The Role of Strategic Planning and Leadership in the Success of Family-Owned Construction Businesses in the Gauteng Province of South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Purpose
Family-owned businesses play a significant role in Gauteng Province's economic growth, particularly in the construction sector. This research aimed to assess how strategic planning and leadership have affected the activities, sustainability, and competitive position of family businesses.

Methodology
Using a qualitative approach, the study used case studies and semi-structured interviews with 30 individuals from family-operated firms based in Gauteng.

Findings
The findings showed that family members' participation in strategic planning, informal planning processes, and effective vision and mission statements influenced operational activities and the sustainability of family businesses. However, the study identified gaps in formal documentation, long-term sustainability issues, and training needs. The study also recognized leadership styles and succession issues as important factors affecting family businesses' success and competitiveness. Both transformational and democratic leadership styles appear effective in supporting employees' innovation initiatives and participation in decision-making. Finally, the study highlights the importance of effective succession planning.

Conclusion
This research contributes to the literature on family business management by offering insights on improving the sustainability, profitability, and continuity of family-owned construction firms in Gauteng Province. The results show that family businesses must use transformational and democratic leadership, develop thorough succession strategies, and manage family conflicts to succeed in the future.

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1. Introduction

Family businesses are valuable to the global economy because they create jobs, generate wealth, and foster innovation across numerous industries. Many countries, especially developing countries, have family businesses operating in construction, manufacturing, and retail (Chrisman et al., 2018). The construction industry is noted for its complexity, as it involves difficult operations, a high risk of safety accidents, and fluctuations in business and resource availability. In South Africa, builders contribute significantly to the country's economy and infrastructure (Mpanza, 2023). As a result, family-owned builders can operate successfully and effectively only through strategic planning and strong leadership. Strategic planning helps businesses define goals and objectives, allocate resources, and respond to changes in the business environment. For family builders, strategic planning matters because it balances business goals with family values and experience, while ensuring the business can continue functioning from generation to generation. Research indicates that family businesses with effective planning practices are more likely to survive and thrive than those without organized planning systems. Nevertheless, family construction companies may struggle to establish effective planning systems because of governance and financial limitations and family-related difficulties. Consequently, lack of planning may lead to stagnation and poor financial performance (Struckell et al., 2022).

The second important element of success for family construction companies is leadership. Leadership is defined by how an organization implements its strategy; it shapes employee motivation and how resources and skills are combined to achieve goals. In family businesses, leadership is expected to help meet the needs of both the business and the family. Successful family business leaders must have credibility, flexibility, and the ability to meet the needs of both the family and the organizational environment. Khalifa et al. (2023) noted that transformational leadership is connected to business innovation and growth. Poor leadership transition planning can lead to confusion, reluctance to change, and generational conflicts, whereas a successful succession process supports organizational continuity and flexibility (Seniwoliba, 2015; Nwuke & Adeola, 2023). The adverse effects of economic crisis, regulations, worker shortages, and rising material prices highlight the importance of strategic planning and leadership in Gauteng's construction industry. These challenges make it imperative for family-run construction companies to develop strategies to counter uncertainty while preserving competitive advantage. Implementing strategic measures such as risk assessment, financial forecasting, and market analysis is critical to addressing economic challenges (Lear, 2012). Furthermore, leadership adaptability is also relevant when responding to technological advances, customer needs, and sustainability initiatives. Leaders who foster innovation and sustainable practices help ensure the sustainability of family-owned companies (Bera, 2023).

Although family members may bring loyalty, confidence, commitment, and knowledge to family businesses, family participation can also create complications if there is no proper balance between family interests and business needs. Family relations can play a vital role in enhancing loyalty towards the family business. However, these relations may also contribute to nepotism, reluctance to accept outsiders, and inadequate governance processes. A proper governance structure can help family businesses define employees' organizational roles, tasks, and decision-making processes while preserving the company's identity and family values. Studying family relations in the context of strategic planning and leadership matters because both practices are effective only when family connections, organizational responsibilities, and power are properly managed.

Although many scholars have explored family businesses, it remains unclear how managing family relations, strategic planning, and leadership affects the profitability of family construction businesses in Gauteng Province (Sen, 2021).

This research therefore addresses the inadequate understanding of how family-run construction companies in Gauteng Province achieve business success through strategic planning and leadership. Informal, family-based planning and leadership can provide high flexibility, reliability, and continuity, but they may also have weaknesses related to formal planning, leadership development, and intergenerational transition. This research treats succession planning, mentoring, and training as part of leadership continuity rather than as separate concepts. In addition, family conflict, governance, technological change, financial limitations, and a lack of qualified personnel are treated as contextual conditions that can affect the introduction and effectiveness of strategic planning and leadership.

The research focuses on strategic planning and leadership as key factors contributing to performance in family-run construction businesses in Gauteng Province. The research aims to deepen understanding of the interplay between strategic planning and leadership by examining them as interconnected rather than unrelated concepts. The study adds to the literature of family businesses and construction management by providing contextual qualitative data on strategic planning and leadership in family construction businesses in Gauteng Province. The study also provides recommendations for family business owners and managers based on the findings on the importance of structured planning and effective leadership development in ensuring sustainable performance and continuity in family businesses. Therefore, the study fills this gap by emphasizing the importance of examining these concepts together in the context of family construction companies in Gauteng Province. The study's general objective was to examine the role of strategic planning and leadership in the success of family-owned construction businesses in Gauteng Province, South Africa. The specific objectives were to examine how strategic planning practices influence the operational performance and long-term sustainability of family-owned construction businesses in Gauteng Province, and to assess how leadership practices, including leadership styles and succession planning, shape the competitiveness, continuity, and overall success of these businesses.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Family-Owned Construction Businesses

Family businesses play a significant role in the economy by generating employment and maintaining the continuity of business processes across industries. Family-owned construction companies in Gauteng operate in sectors that contribute to infrastructure development and other economic activities (Grobler, 2022). Family-owned businesses are characterized by family participation in ownership and management activities aimed at sustaining the family business for many generations (Oudah et al., 2018). Family businesses have specific features, such as a mix of family relationships, knowledge, financial capital, and social capital, that distinguish them from non-family-owned companies (Chrisman et al., 2018). Family factors give family businesses practical advantages, such as commitment, trust, and loyalty. However, these strengths can also create management challenges when family matters intrude on business decisions. Family-owned construction companies need effective strategies and leadership to turn their unique family resources into business capabilities that support market success through family values combined with professional management practices (Erdogan et al., 2020).

2.2. Strategic Planning in Family-Owned Construction Businesses

Strategic planning is a process by which an organization defines its long-term goals and objectives, assesses its environment, allocates resources, and creates action plans to achieve future success. However, in family-run firms, strategic planning includes an additional element because family traditions and ownership plans may influence management decisions. Thus, strategic planning allows family firms to synchronize their objectives with the existing resources and future market changes. According to Samiun et al. (2024), strategic planning relates to long-term planning, risk management, and resource management. These aspects are particularly pertinent for construction firms because their operations are subject to changes in material prices, legislation, finances, project uncertainty, and labor issues. Family-owned construction companies need to plan because they must anticipate these situations and allocate resources accordingly. Strategic planning also helps businesses understand the market environment.

Risk assessment is an integral part of strategic planning in the construction industry. Economic volatility, changing market conditions, personnel issues, and fluctuations in construction material prices can affect project implementation and an organization's performance. Jedynak and Bąk (2021) argue that risk management is necessary in uncertain business environments. For construction family businesses, regular risk assessments can improve decision-making and reduce the risk of disruption. Formalizing strategic planning is also important for family firms. Although informal planning, based on family experience and acquired knowledge, provides flexibility, excessive reliance on informal methods can hinder decision documentation, knowledge transfer, and consistency across generations. Indeed, strategic planning should leverage family knowledge and commitment.

2.3. Leadership in Family-Owned Construction Businesses

The second core concept in this research is leadership. Leadership is how individual managers influence employees, set the organization's course, make decisions, and use available resources to achieve organizational goals. However, leadership in family-owned businesses can be more complex because leaders must balance business responsibilities with family relationships. Some argue that successful leaders should set objectives common to all employees, communicate organizational values, and create an environment for sustainable growth (Darling et al., 2007). Various leadership styles and methods may influence how family businesses respond to challenges and opportunities. The transformational leadership style is particularly important because it helps people achieve common organizational goals, encourages innovation, and involves employees. Transformational leadership may play a crucial role in family-owned construction companies by helping businesses cope with changing industry conditions, as the style encourages people to share ideas and help improve the organization. Costa et al. (2023) show a link between leadership styles, human capital, and innovation management, underscoring the importance of leadership approaches that support organizational development.

On the other hand, highly authoritarian leadership may hinder employee involvement and innovation when decision-making is overly centralized in one leader. This scenario can be worrisome in construction, where change, knowledge, and collaboration among employees are needed. Thus, good leadership provides strategic direction while also creating space for employee contributions. In addition, leadership relates to the continuity

of family-owned construction companies, as there are times when the company transitions from founders or current leaders to the next generation. If leadership transition is not executed properly, the company faces risks including uncertainty, resistance to change, and intergenerational conflict. Hill (2019) mentions the key role of leadership transition and development in perpetuating family businesses. In addition, Nwuke and Adeola (2023) noted that effective leadership transition can benefit family-owned businesses and their ability to survive and adapt.

2.4. Succession Planning as a Dimension of Leadership Continuity

The study views succession planning as one aspect of leadership continuity and not as an independent main concept. Succession planning means equipping potential future leaders with skills and creating a structure that allows the transfer of leadership responsibilities. This is especially vital for family businesses, as the successor's ability to lead may determine the company's survival. However, family-owned construction firms may face succession problems because future leaders may lack design know-how, leadership skills, or willingness to manage the business. Intergenerational disagreements over strategic direction and leadership roles may also arise. Nbabuife and Okoli (2017) highlight the challenges of succession planning in family firms, while Toliver emphasizes the importance of leadership preparation and training in developing future managers. Thus, training and mentorship play a significant role in leadership continuity. Mentorship enables family members with successful business careers to pass skills and managerial practices to potential successors. Training helps develop the skills needed to manage complex businesses. A proper succession plan should not only identify the successor but also support their development.

2.5. Synthesis and Research Gap

The body of existing literature outlines how important strategic planning and leadership are to the performance and sustainability of family-owned businesses. Through strategic planning, businesses set direction, manage risks, allocate resources, and respond to an uncertain environment. Meanwhile, leadership plays an important role during strategy implementation, as well as in ensuring employee involvement and adaptation. Leadership continuity is also vital for family businesses, as succession planning helps prepare future leaders. However, the existing literature does not adequately explain how these elements work in the context of family-owned construction businesses in Gauteng Province. Most of the literature considers strategic planning, leadership, and succession separately, and it has not discussed the relationship between strategic planning and leadership in terms of their influence on performance. This is a significant gap, as family construction companies operate in a unique environment marked by project-related uncertainty, limited resources, evolving regulations, skills demands, and competitive pressure.

2.1. Theoretical Review

The Resource-Based View (RBV) serves as the major theoretical framework for this research because it explains how family businesses in the construction industry can use their unique resources and organizational capabilities to achieve long-term success. Basically, RBV underlines the crucial role of valuable, scarce, hard-to-copy, and non-substitutable resources (VRIN) in achieving competitive advantage (Sun et al., 2024). Family businesses have unique resources based on shared beliefs, mutual trust, accumulated knowledge, and strong family and business ties, traditionally called "familiness" (Chrisman et al., 2018). For a construction family-owned company, VRIN resources may include industry knowledge, personal relationships, and money and

people, which help the organization adapt effectively to market conditions (Teleki et al., 2024). In this research, strategies and leadership are critical organizational capabilities that enable effective management of these resources, resulting in improved performance and sustainability of family businesses. Stewardship Theory offers a complementary perspective on family proprietors' intentions to work for their companies' future. The theory suggests that family business owners may act as stewards who prioritize collective organizational goals and preserving the business over individual interests (Ali et al., 2024).

This approach is relevant for construction family businesses, as leadership can be shaped by family principles, business heritage, and transgenerational continuity. Stewardship may facilitate leaders' involvement in employee development, innovation, and sustainable approaches to running the business. However, generational differences in the vision of the business' future can create obstacles to leadership succession, making leadership development and systematic succession processes necessary for the ongoing functioning of the business (Neubaum et al., 2022). Thus, these theories provide a logical basis for the study. RBV clarifies how strategic planning and leadership act as effective organizational capabilities that enable the use of family resources for business purposes. At the same time, Stewardship Theory explains how family business leaders' long-term commitment to running the business can support business continuity. Both theories analyse how strategic planning and leadership can help family-owned businesses in Gauteng Province improve efficiency and effectiveness.

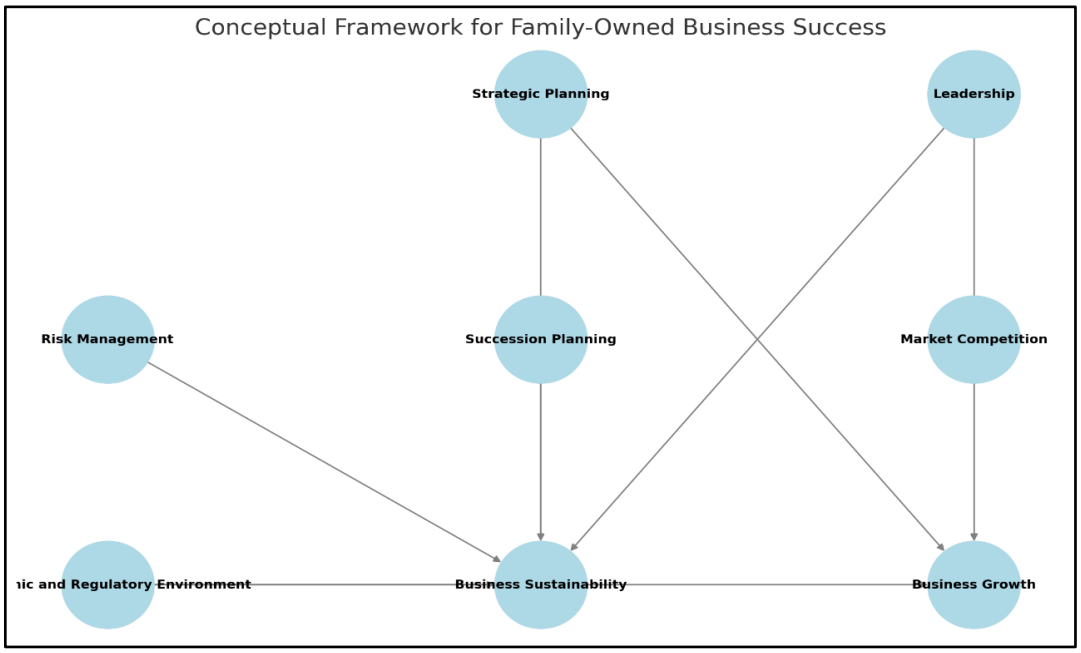


Figure.1.Conceptual Framework
Source: Author's own elaboration

3. Methodology

3.1. Methodology and Research Design

The study followed the Research Onion framework of Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), which provided a systematic structure for the research process. The study adopted a qualitative research approach because it sought an in-depth understanding of

how strategic planning and leadership were experienced and practiced within family-owned construction businesses. The study employed a case study strategy, bounded by the construction industry, family ownership, and the geographical context of Gauteng Province, South Africa. The study therefore focused specifically on family-owned construction businesses operating in Gauteng rather than on construction businesses generally.

The study adopted a cross-sectional time frame because data were collected during a defined period rather than through repeated observations over an extended period. Semi-structured interviews were the principal data-collection method, allowing participants to provide detailed accounts of strategic planning practices, leadership approaches, leadership continuity, and factors influencing business success. The design was appropriate because it enabled the researchers to explore the experiences and perceptions of individuals directly involved in managing and leading family-owned construction businesses.

3.2. Population of the Study

The sample comprised entrepreneurs and managers in family-owned construction companies in Gauteng Province. The subjects were chosen because they are directly engaged in running businesses, making decisions, and leading. Their background and experience were used to gather information about how these companies use strategic management and leadership skills in their operations and how these influence performance, sustainability, competitiveness, and continuity. In this research, a family-owned construction company means a firm controlled and/or managed by members of the same family, with operations conducted to retain family ownership and management. This definition helped to ensure that the subjects being interviewed were people whose participation in management and ownership is crucial. The subjects needed to know the basics of strategic planning and leadership; those without proper knowledge were excluded from the cohort. Therefore, the necessary characteristics of the respondents included their role in the company, experience, and relationship to the family-run organization.

3.3. Data Gathering Methods

The researchers collected qualitative data using semi-structured interviews. This method allowed researchers to ask a consistent set of questions while still enabling them to explore important issues that arose during interviews. Specific topics covered during interviews included strategic planning, leadership techniques, leadership training, succession planning, and reasons contributing to the success and sustainability of family-owned construction companies. Interviews were conducted in person and online via Zoom to include all participants in data collection. The interview format allowed participants to convey their opinions and understanding in their own words, enabling a thorough evaluation of the qualitative data in line with the research aims. Participant consent granted access to video and audio recordings of the interviews, enabling transcription after the interviews.

3.4. Sampling Method and Sample Size

The purposive sampling method was used to select individuals with considerable knowledge and experience in strategic planning and management in family businesses in the construction sector. This method was appropriate because the research required individuals directly involved in their organizations' decision-making processes to provide the information needed to address the research questions. In the second stage of

sampling, the researchers used snowball sampling. Individuals already consulted were asked to provide contact details of others who met the criteria for participation in the research. Prospective participants had to meet the requirements for involvement in family companies, the construction sector, and knowledge of strategic planning and management. The research involved 30 participants from family businesses related to the construction sector in Gauteng province. The total number of participants is guided by the adequacy of the sampled data. The researchers ensured saturation during data collection. The scholars assessed whether subsequent interviews provided new codes, perspectives, and information related to the research questions. Data collection was considered sufficient when successive interviews substantially repeated previously identified information and no meaningful new themes emerged.

3.5. Data Analysis

The current analysis of interview data used thematic analysis in NVivo. The analysis was conducted systematically to organize, code, and interpret participants' accounts. In the first stage, the researchers converted the interview recordings into transcripts. The researchers then read through the interviews multiple times to identify the issues contained in the data. In the next stage, the researchers applied initial coding. At this stage, the researchers defined and labeled statements and parts of interviews related to issues such as strategic planning, leadership, business success, and other experiences. Next, the researchers compared codes with similar meanings to identify broader categories that included several related codes. Next, the researchers analyzed the categories and developed preliminary themes. The researchers reviewed each emerging theme to ensure it was supported by participants' accounts and aligned with the research questions. If a theme was not supported, it was refined or modified as needed.

In conclusion, the themes were assigned specific meanings, and their implications were identified in line with the research objectives and the theory under consideration. The key section of the analysis focused on strategic planning and leadership, while succession planning and mentoring were interpreted within the framework of leadership continuity. The research also included factors that preliminarily influence the implementation of strategic planning and leadership: family conflicts, computing governance, financial situations, technological changes, and a lack of necessary skills. NVivo software facilitated data analysis by systematizing interviews, coding, retrieving materials, and understanding the relationships between codes and categories. The software simplified the analytical process, but interpreting the results remained the researchers' responsibility.

3.6. Ethical Issues

The University of Johannesburg ethics committee approved the study before data collection began. Respondents were informed about the study details and procedures so they could consent to participate.

4. Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of interviews conducted with 30 participants from family-owned construction businesses in Gauteng Province identified nine key themes relating to strategic planning. The frequencies reported below represent the number of participants whose interview responses referenced the respective themes and should therefore be interpreted as coding frequencies rather than statistical prevalence. The most frequently identified theme was family members' involvement in strategic planning, mentioned by 24 of the 30 participants. This was followed by informal strategic planning, mentioned by

21 participants. 18 participants identified clear vision and mission statements, while 19 discussed the impact of strategic planning on daily operations. 17 participants mentioned considering long-term sustainability. However, only 15 participants referred to formalized strategic planning documentation, while 13 participants mentioned training and capacity building as part of their planning processes.

Table 1. Summary of Thematic Analysis

Themes Identified	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Respondents Mentioning Theme (%)
Clear Vision and Mission Statements	18	60%
Formal vs Informal Strategic Planning	21	70%
Involvement of Family Members in Strategic Planning	24	80%
Lack of Documentation and Formalization	15	50%
Long-term Sustainability Considerations in Strategic Planning	17	57%
Impact of Strategic Planning on Daily Operations	19	63%
Adaptation to Changing Market Conditions	16	53%
Resource Allocation and Financial Planning	14	47%
Training and Capacity Building through Strategic Planning	13	43%

Source: Author's own elaboration

The thematic analysis of the interviews identified four leadership styles among the participating family-owned construction businesses. Participants perceived transformational leadership as particularly supportive of employee engagement, innovation, and business development, with 15 references across the interview data. Democratic leadership followed with 12 references, while autocratic leadership was identified in 8 references and laissez-faire leadership in 5 references. These frequencies represent the number of coded references to each leadership style and are not statistical measures of prevalence across the wider population of family-owned construction businesses. Succession planning also emerged as an important dimension of leadership continuity and business sustainability. Mentorship and training constituted the most frequently coded succession-related theme, with 16 references. Succession preparedness appeared in 14 references, indicating the importance of preparing potential successors for future leadership responsibilities. Formal succession planning appeared in 10 references, suggesting that some participating businesses attempted to establish systematic mechanisms for leadership transition. However, 7 references identified family-related conflicts associated with succession, indicating that intergenerational and family relationship issues remained a challenge for leadership continuity. The analysis further indicated that leadership and strategic decision-making were associated with business competitiveness and stability. Participants identified strategic decision-making as an important theme in their accounts of competitive advantage and business success. Business stability was mentioned in 9 references, while leadership style and employee retention were identified in 11 references. These findings indicate that participants linked effective leadership and strategic decision-making to family-owned construction businesses' ability to maintain employee commitment, organizational stability, and competitiveness.

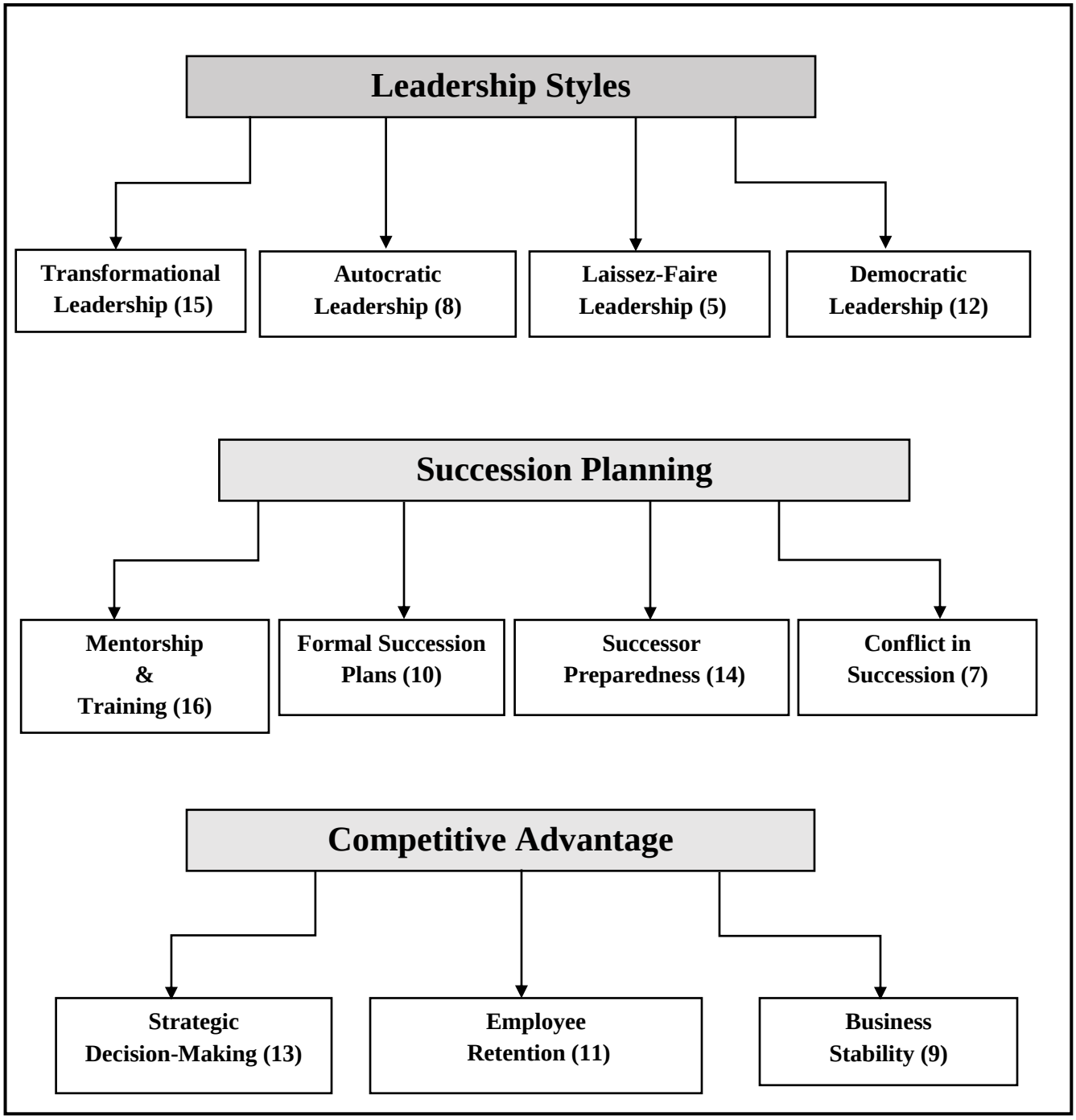


Figure.2.Thematic Map: Leadership Styles, Succession Planning, and Competitive Advantage
Source: Author's own elaboration

According to the findings, strategic planning is a crucial part of the experiences and practices expressed by participants in family-owned construction firms in the province of Gauteng. Family engagement in strategic planning emerged as the most mentioned aspect of planning, with 24 of the 30 participants saying family members participated in the process. This suggests that strategic direction is directly linked to family relationships, knowledge, and decision-making in the firms that took part in the research. Although family involvement in the planning process may help transfer useful experiences and maintain continuity, it can also create problems because families may stick to traditions and ways of doing business, or be biased when making business decisions. In this context, Cherchem (2017) noted that family involvement in business strategy can add to

continuity as much as it can create challenges because of resistance to changing traditions and bias.

Informal planning also emerged as evident, as 21 people described planning practices that are not structured or documented. This finding suggests that strategic decisions in many participating businesses may be influenced by experience, personal judgement, and knowledge accumulated within the family rather than by formally documented planning processes. Informal planning can enhance flexibility and allow family businesses to react promptly to changes in their environment. Nevertheless, it can hinder consistency in strategic goals and affect how individuals set them. One possible explanation is the transfer of tacit knowledge from one generation to the next, with family businesses potentially engaging in experience-based knowledge transfer through participation rather than formalized planning (Guibrunet, 2021). The presence of mission and vision statements identified by 18 respondents shows that the family businesses in the study had some level of formal strategy, a significant finding because it highlights that some businesses adopt general statements about their strategy even when their overall strategy is informal. While Astrachan et al. (2020) show that strategic direction is vital for family enterprises, they also highlight a crucial distinction between strategic intent and well-formulated formal strategies. Specifically, although 18 respondents claimed to have mission or vision statements, only 15 could support their claims with relevant documentation, suggesting that strategic intent may exist even without formalized strategizing processes.

The results also revealed the relationship between strategic planning and the way participants perceive their daily operations and long-term sustainability. Specifically, participants acknowledged the significance of strategic planning for both immediate decision-making and their businesses' ability to survive in the long run. Nineteen informants mentioned strategic planning's contribution to their everyday operations, while 17 referred to its influence on the long-term sustainability of their business endeavors. However, the lower emphasis on long-term sustainability suggests that immediate operational needs may eventually overshadow long-term sustainability requirements. Training and capacity building were mentioned by 13 participants, making them less prominent than family involvement, informal planning, and operational strategic direction. Rather than interpreting this finding as evidence of a specific skills deficiency, it suggests that participants did not consistently incorporate formal capability development into the strategic planning practices they described. This matters because strategic plans require appropriate organizational capabilities for implementation. The finding therefore points to a connection between strategic planning and capability development: planning sets organizational priorities. In contrast, training and development can provide the knowledge and skills needed to translate those priorities into practice.

The leadership findings further strengthen this relationship between strategic direction and implementation. Transformational leadership was the most frequently coded leadership approach, with 15 references, followed by democratic leadership with 12 references. Autocratic leadership was identified in 8 references, while laissez-faire leadership appeared in 5 references. These findings should be interpreted as patterns within participants' accounts rather than as evidence that transformational leadership is objectively more effective than other leadership styles. Participants particularly associated transformational leadership with employee engagement, innovation and business development. This perception aligns with previous research highlighting

transformational leadership's contribution to employee motivation, creativity, and business development (Hadi et al., 2019).

The prominence of democratic leadership also suggests that participants recognized the value of inclusive, participatory decision-making. This approach may be particularly relevant in family-owned construction businesses, where strategic decisions affect both family members and non-family employees. By encouraging participation and communication, leadership can help translate strategic priorities into shared organizational objectives. In contrast, the lower frequency of autocratic and laissez-faire leadership references does not establish that these approaches are ineffective; rather, it indicates that they were less prominent in the accounts provided by participants. Ametefe et al. (2025) similarly suggest that although autocratic leadership may be useful in particular circumstances, excessive reliance on it can restrict employee involvement and creativity.

The findings concerning succession planning provide an important mechanism through which leadership can contribute to organizational continuity. Mentorship and training were the most frequently coded succession-related theme, with 16 references, while successor preparedness appeared in 14 references. These findings suggest that participants viewed preparing future leaders as an important part of maintaining family business continuity. Mentorship provides a way for experienced leaders to transfer knowledge and organizational values, while training can help prospective successors develop the capabilities needed to assume greater responsibility. Succession planning therefore connects current leadership practices with the business's future leadership capacity. Formal succession planning appeared in 10 references, suggesting that some businesses have developed more systematic approaches to leadership transition. However, the lower frequency of formal succession planning compared with mentorship, training, and successor preparedness suggests that leadership development may occur more informally than through documented succession systems. Family-related conflict was also identified in 7 references, indicating that leadership transition can involve relational as well as organizational challenges. Gavric and Brajes (2024) emphasize the importance of succession planning in reducing disruption and addressing both technical and interpersonal challenges associated with family business succession. The present findings similarly suggest that leadership continuity depends not only on identifying potential successors but also on preparing them and managing the relationships involved in the transition process.

The findings on competitiveness further demonstrate the connection between strategic planning and leadership. Strategic decision-making was identified as an important factor associated with maintaining competitive position, while business stability was mentioned in 9 references. These findings suggest that participants viewed the ability to make appropriate strategic decisions as important for responding to changing conditions in the construction sector. Strategic planning can provide a framework for anticipating challenges and establishing priorities, but leadership is required to interpret changing circumstances, make decisions, and mobilize employees around those decisions. Thus, the findings point to an interaction between planning and leadership rather than treating them as independent contributors to business success. Employee retention, identified in 11 references, further indicates how participants connected leadership with business continuity. Participants linked leadership practices to employee motivation and retention, which is particularly relevant to construction businesses that depend on experienced, skilled personnel. Chitranshi and Chopra (2024) similarly support the importance of

leadership approaches that consider employee well-being in promoting long-term business success. Within the present study, however, employee retention should be understood as a participant-reported dimension of perceived business success rather than as an objectively measured performance outcome.

The findings provide an analytical explanation of how strategic planning and leadership may operate together within family-owned construction businesses. Strategic planning provides direction by establishing priorities, identifying organizational goals, and supporting responses to changing conditions. Leadership provides the mechanism through which this direction is communicated, implemented, and translated into collective action. Leadership development through mentorship and training further strengthens the capabilities required to implement strategic priorities, while succession preparation supports the transfer of these capabilities across generations. Through these interconnected processes, participants perceived strategic planning and leadership as contributing to operational performance, competitiveness, sustainability and continuity. The findings therefore extend beyond the simple observation that strategic planning and leadership are important to family-owned construction businesses. They suggest that their value lies partly in how they interact. Strategic planning without appropriate leadership may not be implemented effectively, while leadership without strategic direction may lead to reactive or fragmented decision-making. Similarly, strategic direction may not be sustained across generations without deliberate development and preparation of future leaders. The central contribution of the findings is therefore identifying an interconnected process in which strategic planning establishes direction, leadership facilitates implementation, capability development strengthens organizational capacity, and succession preparation supports continuity.

These findings should nevertheless be interpreted within the limits of the qualitative case-study design. The study captures participants' perceptions, experiences, and reported practices and does not objectively measure organizational performance or establish causal relationships between particular leadership styles, planning practices, and business outcomes. Consequently, the finding that transformational leadership was the most frequently discussed leadership approach should not be interpreted as proof that it was the most effective leadership style. Rather, participants' accounts suggest that they perceived transformational leadership as particularly supportive of employee engagement, innovation and business development. Similarly, the relationships identified between strategic planning, leadership and business success represent patterns and interpretations emerging from the interview data rather than statistically demonstrated causal effects.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that strategic planning and leadership were important features of the experiences and practices reported by participants in family-owned construction businesses in Gauteng Province. Strategic planning provided direction for business activities, while leadership was perceived as important in translating strategic priorities into organizational action. Transformational leadership was the most frequently discussed leadership approach, with participants associating it with employee motivation, innovation, and business development. However, this finding reflects participant perceptions rather than objective evidence that transformational leadership was more effective than other leadership styles. The findings further indicate that leadership continuity was closely associated with mentorship, training and successor preparedness. These practices were perceived as important for transferring knowledge and leadership

capabilities across generations. Although some businesses had formal succession arrangements, family-related challenges and limited formalisation remained barriers to continuity. Overall, the findings suggest that the interaction between strategic planning, leadership development and succession preparation may support the continuity and sustainability of family-owned construction businesses.

5.1. Recommendation

In their strategic planning processes, family-owned construction companies should combine the flexibility of family knowledge with better documentation of organizational goals, priorities, and long-term vision. They should be more committed to developing leadership through adequate training, mentoring, and succession preparation. It is crucial to ensure succession planning happens early enough for leadership processes and knowledge transfer to be smooth. If family disputes prevent leadership transitions, companies should focus on structured communication and conflict-resolution measures to ensure they continue operating.

5.2. Contribution of the Study

The study contributes context-specific qualitative insight into how strategic planning and leadership are experienced and interconnected within family-owned construction businesses in Gauteng Province. The findings suggest that strategic planning provides organizational direction, while leadership facilitates implementation, and leadership development and succession preparation support the continuity of organizational capabilities across generations. The study therefore highlights the importance of considering strategic planning and leadership together when examining continuity and sustainability in family-owned construction businesses, without claiming statistical or causal generalization beyond the study context.

Author Contributions

Victoria Oluwafunmilayo Adekomaya conducted the full research from introduction to conclusion and addressed the reviewers' comments.

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Conflicts of Interest

No conflict of interest

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