with his son's behaviour. The last event that really damaged the relationship between the father and the son was the theft of their new truck, *'I was traveling abroad, so I called my eldest son and asked him to bring the truck into the garage (a new truck). He did not. Result: the truck was stolen'* (Predecessor). Given the recurring faults of the successor, the father accused his son of being 'not responsible,' and this event subsequently generated negative emotions such as hostility and resentment.

The successor was aware that his failure in school was the main factor explaining the bad relationship with his father: *'My father blames me because I dropped out of school. Now, he doesn't hesitate to offend me in front of employees, and even in front of the customers, by saying that I am incompetent. I accept it and do not react'* (Successor). The successor emphasised that he could neither react nor answer back because he greatly respected his father, reinforcing the gap between

felt and expressed emotions: *'I would come home angry because he would disrespect me in front of everyone. Eventually, I got used to this behaviour. That is why I avoid conflicts with him because he makes a fool of me in front of everybody'* (Successor). The results showed that the son was often afraid of his father and of his reactions. The observation also revealed that the son did not accept his father's accusation of stealing. The successor began to cry as he recounted, *'My father called me a thief! I was shocked and had trouble accepting it. I was very angry and disappointed! He hurt me! My father called me a thief'*. The behaviour of the predecessor resulted in a set of negative emotions for his son: disappointment, frustration, and lack of social belonging. These negative emotions were reinforced by the difficulty – even the inability – to express these emotions, as the successor felt that he had to respect his father, leading to conflict escalation.

Finally, the successor decided to leave the family business because his father accused him of being responsible for the theft of the truck. The son found it difficult to accept this new accusation. He felt a sense of injustice, *'It's true that my father called me and asked me to put the truck in the garage. I was not at home. I called my brother and I asked him to do it, but he didn't do it!! The truck was stolen! It's not my fault'* (Successor). This was confirmed by his brother who assumed full responsibility, *'I explained to my father that I am the culprit, but he always accuses my brother'* (Brother's successor). We emphasise that the father and the eldest son had different perspectives. Although the eldest son was wrongly accused, he could not justify his position with his father. Therefore, he took things on himself, even though if he did not accept them: The gap between expressed emotions and feeling is clearly a mark of emotional dissonance and played a role in his next decision, to leave the firm. As for the father, given his feelings of hostility towards his son, he no longer wished to change his position, even though he had all the necessary information to see the truth of what had occurred.

The results show that conflicts generated negative emotions between family members; the inability of the successor to express his emotions and feelings clearly led to deterioration in the relationship between the father and the son and also developed conflicts and tensions. However, it is important to emphasise that emotions and feelings can also be a way to reduce conflicts between individuals. In early 2018, a serious illness and the deterioration of the predecessor's health forced the successor to return to the company: *'My father can no longer drive the car alone, because he lost his toes. I take care of him because he has psychological problems: He feels dependent on us. He feels like he's losing power. I adapt to his behaviour, even if he offends me. I try not to take it badly because I understand his situation'* (Successor).

The predecessor's state of health and the successor's empathy eased tensions and conflicts. Family members showed strong empathy for their father and true

family cohesion: *'We were all struggling with seeing our father as weak and suffering from a psychological problem because he knew that the disease had invaded his body. All of us came together to please him and make him happy'* (Successor's brother). The successor's mother confirmed, *'My husband did not want to be weak in front of his children'*.

The successor admitted that, after the death of his father, the family business's founder, he realized that he had not learned how to utilize his father's knowledge, and that he was experiencing the consequences: *'My father was very severe with me. I didn't dare contradict his decisions. I regret my behaviour when he asked me to follow his advice to learn'*. During the interview, we observed the successor's strong emotions, as he cried when he said: *'My father never apologised. Just before his death, he said to me, 'My son, you never insured!' Now I am relying on you to take care of the family! I'm counting on you. They were the last words that he said to me. Today I work and train to make the company sustainable and take care of my brothers and my mother'* (Successor). The results show that the successor still experiences a feeling of guilt regarding his relationship with his father in both family and professional sphere.

5 Discussion and Contributions

Succession is perceived as a critical and risky process for family businesses. This research aimed to explore the dynamic nature of conflicts and emotions between the successor and predecessor.

5.1 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

Most studies in the family businesses field have investigated the impact of conflict on performance (Kellermanns and Eddleston 2004; 2007), source and type of conflict (Harvey and Evans 1994; McKee et al. 2014) but have not examined enough why such conflict evolves in the family business and how they affect emotions of family members (Bertschi-Michel, Kammerlander, and Strike 2020; Kubíček and Machek 2020). The present study contributes to the family business literature on emotions during the succession process (Bertschi-Michel, Kammerlander, and Strike 2020; Shepherd 2016; Stanley 2010) and more precisely on emotional dissonance (Labaki, Michael-Tsabari, and Zachary 2013a; Rafaeli 2013; Morgan and Gómez-Mejía 2014) by addressing the call to go beyond the definition, typology, and impact of emotions and pay more attention to how individuals regulate and manage their emotions in family business context (Labaki 2020). The main

contribution of this empirical study is then its emphasis on the connection between evolution of conflict and emotion dissonance during the succession process in a family business, which in turn establishes the need to conduct longitudinal research to better understand the dynamics of these intrafamily emotions and conflicts (Bertschi-Michel, Kammerlander, and Strike 2020; Kubiček and Machek 2020). We have explained how the expression of negative emotions generated by conflicts can increase tensions between individuals in a family firm. At the same time, we underline that the inability of the successor to clearly express his emotions involves recurring frustration, and finally an accumulation or escalation of conflicts. The results show that when the successor does not show his real emotions, the other party (predecessor) does not understand the psychological state of the successor and therefore he will not be able to adjust his behaviour to meet the expectations of his successor. Given these observations, we suggest the following proposition:

Proposition 1. *Emotional dissonance influences the dynamics of conflicts.*

We also contribute to the literature on family related conflicts by showing that conflicts are not a static phenomenon (Danes et al. 2000; Kubiček and Machek 2020) and that they can evolve according to the evolution of the succession process (and business system). We also underline the need to take into consideration the family system and family events to better understand the dynamic nature of conflict. Our results have confirmed that emotional dissonance is one of the main factors influencing the evolution of conflicts; however, we also provide some elements that help to understand where the emotional dissonance comes from. Three factors may explain the difficulty in managing/expressing emotions and the possible gap between felt and expressed emotions. The first is related to the Arab culture of respecting one's elders, especially parents (Fahed-Sreih 2017; Sonfield, Lussier, and Fahed-Sreih 2016). This can affect successor behaviour: In the case of succession by several members of the same family, the successors, according to their age and/or sex, may have difficulty in clearly expressing their expectations and needs. Second, the family system in Tunisia is based on parental patriarchy (Mzid Ben Amar and Mezghani 2010; Touzani et al. 2015). The "sacred" place of the father is considered as a source of power and authority allowing him to make decisions by himself. This behaviour is also applicable in the family business, where the founder is the only decision maker. The successors, depending on the profile of the predecessor, may find difficulty in openly discussing certain subjects or negotiating certain business decisions with them. The third factor relates to the Islamic belief in obedience to parents and compliance with the restrictions they place and their reprimands. The analysis of the results highlighted the importance

of the parents' 'sacred position' in the Arab countries. Quotes from the interviews revolved around this religio-cultural norms and reflection: '*God's approval is won by winning the satisfaction of the parents and that those who act badly with parents would be punished*'. Successors need to overcome the difficulties related to the patriarchal aspect of families and the rules and religious norms they face in order to respect their elders. Previous research has confirmed that emotional dissonance is governed by professional, organisational, and behavioural norms (Hochschild 1979; Rafaeli and Sutton 1989; Sutton 1991) and has explained how family systems establish norms (Thompson and Meyer 2007). We add to this by detailing how religious and cultural norms also impact how individuals express their emotions in family business context. Indeed, Dwairy and El-Jamil (2015), who studied the Arab and Muslim context, underlined that norms and values such as showing respect (*ihitiram*), social duties (*wajib*), and pleasing others while avoiding confrontation (*mosayara*) determine and condition the individual's behaviour. This situation requires that individual possesses social skills in order to cope with these norms (Yezza and Chabaud 2020a; 2020b). Given these observations, we suggest the following propositions:

Proposition 2. *"The respect of elders" which characterizes Arab culture, influences the emotional dissonance of successors.*

Proposition 3. *The family structure, through the father's authority, influences the emotional dissonance of successors.*

Proposition 4. *Religious norms and beliefs influence the emotional dissonance of successors.*

Our research offers a complementary perspective to the study by Radu-Lefebvre and Randerson (2020), who showed how successors manage the paradox of control and autonomy by mobilizing different emotion management strategies. The authors highlight that successors manage ambivalent emotions by using either defensive strategies or confrontational strategies like avoidance, compromise, domination, surface acting, emotional display of negative feelings, hyperbolised emotional reactions, and holism. The interpersonal level of our analysis considered emotional dissonance as an important factor that accentuates the escalation of conflicts. This means that the incapacity to clearly express emotions and speak openly about conflicts generates an accumulation of conflicts which remain unresolved and continuous. However, we also observed that family and environmental events can play an important role in de-escalating conflicts and avoiding tension. In this case study, tragic events such as a serious illness played an

important role in individuals' emotions, decisions, and behaviours. Our findings reinforce previous research stating that emotions can change on the basis of critical events related to the family system (Shepherd 2003). Moreover, we responded to the call in the literature that encouraged authors to conduct longitudinal research to follow the evolution of processes in family businesses (Payne, Pearson, and Carr 2017; Kellermanns, Dibrell, and Cruz 2014). We also avoided the retrospective effect that is sometimes apparent in data collection, since we studied the evolution of emotions in real time (Bertschi-Michel, Kammerlander, and Strike 2020).

Finally, we addressed a research gap noted by several previous studies that emphasised the necessity to conduct research in different contexts and cultures to better understand who individual's capacity to cope with conflicts and family relationships (Kubíček and Machek 2020; Rousseau et al. 2018). This also justifies the need to discuss how cultural and contextual dimensions influence the family firm's behaviour (Carney, Gedajlovic, and Strike 2014; Gedajlovic et al. 2012; Sharma and Manikutty 2005; Stough et al. 2015; Wright et al. 2014). The Tunisian context of our empirical study, being an African, Arab and Muslim country, allowed us to identify the particularities of a context that remains understudied in family business literature. Recent literature considers that the Arab context offers a new perspective for studying a holistic identity formed by religion, culture, and traditions (Basco 2017) and underlines the need to conduct more research in Arab contexts to better understand family businesses heterogeneity across regions (Krueger et al. 2021). These authors propose an embedded framework for the family business context in which they identify different levels of analysis: micro-, meso- and macro-contexts. These three layers condition stakeholder communication and cooperation, which in turn impact family firm's behaviour through dimensions such as family emotions, entrepreneurial mindset, and individual and collective goals. Further, these authors call scholars to move from classical contextualising to context theorizing in their future research, to offer more useful knowledge to the family business literature. We addressed this call by studying the micro-, meso-, and macro-contexts with a particular focus on the diversity of goals between family members during the succession process.

5.2 Managerial Contributions

Our research also offers managerial contributions. Depending on family characteristics and the profile of successors and predecessors, it would be interesting to take into consideration the emotional dimension, and more precisely,

emotional dissonance in succession planning, education, and support programs intended for potential successors. Professionals should focus more on developing social and relational skills to overcome the difficulties associated with expressing emotions.

5.3 Limitations, Future Directions and Conclusion

Similar to all research work, our study has some limitations that open new research avenues. The single case study used is the main limitation, which prevents the generalisability of the study results. However, this was not the aim of this study. Similar research should be conducted to study the role of conflict and emotions during the succession process in several observation cases. Our findings explain why and how individuals do not clearly express their emotions, leading to emotional dissonance and conflict escalation. Future research will have to address this point by providing studies that shed light on the way emotional dissonance impacts the succession process, on the determinants and consequences of emotional dissonance but also possible solutions to emotional dissonance. Understanding the antecedents of emotional dissonance is important in this light. While this research emphasised the importance of culture, religion, and context in the study of conflicts and emotions, future research must explore the role of different dimensions of culture, for example by referring to the research conducted by Hofstede and colleagues (1988; 2001; 2011). It would be interesting to conduct quantitative studies on a large sample using reliable measurement scales to test the impact of conflicts on emotions and/or the impact of cultural dimensions on the development of conflicts and emotions. Scholars can also mobilize the embedded contextual framework for family businesses proposed by Krueger et al. (2021) to advance family business science by better comprehending the heterogeneity of family firms from different regions and contexts.

Analysing possible solutions to emotional dissonance is also an important issue. If it will be important to shed light on the ability of individuals to interact in the right way, due to social skills (Yezza and Chabaud 2020), it will also be important to understand the role of family members, as well as that of external advisors (Bertschi-Michel, Kammerlander, and Strike 2020), to address this conflict dynamic. Finally, future research can also promote collaboration with scholars from other disciplines to introduce experimental settings and physiological measures such as facial movements, heartrate, blood pressure, and sweating that may offer more physiological data and detailed insights into emotions. Combining physiological and psychological measures was also advocated by Labaki (2020),

who called for more rigorous quantitative and qualitative methods to advance the understanding of emotions in family business research.

Our exploratory study emphasises the importance of emotional dissonance as a way to understand the dynamics of intrafamily conflicts during the succession process in family firms, paving the way to a better understanding of the factors that can facilitate or inhibit the success of succession.

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