

**Family Firm Succession as Career Option of Siblings in Swiss Entrepreneurial
Families – Insights based on the Family Niche Model and Sibling Research**

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Zusammenfassung – Executive Summary in German

Basierend auf Forschungskonzepten aus der Geschwisterforschung und primär basierend auf der Familiennischenforschung von Frank J. Sulloway, wird in dieser Dissertation die interne Nachfolge in schweizerischen Familienunternehmen untersucht. Diesbezüglich liegt der Fokus auf Unternehmerfamilien mit mehreren Kindern als potentielle Nachfolger. Basierend auf der Grundannahme, dass Geschwister innerhalb der Familie um die verfügbaren und begrenzten Ressourcen konkurrieren und daher individuelle Strategien entwickeln um sich voneinander zu differenzieren, betrachtet Sulloway insbesondere die Möglichkeiten der Nischenwahl und/oder der Nischenbildung von spätergeborenen Geschwistern. Gemäss Sulloway ist die Wahl einer Nische bei Spätergeborenen davon geprägt, eine Konkurrenzsituation mit frühergeborenen Geschwistern – die während der Kindheit und Jugend durch ihren früheren Geburtsrangplatz als körperlich überlegen und erfahrener einzustufen sind – zu vermeiden.

Übertragen auf den Kontext der Nachfolgeregelung in Familienunternehmen wurden in dieser Studie die Karriereentscheidungen der Nachkommen hinsichtlich der internen Nachfolge als Nischenwahl im beruflichen Kontext betrachtet. In diesem Zusammenhang war der Vergleich der Karriereentscheidungen von frühergeborenen und spätergeborenen Geschwisterkindern ein zentraler Aspekt dieser Studie. Um die interne Nachfolge in Familienunternehmen in Bezug auf ausgewählte Konzepte der Geschwisterforschung zu untersuchen, wurde eine empirische Studie mit neun Fallstudien, bestehend aus zwölf teilstrukturierten Intensivinterviews mit Nachfolgern und Nichtnachfolgern, durchgeführt und die erhobenen Daten mithilfe einer qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse ausgewertet. Ziel der Arbeit war es, die Forschungsfragen zu beantworten und darauf aufbauend ein Modell zu generieren und Hypothesen zu entwickeln. Die zentralen Forschungsfragen lauten wie folgt: (1) Wie beeinflusst – unter Zugrundelegung von Konzepten der Geschwisterforschung – die Geschwisterreihe in Unternehmerfamilien die Nachfolge in Familienunternehmen? (2) Wie beeinflussen sich – unter Zugrundelegung von Konzepten der Geschwisterforschung – Geschwister in Unternehmerfamilien hinsichtlich der Nachfolge in Familienunternehmen?

Zusammengefasst dargestellt, ergab die Datenanalyse dass (1) die Konzepte der Geschwister-Identifikation und De-Identifikation auf die Karriereentscheidungen der Nachkommen übertragbar sind, wobei durch die Wahl verschiedener Berufe bewusst oder unbewusst eine Konkurrenzsituation vermieden wurde, (2) Identifikation mit den Eltern wurde häufiger gefunden als De-Identifikation mit den Eltern, wobei jedoch kein eindeutiger Zusammenhang zwischen der Identifikation mit den Eltern und der

Karrierewahl der Nachkommen festgestellt werden konnte, und (3) innerfamiliäre Nischen wurden auf verschiedene Weise in den Unternehmenskontext übertragen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass insbesondere Sulloway's Hypothesen bezüglich der Karriere-strategien von Forschern in den Kontext der Nachfolge in Familienunternehmen übertragen werden können. Diese adaptierten Hypothesen lauten wie folgt: (1) Wenn Du Spätgeborener bist, setze auf Entwicklungsvielfalt. (2) Wenn die firmeneigenen Ressourcen begrenzt sind, setze auf Entwicklungsvielfalt. (3) Deine Entwicklungsviel-falt sollte im Verhältnis zur Anzahl Deiner Geschwister stehen. (4) Unter bestimmten Umständen lasse die vorherigen drei Regeln ausser Acht und spezialisiere Dich. Aufbauend auf den Ergebnissen der Forschungsfragen und in Kombination mit den adaptierten Hypothesen wurde das Nachfolge-Nischenmodell entwickelt um das untersuchte Phänomen abschliessend darzustellen.

Executive Summary

Based on sibling research concepts, and primarily based on the research on family niches by Frank J. Sulloway, this dissertation examines internal succession in Swiss family firms. In this context, the focus is set on entrepreneurial families with multiple children as potential successors. Having regard to the basic assumption that siblings within the same family compete with each other for the available and limited resources and therefore develop individual strategies to differentiate from each other, Sulloway particularly researches the opportunity of niche selection and/or niche creation of laterborn siblings. According to Sulloway, laterborns' choice of a niche is characterised by the attempt to avoid a competitive situation with one or several earlierborn sibling(s), since due to the earlier birth order position, the earlierborn(s) can be expected to be physically superior and more experienced during their childhood and youth.

Transferred into the family firm succession context, the career choices regarding internal succession were regarded as an offspring's niche selection within the professional context. In this respect, the comparison between the career choice of earlierborns and laterborns was a central aspect of this study. To research family firm succession in relation to selected sibling research concepts, an empirical research study consisting of nine cases and in summary twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews with successors and non-successors was conducted whereby the data were analysed by means of a qualitative content analysis. The overall aim of this study was first, to answer the research questions and to thereupon generate theory and develop hypotheses. The general research questions were defined as follows: (1) How do sibships in entrepreneurial families, within the scope of sibling research, influence succession in family firms? (2) How do siblings in entrepreneurial families influence each other regarding succession in family firms – considering the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing?

In summary, the analyses revealed that (1) the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification are transferrable into the family firm succession context, whereby due to the choice of different professions wittingly or unwittingly competition can be avoided, (2) parent identification as well as parent deidentification were found between the successor and the predecessor, however, no distinct cross-case evidence as to a causal relationship between parent identification and the career choice of succession in the family firm could be confirmed, and (3) based on Sulloway's

Family Niche Model, inner-family niches are transferable into the family firm succession context in several ways.

The research findings show that particularly Sulloway's four rules as to career strategies of scientists can be transferred into the family firm succession context. In consequence, the developed hypotheses as to family firm succession are as follows: (1) If you are laterborn, diversify. (2) If the family firm has limited resources, diversify. (3) Diversify in proportion to the number of your siblings. (4) Under certain circumstances, disregard the previous three hypotheses and specialise. Based on the answers to the research questions and in combination with the developed hypotheses, the Succession Niche Model was generated to conclusively illustrate the research findings.

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List of Abbreviations

acc. to	according to
aka	also known as
Case1IP1	Case 1 Interview Partner 1
Case1IP2	Case 1 Interview Partner 2
Case2IP1	Case 2 Interview Partner 1
Case3IP1	Case 3 Interview Partner 1
Case4IP1	Case 4 Interview Partner 1
Case5IP1	Case 5 Interview Partner 1
Case5IP2	Case 5 Interview Partner 2
Case6IP1	Case 6 Interview Partner 1
Case7IP1	Case 7 Interview Partner 1
Case7IP2	Case 7 Interview Partner 2
Case8IP1	Case 8 Interview Partner 1
Case9IP1	Case 9 Interview Partner 1
CEO	chief executive officer
cf.	Latin: confer, engl.: compare
cont'd	continued
DACH	Germany (D), Austria (A), and Switzerland (CH)
doi	digital object identifier
e.g.	Latin: <i>exempli gratia</i> ; English: for example
Ed. (Eds.)	editor (editors)
ed.	edition
etc.	Latin: <i>et cetera</i> ; English: and so forth
EUR	Euro
f	female
FBO	family buy-out
fn.	footnote
FNM	Family Niche Model
GRQ	General Research Question
GUESSS	Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey
HR	human resources
HSG	University of St. Gallen (HSG)
i.e.	Latin: <i>id est</i> ; English: that is
m	male
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MBI	management buy-in

List of Abbreviations (cont'd)

MBO	management buy-out
n.d.	no date
p. (pp.)	page (pages)
para. (paras.)	paragraph (paragraphs)
PBD	president of the board of directors
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
QCA	qualitative content analysis
RFH	Rheinische Fachhochschule Cologne
SFSO	Swiss Federal Statistical Office
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
SRQ	Specific Research Question
WIFU	Witten Institute for Family Business

1 Introduction

Succession management in family firms is essential and necessary to secure the continuity of the business. The importance of succession management becomes evident, when considering that worldwide, about 60 to 90% of all firms are assumed to be family firms (Christen et al., 2013, p. 24). Consequently, family firm succession management not only contributes to the continuity of the firms themselves, but to the continuity of the economy and society as a whole. According to O'Hara and Mandel (2003, p. 1), the oldest family firm still in operation is *Kongō Gumi*, a Japanese temple-building and restoration company that was founded in 578.¹ The oldest European family firm is the castle *Château de Goulaine* in France, founded in 1000, whereas the oldest family firm in Switzerland is *Fonjallaz* (O'Hara & Mandel, 2003, pp. 2, 4). Both companies operate in the winegrowing business; however, the Swiss family firm was founded only in 1552 and is currently operated by the 13th generation.² The longevity of these companies is even more remarkable in the light of oft-cited research by Ward (2011, pp. 1–2), which reports a survival rate of 30% for family firms transferred from the 1st to the 2nd generation, 13% for those transferred from the 2nd to the 3rd generation, and reports that only 3% survive beyond the 3rd generation. Zellweger, Nason, and Nordqvist (2012, p. 8) refer to this study and note an entrepreneurial family's control in its core company (i.e., if the family runs multiple companies) with a mean age of 60.2 years and the 2.8th generation being in control of the company management.

As these examples illustrate, succession management and thereby the need to choose an adequate successor, particularly for the company management, is self-evident. This leads to the questions of *how* to choose the successor and *whom* to choose, if more than one potential successor (i.e., within the context of this study, children in the entrepreneurial family) is available. This study explicitly targets this problem by combining hitherto unrelated topics. In general, the study is located in the research area of strategic management, namely succession management in family firms, and in particular studies the Swiss family firm environment.

¹ *Kongō Gumi* later diversified its business by adding the operation of constructing apartment buildings and offices (O'Hara, 2004, p. 2). However, *Kongō Gumi* always concentrated on their core business and intended neither to expand internationally nor to take over other companies ("Familienunternehmen", 2004). Except once, the entrepreneurial family always chose the successor based on the sons' talent and not based on the birth order position; and for 40 generations, the company was able to flexibly react to changing business conditions (Willacy, 2011). However, after the company went into liquidation in 2006 ("Kongo Gumi", 2006), *Kongō Gumi* became a wholly-owned subsidiary of the *Takamatsu Construction Group* (Pilling, 2007, para. 2).

² "Das älteste Unternehmen der Schweiz", 2004.

1.1 Problem Statement

Research by Christen et al. (2013, p. 28) revealed that about 40% of Swiss small and medium-sized enterprises are handed over in the context of a family buy-out³, 40% in the context of a management buy-in, and 20% via a management buy-out.⁴ Furthermore, the same study reports that a family buy-out is still the most preferred solution for succession and almost half of the Swiss entrepreneurs intend to hand over the family firm to a family member (Christen et al., 2013, pp. 5, 26). However, although about 90% of Swiss entrepreneurs encourage their children to become entrepreneurs themselves, 23% of the children are unwilling to take over the family firm (Christen et al., 2013, p. 27). The offspring's unwillingness to take over the family firm is thereby the most common reason to refuse succession.

Nevertheless, the family firm could represent the nearest opportunity to realise a desire for entrepreneurial activities. This fact is of further importance, when considering that the pre-study interviews for this study revealed that students having an entrepreneurial background generally stated positive intentions towards an entrepreneurial activity in their future career. Since an entry into the family firm is assumed to provide a secure job position as well as a secure work environment – in which the offspring is expected to have access to more information compared to when working as an external and freshman in another company – it is supposed to provide an attractive start into business life. In this context, from being confronted with the family firm, an offspring might have obtained an advantage in knowledge that might facilitate the career start – however, depending on the level of involvement in the family firm and the degree to which family firm matters were discussed within the family environment. Therewith related, research by Sieger, Baldegger, and Fueglistaller (2014a, p. 22) showed that an offspring's social environment is important to develop an entrepreneurial intention and that the parents play a central role during this stage. Nonetheless, by starting a career in the family firm, an offspring might be able to transform already existing knowledge about the family firm and the family firm's industry into an advantage in his/her professional life. Accordingly, the family firm could represent (1) a good learning environment, (2) a place to test if this entrepreneurial intention is worth pursuing in the future, and (3) a rather secure job entry, needless to say only if crucial requirements are fulfilled.

³ Family buy-out stands for the sale of the family firm to one or multiple family members (Christen et al., 2013, p. 26, fn. 20).

⁴ Based on full-time equivalents, Swiss SMEs account for 99.8% of all Swiss enterprises (based on data provided by the SFSO, 2014a).

In this respect, it has to be considered that offspring that refuse to take over the family firm are not necessarily at the beginning of their career, but can also have already gained experience inside or outside the family firm. In addition, it is imaginable that the family firm is regarded as a back-up solution for the offspring. On a related note, it has to be pointed out, that in a global comparison, the reasons for succession as well as the career opportunities vary. Whereas in some countries a career start in the family firm is regarded as a steppingstone in case later on an even more attractive job opportunity appears, students in Switzerland have several job opportunities after completing their studies and in consequence intend to start their career outside the family firm before eventually entering it at a future date (EY, 2012, para. 6). However, a family firm's attractiveness also depends on its core characteristics and in this context, offspring are more willing to succeed if the family firm is flourishing and is rather a big company (EY, 2012, para. 10; see Zellweger & Sieger, 2012).

Relatedly, the *Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey* (GUESSS) generally studies students' career choice intentions and entrepreneurial intentions in particular.⁵ Regarding students' entrepreneurial intentions five years after having completed their studies, the study revealed that globally, 42.5% of those students having entrepreneurial parents intend to pursue an entrepreneurial career themselves – either as founder (34.7%) or as successor (7.8%) in the family firm or another company (Sieger, Fueglistaller, & Zellweger, 2014b, p. 31). Focusing on students in Switzerland, the survey revealed only 1.1% of the students with an entrepreneurial background intend succession right after graduation, whereas 6.5% of the students intend succession in the family firm or in another company five years after having completed their studies (Sieger et al., 2014a, pp. 22–23).⁶ Accordingly, in a future outlook, students perceive the career option of succession as being more attractive five years after having completed their studies and after having gained experience than directly after graduation. Therefrom follows as well, that regarding five years after graduation, the succession intention of students in Switzerland having an entrepreneurial background is below the international reference level.

⁵ The GUESSS online survey was conducted at more than 700 universities in 34 countries whereby the respondents' mean age is 23.1 years (median = 22 years), 58.4% of the respondents are female, and with survey respondents having 1.6 siblings on average. The dataset comprised 109,000 complete responses. (Sieger et al., 2014b, pp. 5, 10)

⁶ The sample revealed the students' entrepreneurial background in Switzerland as follows: 13.3% of the students reported that their father is entrepreneurially active, 1.6% reported that their mother is entrepreneurially active, and 5.9% of the students reported that both parents pursue an entrepreneurial activity (Sieger et al., 2014a, p. 22), which results in 21.8% of the students having an entrepreneurial background. In this context, entrepreneurial activity refers to either working self-employed or being a majority shareholder in a privately held company. The study further revealed that most of the potential successors were students of economic sciences or law students (Sieger et al., 2014a, pp. 14–15).

The second major concern in this context is the nomination of the successor, if more than one offspring are potential successors. In this respect, it is relevant to understand the criteria by which the successor(s) is/are selected. Central questions in this context are for instance: Does birth order even today play a major role or only a minor one? How are gender and educational attainment considered these days? In addition, if more than one offspring is able and willing to take over the company, it is essential to understand why or why not siblings take over the family firm together. In the pre-study interviews, two examples were found in which the oldest child only took over or would have been willing to take over the company as single owner/manager. These interview partners warranted their stance by their request for full responsibility and the full power of decision for the business on their own. In this context it has to be pointed out that it was not the interviewees' intention to exclude their sibling(s) from internal succession based on spite, but due to their desire for being solely responsible.

Regarding family firm succession, such decisions not only determine the successors' professional career, but inevitably also the non-successors' career (i.e., his or her sibling's/siblings' future position(s) inside the family firm). Hence, it is important to mention, that the first offspring that has to decide in terms of succession has a kind of a first-mover advantage, since it can freely choose his or her position within the family firm and is assumed almost not to be affected by the career decisions of its usually younger siblings. This exceptional position which constitutes a competitive advantage towards the laterborn children results from the age gap between the siblings. If the children develop equally, the firstborn will still keep this advantage at the time of the decision regarding succession in the family firm. If a laterborn sibling decides to enter the family firm as well, the firstborn could have already gained respect and reputation from parents, employees, customers, suppliers and so forth; in short, on all levels and across all fields of business activity. Under normal circumstances, the one single situation of direct competition between siblings would arise if the siblings entered the family firm at the same time. In general, a laterborn is assumed to be favoured in contrast to its elder sibling(s) in two distinct situations, namely (1) through a better professional education or talent, or (2) if the age gap between the laterborn and the father or mother in charge of management would facilitate succession. In case of the latter, the age gap could favour the laterborn since the laterborn's entry in the family firm could match with the time of retirement of the parent(s), especially if the age gap between the siblings is rather big.⁷ In addition, the parents have to decide who will take over the family firm, which potentially implies choosing among the children if

⁷ Evidence for this reasoning was found in the pre-study interviews.

more than one offspring intends to enter the family firm, and at the same time avoid disagreements within the family as well as rivalry among the siblings.

Disagreements among siblings can cause major difficulties for the company. Examples on this are manifold, such as the different approaches to leading the company between the Dassler brothers (Smit, 2010). After having divided the company, Adolf (Adi) Dassler successfully founded *Adidas*, whereas Rudolf Dassler founded *Puma*. Both brothers became successful manufacturers of sporting goods, sportswear, and casual wear. An example in which a family firm was divided in a friendly way into two separate companies represents *Aldi* (Brück, 2008). The company was geographically divided into *Aldi Süd* and *Aldi Nord*. It is impossible to say, if these companies were even more, equally, or less successful without the split of the sibling partnership. Another example of a successful sibling partnership is the *Benetton* family in which four siblings successfully worked together – each of them having his/her own area of responsibility (Mantle, 1999). This example demonstrates one possibility of allocating the roles within a family firm based on talent. If each sibling obtains his/her field of responsibility and activity, each of them has the opportunity to develop and bring in his/her personal capabilities and thereby create an even stronger management team that is built on the family bond. Furthermore, it has to be considered that even if only one child takes over a management position within the family firm, his/her sibling(s) can still become an inactive business partner and thus influence business decisions even though he/she/they may not be involved in the daily business.

Resulting from these critical remarks, the central arguments of this study can be summarised as follows: Siblings in entrepreneurial families (perceived as multiple potential successors for the family firm) influence family firm succession in three ways, which are in regard to (1) the job allocation within the family firm if more than one offspring intends to enter the family firm, (2) a mutual career-related influence of the siblings in terms of career options as well as career choices towards succession in the family firm, and (3) the variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing. It is assumed that succession management in entrepreneurial families might be improved by finding out if people involved in succession management support these arguments. The central claim for these arguments is initially based on evidence obtained in the pre-study interviews (see Chapter 2) and the literature review in the relevant fields, namely family firm succession research and sibling research (see Chapter 3). As these central arguments imply, the study needs to conduct family firm succession research in combination with sibling research.

Regarding the central arguments, it is important to understand how a career decision under the respective circumstances is being made and how an offspring might find his/her place within the family firm. Accordingly, the study primarily focuses on identifying how one or multiple offspring find or might find their niche within the family firm. This leads to the Family Niche Model by Sulloway as general underlying reference concept and in particular leads to the study of Sulloway's findings regarding career strategies within the new research context of family firm succession. According to Sulloway, each sibling strives for his/her niche within the family (Sulloway, 1996, pp. 83–118). Therefrom follows, that the firstborn has the free choice, since no older sibling is occupying a niche. By implication, the secondborn has to choose between competing for the niche the firstborn has already occupied or choosing an unoccupied niche and thereby avoiding competition for the same niche. Sulloway (pp. 83–86) grounds his argumentation on Darwinian theory and attributes the siblings' search for an individual niche to the competition for parental resources. It follows from the foregoing, that the later a child is born, the less free choices that child has since fewer niches are available – assuming that not all earlierborn children compete for the same niche. In this regard, Sulloway (pp. 105–112) discusses openness and diversification with regard to career strategies of leading figures in science⁸ and summarises his findings in the following rules: (1) If laterborn, diversify. (2) When parental resources are scarce, diversify. (3) Diversify in large sibships. (4) Whenever expedient, disregard Rules 1–3 and specialise. With regard to the family firm succession context and based on selected sibling research concepts, these rules are studied as to career options and career choices of earlierborn siblings and laterborn siblings. Therefore, this research studies if specifically firstborn children do have the presumed first-mover advantage also within the family firm succession context and if so, this research questions how they use this potential career advantage or why they are not making use of it.

Regarding the applied sibling research concepts, it is assumed that identification or deidentification with siblings and/or identification or deidentification with parents may also lead to a career decision for or against succession in the family firm.⁹ Hence, it is studied if successors and/or non-successors identify with their sibling(s), who might

⁸ Although this study primarily tests Sulloway's career strategies in science for the research context of family firm succession, in most parts of this dissertation, the term Family Niche Model is used, since for discussing the topic comprehensively, Sulloway's full argumentation on family niches has to be taken into account.

⁹ Sulloway accounts for then existing concepts of identification and deidentification (e.g., Schachter, 1982) when developing his concept of family niches. Nonetheless, in this study identification and deidentification are studied in single research questions and separately from the research questions regarding how niches are occupied in the specific cases. This approach has been chosen, since the link to this previous research is not immediately retrievable from Sulloway's four rules regarding career strategies.

have entered the family firm or might have refused succession and based on this identification follow the same career path. With regard to parent identification and parent deidentification, it is studied if an offspring identifies with the parent(s) working in the family firm and enters the family firm as well, or if an offspring identifies with a parent not working in the company and refuses to enter the family firm. However, these decisions might be reached wittingly or unwittingly. In addition, the type of job a parent pursues might influence an offspring's future job position as well. In this context, it is conceivable that within a two-child family the son identifies with the father who leads the company and the daughter identifies with the mother who is responsible for the book keeping. With regard to succession, the son might succeed the father in the management and the daughter might follow the mother and take over her area of competence. In addition, this scenario would enable both children to enter the company with each of them having his/her own sphere or responsibility.

As well with regard to the current rather unstable economic situation, these aspects should be worth considering when deciding towards or against family firm succession. If factors that have a distinct impact on the succession decision and therewith the career of an offspring – either as single owner and/or manager or in a sibling partnership – can be identified, these could be considered to assist the offspring during the career choice stage and later on. These remarks already demonstrate the complexity and the need to study the reasons why children of entrepreneurial families refuse to take over the family firm, so as to identify factors that can make internal succession more attractive. Accordingly, to research the assumptions and to obtain supportive results for the central arguments, the study conducts case study research, based on a sample of nine cases, and thereby researches the arguments in their real-world context. For providing a comprehensive analysis, this study examines the topic from different angles, namely by the stance and experiences of successors, non-successors, one retired CEO, and other stakeholders involved. The possibility of selecting a successor by the parents is only marginally discussed as to its relevance for the research topics. As a selection implies that multiple potential successors are available, first and foremost it is important to identify the reasons for choosing succession as a career option by several offspring in order to have multiple successors and thereby having a choice. The selection thereby represents a successive step after the career decision has been made by more than one offspring. In this context, the selection process itself is not the primary focus of this study. Instead, this research primarily focuses on how sibships in entrepreneurial families influence succession and how siblings in entrepreneurial families influence each other regarding career opportunities and career choices.

1.2 Rationales, Purpose of the Study, and Research Aim

For family firms, succession management is a crucial part of its strategic management that determines the firm's as well as the family's future. Besides, several stakeholders inside and outside the firm are affected. However, the area of strategic management research as to family firms is still underrepresented (cf. e.g., Heck, Hoy, Poutziouris, & Steier, 2008, p. 327). Regarding family firm succession research, much research has been conducted and several concepts have been developed.¹⁰ Nevertheless, considerable concepts from the field of sibling research are hitherto not or insufficiently applied to enrich family firm literature by combining these research fields. This leads to this study's first rationale, which is the existing research gap that has not been closed yet. However, the rationale for this research is twofold. Since this study applies a problem-based research approach (cf. Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 279), existing problems that were identified in the pre-study interviews and which may arise when choosing the successor(s), constitute the second rationale for this research project.

With regard to the second rationale, problems in family firm succession may arise based on different reasons, for instance due to family-related or family firm-related issues. In this context, inner-family problems or differences in opinions may negatively influence succession and thereby the family firm and its continuity. By implication, it is important to understand the family system to avoid potential sources of problems. According to Sulloway's (1996) research findings regarding family niches, each offspring searches for its own niche and in the case of a laterborn offspring has thereby to decide whether to compete with earlierborn children or strive for an unoccupied niche. Based on Darwinian thinking, Sulloway reasons this behaviour with the children's attempt to increase parental investment. By choosing an unoccupied niche, siblings differentiate from each other and thereby sidestep a direct comparison. In consequence, a balanced comparison between the siblings becomes more difficult for the parents. Especially for laterborns, this differentiation strategy seems worthwhile being considered, since given that the siblings develop equally, a laterborn sibling seems to be disadvantaged to some extent due to the age gap between the siblings and the therefrom resulting less time to learn for the laterborn in comparison to the earlierborn sibling(s). Within this study, this way of thinking is transferred into the family firm succession context. Accordingly, on the assumption that all siblings follow a comparable education, it is to research if an offspring that enters the family firm first, obtains a first-mover advantage by being able to choose his/her niche earlier. An offspring that

¹⁰ E.g., Davis & Harveston (1998), Friedman (1991), Handler (1990, 1991), Steier & Miller (2010), and Wasserman (2003).

enters the family firm after a sibling already entered has – as in the family – to choose between competing for the niche the sibling already occupies or searching for an unoccupied niche. Such a delayed in time entry into the family firm, might mean that the sibling who is already involved in the family firm, could already have built up a reputation and could already have got to know the family firm. Furthermore, as in the family context, it is assumed that separate niches, represented by separate areas of responsibility within the family firm, might avoid competition among the siblings within the family firm. In addition, it is questioned if identification and/or deidentification between the siblings and/or with one or both parent(s) influence an offspring's career decision. By giving answers to these research topics, it is intended to provide substantial and original contribution to scientific knowledge. Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to apply existing concepts from sibling research¹¹, transfer them into the family firm succession context and thereupon to provide insights into family firm succession as a career option of siblings in Swiss entrepreneurial families.

The research aim can therefore be expressed as the intent to answer the research questions, to generate theory, and to develop hypotheses in order to achieve this research purpose.¹² This study therefore combines a deductive with an inductive research approach; deductive, as it uses existing theory from sibling research, and inductive, as it generates new theory primarily relevant for family firm succession research. Furthermore, it contributes to both sibling research and family firm succession research as it enlarges the scope and the frame of reference of these fields. In addition, this study applies an explanatory purpose¹³, as it seeks to understand and to explain a real life phenomenon. Following this maxim enriches family firm succession literature and sibling research literature even-handedly. This study thereby intends to contribute to the closure of the recognised research gap. In addition, in line with the problem-based research approach and thus the second rationale, the study intends to identify sources of problems in family firm succession if more than one potential successor is imaginable. Beyond, the study encompasses the development of recommendations and practicable solutions for the problems identified. This purpose is pursued with case study research, by means of qualitative interviews with stakeholders affected by succession at different levels inside and outside the companies.

¹¹ I.e., the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification, the concepts of parent identification and parent deidentification, and the concept of family niches as developed by Sulloway (1996).

¹² Instead of theory testing, theory generation provides the possibility to study social phenomena and to develop a theoretical framework or explanation that functions to place the findings in a broader explanatory context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 56).

¹³ Research purposes can either be exploratory (aka discovery), descriptive, or explanatory (see Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, pp. 10–12).

1.3 Guiding Research Questions

This project is situated in the research area of strategic management, more precisely succession management in Swiss family firms. To develop the guiding research questions and later the general as well as the specific research questions¹⁴, the study is designed following a bottom-up procedure. Within the frame of this study, the bottom-up procedure implies that first off, an introductory literature review was carried out, followed by a pre-study consisting of 15 semi-structured interviews. By use of these pre-study interviews, the introductory literature review could be enriched with first-hand information from interviewees affected by succession in diverse ways, such as students that consider succession, those affected as successors or non-successors, and experts in the specific research areas. Subsequently, the literature review was carried out anew, incorporating the results from the pre-study interviews.¹⁵ Thereupon, the research fields were narrowed down, two research topics were selected, and the guiding research questions were developed. The study's guiding research questions are as follows: (1) How do sibships in entrepreneurial families, within the scope of sibling research, influence succession in family firms? (2) How do siblings in entrepreneurial families influence each other regarding succession in family firms – considering the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing? The bottom-up procedure and thereby the way of deriving the guiding research questions is shown in Figure 1.1.

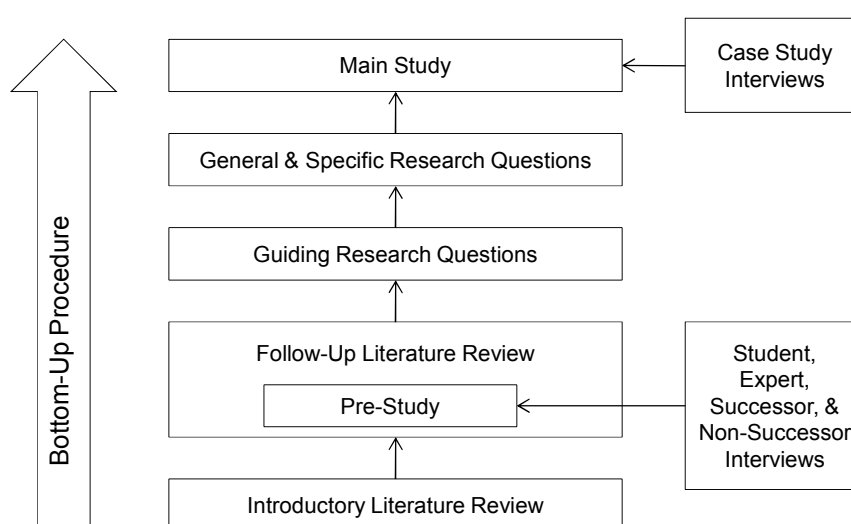


Figure 1.1. Bottom-Up Procedure

¹⁴ Punch (2014, p. 352) distinguishes research questions into general and specific research questions. For this study, the guiding research questions are the equivalents of the general research questions. The general research questions as well as the specific research questions are outlined in Section 4.1.

¹⁵ The findings of the introductory and the follow-up literature review are presented in aggregate form in Chapter 3.

The research phenomena are studied by following a case study research design, which particularly applies sibling research concepts. To be exact, the applied concepts of sibling research are the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification, parent identification and split-parent identification, and most significantly the Family Niche Model by Frank J. Sulloway (1996) as the study's theoretical foundation. The guiding research questions imply the underlying precondition that sibling research is transferable into the family firm succession context and furthermore applicable to this research study. Affirmation for this presumption as to the transferability of sibling research into the family firm succession context was found in the consulting services by Sulloway.¹⁶ Furthermore, Expert 1 in the pre-study interviews evaluated the model's adaptability as very suitable for studying family firm succession.

1.4 Relevance of the Study

Family firms are the predominant form of business enterprises worldwide (cf. Sharma, Chrisman, & Gersick, 2012, p. 5), which exemplifies their relevance for any economy. Research by Poza (2010, p. 3) revealed that family firms employ more than 75% of the working population around the world. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the share of family firms is reported to vary between 60 and 90% of all businesses worldwide (Christen et al., 2013, p. 24)¹⁷. The data referring to this varies across studies and country-specific data are not fully comparable, due to different calculation methods. However, all data studied stated a rather high share of family firms, which points out the significance of this type of business. Accordingly, family firms can be acknowledged as being relevant for any country, which is the central statement for this part and thereby underlines the significance of this research project. Regarding Switzerland, about 78% of all SMEs are categorised as family firms (Christen et al., 2013, p. 24)¹⁸. As a consequence, since Swiss SMEs account for 99.8% of Swiss enterprises (cf. Swiss Federal Statistical Office [SFSO], 2014a), it can be concluded that likewise almost 78% of all Swiss enterprises are family firms. To guarantee family firm longevity and thereby contributing to the survival of the economy, the welfare of the economy and society as a whole, as well as job security, succession management in family firms is therefore crucial. The topicality becomes

¹⁶ See www.sulloway.org/lectures.html.

¹⁷ For country-specific data see e.g., Poza (2010) for data related to the United States of America, Klein (2000) for data related to Germany and Europe, Flören (1998) for data related to the Netherlands, Welsch (1991) for data related to the United Kingdom, Germany, and Spain, and Corbetta & Montemerlo (1999) for data related to Italy and the United Kingdom.

¹⁸ Firms were categorised as family firms, if a *Substantial Family Influence* was found (Christen et al., 2013, p. 24, fn. 17).

even more apparent, when considering that within the timeframe of 2013 to 2018, 22% of Swiss SME ownerships are planned to be handed over and 25% of Swiss SME company managements are planned to be handed over (Christen et al., 2013, p. 18). The meaningfulness is further emphasised as it is assumed that in general up to 30% of companies are not transferred to the next generation and disappear (Christen et al., 2013, p. 18). With reference to succession management in family firms, the family and the business mutually influence each other. Thus, a better understanding of both the business as well as the family side contributes to the improvement of succession management and likewise to the continuity of this type of business.

The high proportion of family firms worldwide underlines the need for understanding respective factors that have an impact on the career decision towards succession. The importance of not solely focusing on the business side but also on the family side becomes more obvious, when considering that in Switzerland, about 9.8%¹⁹ of the working population is self-employed, meaning working in their own company/companies. Therefrom, by applying the definition of entrepreneurial families presented in Subsection 3.1.2, the share of entrepreneurial families in the Swiss population can be roughly estimated as being around 6.5%. These shares can be opposed to a share of 78% of family firms within the Swiss economy. Figure 1.2 depicts these relationships and thereby illustrates the powerful position of Swiss entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial families within and also for the Swiss economy.

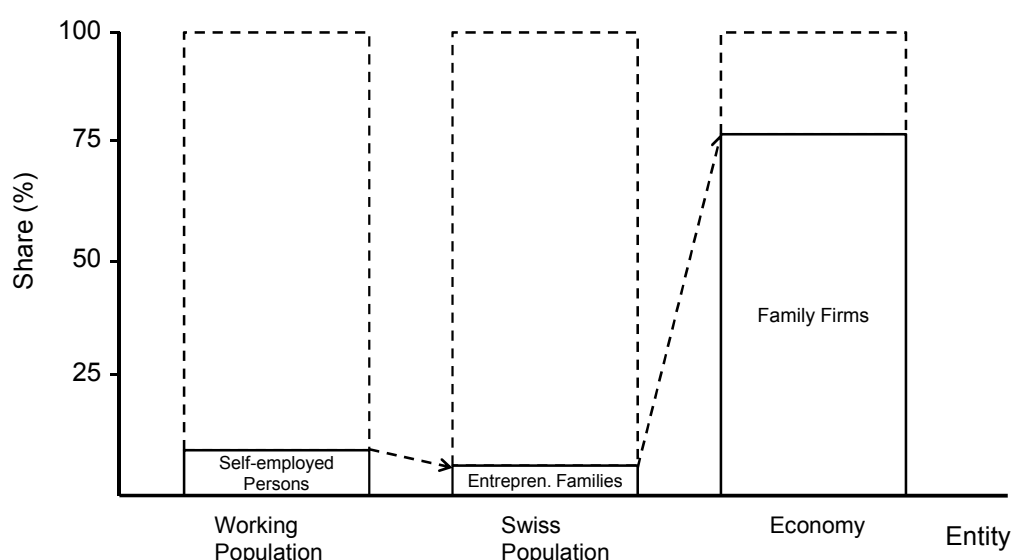


Figure 1.2. The Powerful Position of Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurial Families²⁰

¹⁹ Calculation based on data provided by the SFSO (2013a).

²⁰ Based on data provided by the SFSO (2013a) and Christen et al. (2013, p. 24). It should further be mentioned, that entrepreneurial families may own multiple businesses (cf. Sieger & Zellweger, 2012).

Since children of entrepreneurial families are generally the first ones in discussion as successors for the family firm, the importance of studying this field in relation to family firm succession is beyond dispute. However, in literature, this aspect is targeted either subliminally or not at full length.²¹ In addition, if family firm literature discusses the influence of siblings on family firms, the discussion is oftentimes related to sibling rivalry, the sibling relationship, or the sibling partnership.²² In consequence, core concepts from sibling research are virtually excluded from research regarding family firm succession.²³

With regard to the unaltered social and economic relevance of family firms, the importance concerning their survival, which is attended by the importance of studying career decisions towards internal succession, is evident to sustain these companies in business. To maintain the present economic as well as social situation and to guarantee long-term survival of family firms, the assurance of succession in family firms is essential (cf. Sharma, 2004). Furthermore, the results of family firm studies are not only relevant for family firms themselves, but also provide useful information for instance for business partners, non-family firms, politicians, and further decision makers. Last but not least, this study can also provide applicable knowledge for entrepreneurs to support their children regarding a career decision towards or against succession in the family firm and can foster mutual understanding.

1.5 Ethics and Integrity

Researchers have an obligation to the participants and should serve as their advocates (Hair et al., 2011, p. 58). Creswell (2013, pp. 56–60, 58–59, 174–175) explicitly discusses ethical issues with respect to all phases in the research process and emphasises that against a common misconception, ethical issues not only arise during the data collection, but during several phases within the research process. Ethics regarding this research has to discuss confidentiality and disclosure. Assuring confidentiality of

²¹ See e.g., Aronoff, Astrachan, Mendoza, & Ward (2011).

²² For sibling rivalry, see e.g.: Chirico & Salvato (2008), Davis & Stern (1988), Malkin (1991), Mandelbaum (1994), Matthews, Moore, & Fialko (1999), Sharma, Chrisman, & Chua (1997), Sorenson (1999), or Stavrou (1998). For sibling relationship, see e.g., Barach & Ganitsky (1995), Brown (1991), Cabrea-Suárez, De Saá-Pérez, & García-Almeida (2001), Drozdow (1998), Friedman (1991), Handler (1994), or Swagger (1991). For sibling partnership, see e.g., Gersick, Lansberg, Desjardins, & Dunn (1999), Rutherford, Muse, & Oswald (2006), or Ward & Dolan (1998).

²³ Sulloway consults family firms regarding succession (see fn. 16), but has not yet published about these consulting activities.

research partners is a primary responsibility in research (Roberts, 2010, p. 34) and was guaranteed to all participants.²⁴

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, pp. 100–101) explicitly discuss ethical considerations in in-depth interviewing²⁵, which is used for the main study. As suggested by the researchers, each respondent was made aware of confidentiality issues, his/her role within the research project, and the publication that follows the interview. To ensure confidentiality, the interview partners' names as well as the company names that partnered in this project were depersonalised by replacing them by aliases.²⁶ In addition, the interview partners were assured that the interviews will only be used within the context of this dissertation. With regard to disclosure, Creswell (2013, p. 57) emphasises the importance of disclosing the purpose of the research project towards the participants. The author acted on this advice and informed the interview partners accordingly beforehand. In this context, at the beginning of the interview, the interview partners were given the opportunity to ask questions concerning the research project. Attention has been paid to the disclosure only of general information and no specific information which could have impacted the research outcome (cf. Creswell, 2013, p. 174).

1.6 Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation is subdivided into nine chapters that are (1) Introduction, (2) Pre-Study and Conceptual Framework, (3) Definition of Terms, Literature Review, and Theoretical Framework, (4) Research Questions and Research Methodology, (5) Case Studies, (6) Research Findings Qualitative Content Analysis, (7) Conclusions, (8) References, and (9) Appendices. Furthermore, the dissertation can be classified into Introduction, Exploratory Part 1, Explanatory Part, Exploratory Part 2, Critical Appraisal / Conclusions, and Supplementaries. Figure 1.3 presents the dissertation's structure. The

²⁴ Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles (2008, pp. 417–418) define anonymity as one possibility confidentiality is operationalised and remark that confidentiality means not to disclose any information obtained from an interview partner, in a way that the interview partner might be identifiable. Sapsford & Abbott (1996) distinguish between confidentiality and anonymity as they explain *confidentiality* as a promise that an interview partner cannot “[...] be identified or presented in identifiable form, while *anonymity* is a promise that even the researcher will not be able to tell which responses came from which respondents” (p. 319, as cited in Bell, 2010, p. 49). Hence, when referring to the commonly used term anonymisation, the term depersonalisation is used instead. With regard to the research context of this study, it has abstained from the use of the term deidentification, since deidentification is used as to sibling deidentification and parent deidentification later on.

²⁵ Cf. Atteslander (2010, p. 142).

²⁶ All interview partners declared that de-personalisation would not be needed. However, to follow sound research practices, the interview partners' names and company names were replaced by aliases in order to ensure confidentiality to all interview partners alike.

chart outlines the content of each chapter and accentuates important linkages between these chapters and the related sections.

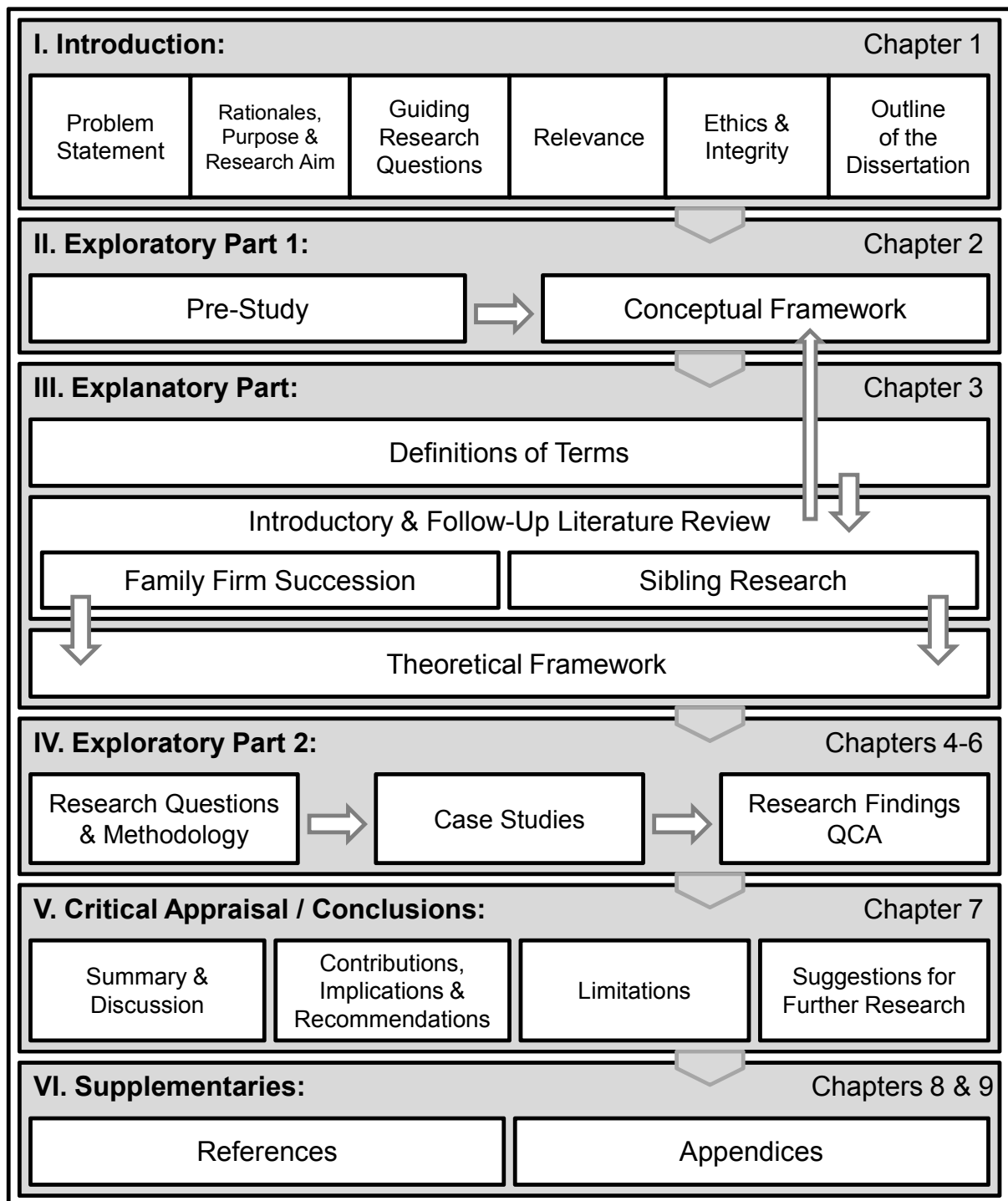


Figure 1.3. Structure of the Dissertation

The introductory chapter provides the derivation of the topic by discussing the research problem, the rationales, the purpose of the study as well as the research aim, and stating the guiding research questions. In addition, the relevance of the research is discussed and ethics and integrity management are commented upon. The chapter

concludes by representing the outline of the dissertation. Chapter 2 discusses the pre-study and therewith provides insight into the pre-study interviews with students, experts, two successors, and one non-successor that were conducted before the main study. The chapter further canvasses the study's conceptual framework.²⁷ Chapter 3 provides the definition of crucial terms and their delimitations as to the specific research context. Furthermore, the third chapter provides the literature review and for this reason discusses literature in the fields of family firm succession and sibling research. The chapter concludes with the theoretical framework. Ensuing this, Chapter 4 informs about the research questions and the research methodology used. The chapter's sections provide detailed information regarding the research approaches, the rationales, the assumption for the qualitative research design, the type of research design as well as the research strategy, the research method, the research instrument, and the research process. In addition, the researcher's role is discussed. The chapter further relates to the research object by discussing the research population, sampling procedures, the research sample, the data preparation and data management as well as the data collection and the data analysis techniques. Chapter 4 also provides an insight into the methods for verification. Then Chapter 5 briefly describes the individual research cases and in addition gives a summarising overview on the research sample. The chapter is followed by the analysis chapter, which is Chapter 6. Therein, the research findings of the qualitative content analysis are presented and discussed as well as linked to previous research and theories. The chapter concludes with the theory generation and hypotheses development. Chapter 7 presents the conclusions, including the summary and discussions, the theoretical contributions, the implications for practice, the recommendations, the theoretical and methodological limitations, and the suggestions for further research. The dissertation is completed by the references and appendices chapters, which are Chapters 8 and 9.

²⁷ Although the introductory literature review was carried out as part of the Exploratory Part 1, this review is discussed in aggregated form with the follow-up literature review as one summarising part in Chapter 3.

2 Pre-Study and Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, the objectives and purpose of the pre-study are described, the methodology is outlined, the results are presented, and the conclusions as well as the implications for the subsequent main study, are derived. The chapter concludes by presenting the conceptual framework of the research project. Since these sections do not discuss the main study, the content is summarised and only briefly discussed.

2.1 Objectives and Purpose

This study is based on a research proposal that was developed by the author during her master degree studies. Hence, that proposal constitutes the starting point for this research. In this respect, the first objective of the pre-study interviews was to critically review the meanwhile advanced research proposal in view of its appropriateness, feasibility, and research potential. As second objective the pre-study intended to obtain a deeper insight into the relevant research topics and to discuss considered research concepts with experts in the respective research fields. In this context, the interviews were furthermore used to discuss concepts regarding their adaptability for the main study. Moreover, the access of first-hand information from practitioners constituted the third research objective. Following this approach assured high-level additional insights into the current state-of-the-art literature in each of the relevant research fields. These practical implications could not have been considered if only academic literature had been reviewed. With regard to relevant theories to apply to this study, after having specified the research idea, it was considered to design the study based on the concept of family niches, also called the Family Niche Model (FNM), by Frank J. Sulloway. In consequence, if the study applied the FNM, the study would focus on sibling research within the research context of family firm succession. Ergo, the pre-study's fourth research objective was to find evidence as to the relevance of the FNM for this research. In this regard, the expert interviews provided the opportunity to discuss the sometimes controversial research findings in sibling research. In respect of the early stage in the research process, the overall purpose of the pre-study can accordingly be stated that it aimed to provide evidence regarding the presumed influence of sibships and siblings in entrepreneurial families on family firm succession.

2.2 Methodology

In the first part of this section, the sample selection and the research sample of the pre-study are presented and reasoned. The sample selection description accommodates for a detailed presentation of each group of interviewees. The second part discusses the data ascertainment, including the data collection, the data management, and the data analysis.

2.2.1 Sample Selection and Research Sample

To obtain a comprehensive insight into the research topic from different perspectives, interviews with students, experts in sibling research and family firm research, as well as with successors and one non-successor were conducted. The sample was selected using convenience sampling for the acquisition of the students, purposive sampling for the enlisting of the experts from science and practice, and a combination of both techniques for the acquisition of two successors and one non-successor.²⁸ In the following, the pre-study sample is described as per each group of interviewees.

2.2.1.1 Students

The group of student interview partners consists of seven students, in fact six students from the *University of St. Gallen (HSG)* and one student from the *Rheinische Fachhochschule Cologne (RFH)*.²⁹ The interviews with the HSG students were conducted at the university campus, whereas the interview with the student from the RFH was conducted via telephone. More precisely, the research sample consisted of five male and two female students that were at that time pursuing their academic studies either at the Bachelor, Master, or Doctoral level. Regarding their professional experience, five of them had already gained professional experience within the family firm or in the context of an internship – one student had already founded his own company. As to the interviewee's birth order position, which is central if the Family Niche Model were to be applied, one student is an only child, five students are firstborns, and one student is a lastborn. Accordingly, middleborn children were not included in the sample due to a lack of volunteers. With respect to the family firms, the companies were either micro, small, or medium-sized family firms and were operating either in the manufacturing, retail, or services industries. The interviews were conducted in January and February 2011.

²⁸ Cf. Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011, p. 46).

²⁹ The HSG interview partners were chosen randomly, the RFH interview partner was known beforehand.

2.2.1.2 Experts

The group of experts from science and practice is subdivided into two groups, one representing experts in sibling research and one representing experts in family firm succession research, including human resources management. Altogether, five expert interviews were conducted. What follows is a detailed description of each subgroup.

Experts in Sibling Research:

The group of experts in the field of sibling research comprises two interview partners. When selecting the interview partners, attention was paid to build an expert group that represents both academia and practice. However, it has to be mentioned, that both interview partners are working in the area of mainstream family and sibling research, which means that their academic and professional works are not specifically focused on entrepreneurial families. Since no adequate sibling-related literature for the specific research context was found, the research findings related to mainstream sibling research are subject to the discussion as to their conditional acceptance for this study. Therefore, attention was paid to potential difficulties and differences that may arise from this preliminary assumption.

More precisely, one interview partner is a former medical practitioner who currently works as a professional psychiatrist for children and adolescents, and has been operating a doctor's practice for more than 20 years. In addition, the interview partner has a family firm background and is therefore able to comment not only on sibling research and practical experience, but also to reflect on the topic of family firm succession. The second interview partner represents both the academic and scientific society and is working as a human developmental psychiatrist with a special interest in the field of family psychology. Both experts were interviewed in April 2011, whereby one was interviewed by telephone and one at his workplace.

Experts in Family Firm Succession and Human Resources Management:

With regard to the experts in the fields of family firm succession and human resources management, a mixed group of academics and practitioners was desired. Based on this precondition, three interview partners were acquired; two having expertise in family firm succession management, and one having expertise in human resources management. All interviews were face-to-face interviews and took place at the interview partners' workplaces. Hereinafter, the interview partners and their professional backgrounds are introduced.

The first expert for family firm succession currently holds a teaching and management position at the *University of St. Gallen (HSG)*. In addition, the interview partner consults family firms planning and implementing their succession strategy. In this function, the interviewee is responsible for the human development of successors and managers. The interview partner's dual role in academia and practice, especially due to his consulting activities related to family firm succession, enabled him to reflect comprehensively on the research topic and to comment on the research outline from various aspects. The second family firm expert also belongs to the academic community at the *University of St. Gallen (HSG)* and currently also holds teaching and management positions. Amongst others, the interviewee's research interests include family firm research, succession management, and strategic management. Complementary to his lecturing functions, the interview partner carries out consulting engagements. Furthermore, due to his family firm background, the interview partner is able to comment on the role as a potential successor in a family firm. The third expert is a self-employed human resources consultant. Owing to various management positions in previous and current occupations, the interview partner has about 25 years of experience in human resources management. The interviewee was selected due to his expert knowledge in building top management teams and his practical experience. A top management team consisting of siblings (aka sibling partnership) is one option to overcome the difficulty of choosing only one successor. Following this strategy would favour all siblings that are interested in becoming a successor in equal measure. Table 2.1 summarises this information.

Table 2.1. Pre-Study Interview Partners – Expert Interviews

Interview Partner	Current Profession	Field(s) of Expertise	Area of Representation
Expert 1	Researcher/Psychiatrist	Family Dynamics/Sibling Research	Academia/Practice
Expert 2	Psychologist	Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychotherapy	Practice
Expert 3	Researcher/Consultant	Family Firm Succession	Academia/Practice
Expert 4	Researcher/Consultant	Family Firm Succession	Academia/Practice
Expert 5	Consultant	Human Resources Management	Practice

To summarise, Table 2.1 provides an overview of the experts involved with regard to the expert's current profession, their field(s) of expertise within the scope of this study, and their area of representation (i.e., academia and/or practice). Contrary to the

author's first classification of Expert 1, Expert 2, and Expert 4 to academia as to their area of representation, it proved to be that they also have a family firm background. This experience enabled them to relate not only to academic research but also to contribute experience and personal insights from both perspectives. The overview clearly shows the diversity of the interview partners as well as the variety of topics that were covered for the development of the research concept.

2.2.1.3 Successors and Non-Successor

These people concerned with succession were interviewed as to their experiences regarding succession within the family firm. To gain a deeper insight into the motivations and reasons why an offspring decides to take over or decides not to take over the family firm, three interviews were conducted. Table 2.2 provides an overview of the interview partners' individual backgrounds.

Table 2.2. Pre-Study Interview Partners – Successors and Non-Successor

Interview Partner	Sex	Age	Birth Order Position (Sibling Constellation)	Current Career Status	Type of Family Firm
Successor 1	m	42	Firstborn (pair of two siblings)	Entrepreneur and later founder	medium
Successor 2	f	41	Second-/Middleborn (group of three siblings)	Entrepreneur and founder, however in a different industry than the family firm	small
Non-Successor	m	57	Firstborn (group of three siblings)	Employee with entrepreneurial experience	micro

To interview a diverse group of people, the interviewees were selected based on the criteria (1) gender diversity, (2) birth order position diversity, (3) industrial sector diversity, (4) company size diversity, more precisely micro, small and medium-sized family firms³⁰, and (5) career decision diversity of the offspring toward succession in the family firm.³¹ So as to picture career decisions for and against succession in the family firm, two interviews were conducted with successors and one interview was conducted with a non-successor. Table 2.2 also depicts the diversity of the research partners' current occupations, ranging from employee with entrepreneurial experience

³⁰ The aim was to interview successors and non-successors with a background from micro, small and medium-sized family firms, since these represent the majority of companies in Switzerland and are therefore the most relevant types of companies (see Section 1.4). Based on headcount (annual work unit) and acc. to the definition by the European Commission (2005, p. 14), enterprises are categorised as micro enterprise when having less than ten employees, as small enterprise when having 10 to 49 employees, and as medium-sized enterprise when having 50 to 249 employees (see Subsection 4.2.5.1, Table 4.1 on p. 95).

³¹ Since age spacing is not relevant at this point in the research process, this variable is disregarded.

to entrepreneurs and founders. The group consists of two male and one female interview partner, who, as dictated by the preconditions, embodied different birth order positions. All interview partners decided their career path long ago, which enabled them to provide an insight into family firm succession from a reflective viewpoint. For this group of interviewees, personal contacts were used to get in touch with the interview partners, which coincidentally provided a familiar interview atmosphere. Likewise the student and expert interviews, these interviews were also semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. The interviews took place once at the interview partner's work place, once at the interview partner's home, and once in a public place.

2.2.2 Data Ascertainment

This subsection discusses the data ascertainment, including the data collection, the data management, and the data analysis. The topics *data collection* and *data management* are jointly discussed, due to their connectedness.

2.2.2.1 Data Collection and Data Management

Interviews can be subdivided into three basic subtypes, which are (1) structured interviews, (2) unstructured interviews, and (3) semi-structured interviews (Thomas, 2013, p. 194). As discussed, 15 semi-structured interviews (cf. Punch, 2014, pp. 145–146; Kvale, 2007, p. 51; cf. Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) with students, experts, as well as with two successors and one non-successor were conducted (see Section 9.1). Punch (2014, p. 144) proposes interviews as a very good way to access a person's perceptions and constructions of reality, and judges this data collection technique as one of the most powerful instruments. The type of semi-structured interviews was chosen (1) for being able to adapt the tentative interview guide to specific key aspects that varied across the interviews, and (2) for being able to spontaneously respond to the interview partners' replies. Following this practice ensured that the interviewees had the possibility to add further information and thereby enrich the study with personal experiences. At the same time, the interview guide was constantly modified, extended, and later narrowed down for the main study interview guides. This proceeding allowed accounting for each interviewee's individual characteristics and background, either as to professional or family-related experiences. Furthermore, the student interview partners were asked to fill in a questionnaire on family-related drivers related to their succession decision.

Except two interviews, all interviews were conducted as face-to-face interviews, whereby the respective two interviews were conducted as telephone interviews. Since the interview partners were either Swiss or German, all interviews were conducted in German. Moreover, for all but two interviews, the research location was Switzerland. The two outlier interviews were from the successors and non-successor group and took place in Germany. The interviews were conducted within the time interval of January to June 2011. The interview order was mainly prescribed by the availability of the interview partners, which entailed that the interviews were not conducted in a particular order. However, this does not limit the scope of the pre-study interviews as to their relevance for the main study. Accordingly, the interviews did not build upon each other. In parallel to the interviews, the literature was reviewed anew. Pursuing this strategy enabled a review of the literature in consideration of up-to-date research findings and to take account of the interview partners' personal contributions.

Data management is the first step within the data analysis spiral³² (Creswell, 2013, pp. 182–183). All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed using the transcription software *f4*³³. Each transcription was carried out following the transcription guidelines by Hautz and Hartmann (2009). The approximate average length of the interviews was 33 minutes for the student interviews, 67 minutes for the expert interviews, and 21 minutes for the successors and non-successor interviews. Supplementary to the audio transcription, for every interview, an interview protocol was compiled.

2.2.2.2 Data Analysis

Qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, are usually analysed by classifying and interpreting the data and transforming these into codes and themes.³⁴ However, since the pre-study intends to verify and concretise the research idea, to respond to the presumed research objectives, and to identify crucial factors to be considered for the further course of the research, a detailed content analysis of the audio transcripts would go beyond the scope of the pre-study's intent. Thus, a rather basic but more adequate method of analysis is applied. In dependence on Mühlfeld, Windolf, Lampert, and Krüger (1981, p. 336), the transcripts were analysed following a five

³² See Creswell (2013, p. 183), Figure 8.1.

³³ See <http://www.audiotranskription.de/f4.htm>.

³⁴ Cf. e.g., Bortz & Döring (2009, pp. 329–330), Bryman (2012, pp. 297–198), or Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014, pp. 71–73). Creswell (2013, p. 184) uses the terms codes and categories interchangeably. Acc. to Creswell (2013) “[t]hemes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 186, emphasis removed).

step approach.³⁵ These five steps are (1) highlight text passages, (2) categorise text passages, (3) build an internal logic, (4) write a text on the internal logic, and (5) write a text and match quotations. Regarding step 2, the categorisation was undertaken in respect of the predefined research objectives and was continuously supplemented. With regard to the questionnaire analysis, closed questions were analysed as to frequencies of the responses, and open questions were analysed first, by summarising the individual responses, and second, by counting the frequency of identical responses.

2.3 Results

This section presents the results of the interview analysis, segmented as to the groups of interview partners. For the reason that this part does not discuss the main study results, the interview results are only briefly discussed.

2.3.1 Student Interviews

Regarding the students' intention towards succession, the interviews revealed that four out of seven students did not intend to enter the family firm, however are giving consideration to the idea of founding their own company. The decisions against succession in the family firm were diverse; five students were not interested in the industry sector within which the family firm is operating, three students remarked on the desire to work in a foreign country, and one student felt that he does not have the necessary business contacts to take over the firm. Two students do not have the option to enter the family firm, since in both cases the company was sold. Nevertheless, all students reported positive as well as negative experiences with the family firm, whereby the interviewees unanimously explained that they liked the conversation about the firm. In addition, four of the students reasoned their current decision against succession with their desire to gain more experience before entering the family firm, if they decide to enter the family firm. This statement implies that not all students strictly exclude the career option of succession in the family firm.

The contacts the students had with the family firm were manifold. For instance, four students reported that they work and/or that they worked regularly in the family firm, three reported that they were affected by the company as their father did not have much time, and again three students stated that their father even worked at home in his free time. In this context it is notable that all interview partners basically had a positive

³⁵ The original approach is composed of six steps. However, since only the research steps 1 to 5 are relevant for this analysis, the sixth step is excluded.

attitude towards an entrepreneurial career in their future. It is furthermore interesting, that five students reported that this attitude did not change during their childhood and adolescence.

When asked as to the parents' role regarding the student's entrepreneurial abilities, all students responded that their parents would believe in their ability to manage a firm. As to the factors determining the students' career choice, the students unanimously stated that the interest in the field of study was the decisive factor. Also, two interviewees again reported the desire to work in a foreign country, one stated the secure career chance after having completed studies in his/her chosen field of study, and one student acknowledged the desire for a self-determined workday. Academic achievements influenced only one interviewee regarding his/her choice of employment. In addition, one interview partner accentuated his parents as successful role models who therewith indirectly influenced the student's career decision towards an entrepreneurial activity. Moreover, one student noted that the moral commitment to take over the family firm decreased, whereas another emphasised the importance of the type of industry the company is operating in and the personal affection to this industry. However, one student also pointed out that living within an entrepreneurial family piqued his/her interest to pursue an entrepreneurial career himself/herself.

As introduced, the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire regarding the family related drivers when deciding for or against succession. For most of the students, a good relationship with their parents as well as with their sibling(s) was evaluated as being important. However, in relation, a good sibling relationship was not valued as important as the relationship with the parents – always with regard to the career decision regarding succession. It is important to emphasise, that these results do not imply that in family life, the sibling relationship is less valued than the relationship with the parents. The interview partners further agreed on the importance of a strong family sense of coherence. Additionally, the majority of the students perceived similar family values as being important when deciding about succession. In case they would decide for succession, for the majority of respondents, a high degree of trust within the family and a good preparation for their future role within the company were also assessed as being important. The conclusion derived from the student interviews and the arising implications thereof for the main study are presented in Section 2.4.

2.3.2 Expert Interviews

The experts unanimously agreed on the relevance of the research idea and therefore supported the research project. With regard to birth order research, the sibling research experts agreed that researching succession by transferring the Family Niche Model (FNM) into the family firm environment may provide an interesting contribution to scientific and practical knowledge. As to the FNM's application as central research model, both sibling research experts approved its appropriateness and feasibility within the particular research context. However, the experts also remarked weaknesses of the model, such as the general discussion regarding birth order's influence on personality development. The author discussed these disagreements with the experts regarding the actual influence of an individual's birth order position on its personality development. This exchange was important, since at first, personality was considered as an additional research subject for this study. In this respect, Expert 1 pointed at the publication *Birth Order – It's Influence on Personality* by Ernst and Angst (1983) that reanalysed sibling research studies as to this influence and concluded the influence as only being a minor one (see Subsection 3.3.1). However, as long as personality development is not the subject of the research, the FNM was evaluated as absolutely appropriate to be transferred into the family firm succession context. With regard to the study of personality, it was intended to study sibling partnerships and therefore to apply the DISC® personality profile. Expert 5, a human resources consultant, strongly supported the idea of making use of this personality assessment tool.

A further important aspect revealed is, that results from sibling research mostly relate to mainstream sibling research and thereby do not particularly refer to siblings from entrepreneurial families. However, after discussing the research outline with Expert 1, the expert pointed out that under the given circumstances the transferability of the FNM from its family context into the family firm context is feasible. As introduced, sibling research concepts that were under consideration for this study, primarily refer to families in general, and do not explicitly differentiate between families and entrepreneurial families. As a consequence, regarding the use of mainstream sibling research within the scope of this research, the experts pointed towards potential particularities that may arise when researching entrepreneurial families. As to the applicability of the FNM for this research, the interview partner confirmed that this research stream fits for the particular research context. In addition, Expert 2 points out the importance of the parents' skill to make particular areas of responsibility (i.e., niches within the family firm) palatable to the siblings. Furthermore, the relevance of Schachter et. al's (1976) and Schachter, Gilutz, Shore, and Adler's (1978) research on

sibling identification and sibling deidentification was emphasised, as Sulloway's research refers to this. In addition, the experts across the different fields of expertise pointed out the uniqueness of such research contexts. In this regard, particularly Expert 3 and Expert 4 commented on family firm characteristics, such as company size, number of employees or industry sector. Regarding the family side, the experts pointed to the potentially influencing family structure variables *sibship size* and *age spacing*.

2.3.3 Successors and Non-Successor Interviews

To recapitulate, it can be said that all interview partners conceived growing up within an entrepreneurial family as interesting and life-enriching, but also mentioned the dual role of the family firm. On the one side, the family firm context enriched their life, on the other side, the family life was subordinated to the business. In addition, the experience of living with a family firm directly influenced the decision regarding succession either way. The interview partners' decision regarding succession was characterised by the experience with the family firm during childhood and adolescence, either that it stimulated regarding succession or it prevented succession, although the general experience of growing up within a family firm environment was perceived as a worthwhile experience. In particular the interview with the Non-successor, whose decision against succession was attributed to the experiences with the family firm, supported the presumed arguments for this study. Owing to his birth order position as a firstborn, the interviewee was more involved in the business than his siblings. Resulting from this, the interviewee decided to pursue a career as an employee. In this context, it is noteworthy that the Non-successor valued freedom differently than for instance Successor 1, who reported that her own business provided her the opportunity to follow her own ideas. In contrast, the Non-successor generally agreed to this perception, however also conceived an entrepreneurial activity (and coincidentally the family life) as being heavily influenced by customers, which led him to decide against an entrepreneurial career. Added to that, it has to be emphasised that the industry sector was not according to his career plans. In this context, he admitted that he would have thought about succession, if the parents' firm had been operating in a technical industry.

Regarding succession management in family firms in which more than one child as potential successor is available, again, especially the Non-successor interview provided strong evidence for the presumed relationship. Since the Non-successor as a firstborn child, stated that he would only have taken over the family firm without his siblings, for his laterborn siblings, this career option would have disappeared to a

greater or lesser extent. Accordingly, the presumed niche-related behaviour among siblings as to a potential mutual influence regarding their career options and consequently their career choices could be supported. In this context, the influence of the firstborn child's career decision on laterborn children appears to be stronger due to the time-wise advantage, which usually exists. Therefore, the firstborn child's birth order position may provide advantages when it comes to succession in family firms. Hence evidence for the presumed niche concept within the family firm succession context was found. From these remarks, it follows that the interview analysis provided evidence (1) for the presumed influence of sibships in entrepreneurial families on succession management, and (2) for the presumed influence among siblings regarding succession in family firms, and more precisely an influence regarding family firm related career options.

2.4 Conclusions and Implications for Main Study

As stated earlier, the research objectives for the pre-study are (1) to critically review the research proposal regarding its appropriateness, feasibility, and research potential, (2) to obtain a deeper insight into the relevant research topics and to discuss research concepts that were under consideration for this project with experts in the respective fields, (3) to access first-hand information from practitioners, and (4) to find evidence as to the relevance of the *Family Niche Model (FNM)* for this research study. As to the objectives 1 to 3, the proposed study was critically discussed from four perspectives, namely from the student's perspective as potential successors, the successor's perspective, the non-successor's perspective, and the expert's perspective. It can be concluded that the interview results supported the intended research idea and confirmed its appropriateness, feasibility, and research potential. In addition, a deeper insight into succession and sibling research was obtained, and first-hand information from various perspectives was gained. In relation to the fourth objective, the relevance of the FNM for this project, evidence for the presumed validity of the FNM in the family firm succession context was found. The transferability of the FNM and thereby researching family firm succession based on sibling research allows to combine two up to that point separate research fields, and thereby to contribute to the enhancement of both research fields. This prospect and in particular the interview with the non-successor, which revealed evidence for the presumed niche-related influence among siblings, led to the application of the FNM as central research model. It has to be pointed out that the sibling research experts evaluated the model as absolutely fitting for the specific research idea and research context.

The implications for the main study are manifold. As discussed, the Family Niche Model is applied in this study and as a consequence, succession is studied based on sibling research. Furthermore, the interview results revealed the appropriateness of semi-structured interviews as a research instrument for the main study. To give an example, one student interview partner whose family sold the business, pointed out that he has the impression that his mother was happier when working in the family firm compared to when working as an employee. With regard to the analysis, this information is important in order to understand the succession context, to interpret the student's entrepreneurial intention correctly, and to evaluate the overall situation correctly, which would have been impossible by means of a solely quantitative survey. Moreover, the interviewee remarked that this impression also shaped his desire towards an entrepreneurial career for himself and he had already founded a small business. By using a questionnaire-based research design, in all probability this specific situation would not have been captured comprehensively and by implication, the data could have been misinterpreted.

As to the study of birth order in relation to personality, this study excludes personality research. Initially, it was intended to compile a personality profile for each sibling to assess the capacity for teamwork among siblings by means of the DISC® personality profile. Expert 5, who is a human resources consultant, evaluated the test as very applicable for this project. However, the value of applying DISC® is linked to the precondition that full sibships are studied and its applicability therefore depends on the research partners. By excluding personality and solely transferring the Family Niche Model's underlying idea into the family firm context, the disagreements in literature are circumvented. Nonetheless, it has to be pointed out that based on a meta-analysis, Sulloway confirmed the influence of an individual's birth order position on personality development and thereupon developed the model. In this respect, it is important to emphasise that this study uses the model to study succession and *not* to study succession as to personality development.

To take account of the critique that Sulloway studied ancient data and did not study siblings from the same families (i.e., within-family siblings), this study applies a case study research design. Consequently, this study aims to research full sibships instead of siblings representing different birth order positions. The case study research design together with the qualitative interviews accommodate for the individuality of each case and the subject as a whole, and simultaneously enable to account for the uniqueness and complexity of succession processes and family constellations that were pointed out by the experts.

The main effects of the pre-study on the main study are (1) the Family Niche Model constitutes the central research model, (2) a case study research design is applied, and (3) the research is conducted by using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Resulting from the aspect of applying a sibling research model in the family firm succession context, the study aims at theory generation instead of theory testing, which seems promising to contribute to the knowledge in both research areas. Moreover, the intent to study career options and career choices of children in entrepreneurial families towards succession in family firms was further corroborated since evidence of these claims was found in the interviews. Based on the results of the pre-study interviews and the initial literature review, the conceptual framework was developed and is presented in the section to follow.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual frameworks are defined as either graphical or narrative representations of the key factors, main concepts or variables, and the presumed relationships among them (Punch, 2014, p. 83; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 20). The conceptual framework thereby reveals how a case is studied within the larger phenomenon (C. Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 7)³⁶. In this context, Quinlan (2011, p. 5) describes a four framework approach to the research process, in which the conceptual framework shapes, supports and directs the theoretical framework, the methodological framework, and the analytical framework.³⁷ The conceptual framework therefore functions as an umbrella framework or starting point for the consequential frameworks. This study's conceptual framework, which is based on the results of the pre-study interviews and the initial literature review, is depicted in Figure 2.1.

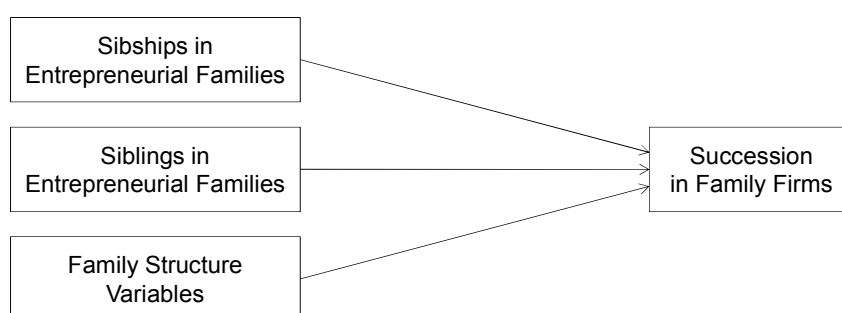


Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework

³⁶ Acc. to Holliday (2002, pp. 52–57), the conceptual framework is a pivotal part in a research study, since one major function is to interrelate the researcher and the research as the researcher's ideology biases the research.

³⁷ The theoretical framework is presented in Figure 3.3 (see Section 3.4), the methodological framework is presented in Figure 4.2 (see Section 4.2), and the analytical framework is presented in Figure 4.4 (see Subsection 4.2.8).

As illustrated, three research streams are presumed. Firstly, the influence of sibships in entrepreneurial families on family firm succession is presumed. If more than one child (i.e., more than one potential successor) is available, technically speaking multiple successors are available – needless to say that crucial qualifications in terms of hard and soft skills have to be fulfilled to be considered as a potential successor. Secondly, the pre-study interviews provided evidence for the presumed influence among siblings in entrepreneurial families towards succession in family firms. Thirdly, the influence of the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing are presumed to influence succession in family firms. This study's conceptual framework is a rather generic one, but echoes the research topics that are subject of the literature review. The demanded solid rationales for the framework (cf. C. Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 7) were identified within the pre-study interviews and were discussed in the preceding sections. An advanced framework, enriched by the results of the literature review, represents the theoretical framework in Section 3.4. This approach avails itself of the opportunity that a conceptual framework may evolve as the research itself evolves (cf. Leshem & Trafford, 2007, p. 95)³⁸. Since this study aims at theory generation and not theory testing, the rather broad framework suits the research.

³⁸ Leshem & Trafford (2007, p. 95) herewith interpret the definition by Miles & Huberman (1984) and at the same time the definition by Miles et al. (2014), who define the conceptual framework as “[...] the current version of the researcher's map of the territory being investigated” (p. 20).

3 Definition of Terms, Literature Review, and Theoretical Framework

This chapter defines relevant terms, discusses main theoretical concepts, and presents the theoretical framework. To provide a comprehensive and current state-of-the-art literature review, both academic and practitioner-based literature in the fields of family firm succession management and sibling research was reviewed. The chapter closes by presenting the theoretical framework.

3.1 Definition of Terms

This section defines crucial terms in order to build a sound basis for the research project. It provides definitions of terms that do not have a common meaning or can be misunderstood. As some terms can be interpreted in different ways, a common understanding is important and central for the course of this research. The terms are operationally defined, meaning defined the way they are used for this study's context.

3.1.1 Firm and Family Firm

Research suggests that family firms are distinctively different from non-family firms.³⁹ Commenting on the difference between the terms *firm* and *family firm* is important as it defines the scope of these terms and is therefore crucial for this study. Since family firms are a specific type of business, the term *firm* is defined first, followed by the definition of the term *family firm*. Supplementary to this, the delimitation of the term *family firm* regarding this study's research ambit is provided.

The *Oxford Dictionaries* defines a *firm* as “[a] business concern, especially one involving a partnership of two or more people [...]” (Firm, n.d., para. 2), and the synonym *company* as “[a] commercial business [...]” (Company, n.d., para. 1).⁴⁰ Within the reference framework of *The New St. Gallen Management Model*, a firm is understood as a complex system, whereby the perception of the term is thereby largely characterised by fundamental notions of systems theory (Rüegg-Stürm, 2005, p. 7; Rüegg-Stürm, 2009, p. 65).⁴¹

³⁹ See e.g., Miller, Le Breton-Miller, Lester, & Cannella (2007), or Zahra, Hayton, & Salvato (2004).

⁴⁰ Within the scope of this study, the terms *firm* and *company* are used interchangeably.

⁴¹ In this context, the system is perceived as an ordered entity of elements, which becomes complex when the therein present elements “[...] interact in a variety of ways and interrelate with each other in a specific and dynamic relationship” (Rüegg-Stürm, 2005, p. 7, emphasis removed). See Rüegg-Stürm (2005, pp. 7–11).

The term *family firm*⁴² is not uniquely defined and in consequence, the research field lacks a widely accepted definition (cf. Astrachan & Shanker, 2003, p. 211; Habig, 2010, p. 7). In this context, Chrisman, Chua, and Sharma (1996) identified 21 definitions in 250 articles. Authors and organisations addressed this non-existence for which reason various definitions exist.⁴³ These definitions range from rather broad definitions regarding ownership and management to very specific ones, definitions including differentiations such as the dichotomous definition as to family firm and non-family firm, or the definition regarding family-owned and/or family-controlled firm. The definitional problem results from the businesses' heterogeneity and multidimensionality, for instance in terms of their variety regarding size, age, firm structure, number of employees, and so forth (cf. Sharma, 2003; Uhlaner, 2005, p. 42). As a consequence, different research streams developed purpose-related definitions. Well-known definitions are for instance the role-related circle models that account for the family, the ownership, and the business (e.g., Gersick, Davis, Mc Collom Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997), the F-PEC scale of family influence (Astrachan, Klein, & Smyrnios, 2002), or the definition by behaviour (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999). Guttman and Peereboom (1999) include the self-perception as a family firm into the definition (see Uhlaner, 2005). By referring to succession, Ward (2011) defines "[...] a family business as one that will be passed on for the family's next generation to manage and control" (p. 273). Klein's (2000) definition is as follows:

A family business is a company that is influenced by one or more families in a substantial way. A family is defined as a group of people who are descendants of one couple and their in-laws as well as the couple itself. Influence in a substantial way is considered if the family either owns the stock or, if not, the lack of influence in ownership is balanced through either influence through corporate governance [...] or influence through management [...]. For a business to be a family business, some shares must be held within the family. (Klein, 2000, p. 158)

It is beyond the scope of this research, to contribute to the solution of the still present definitional lack of clarity. However, it is necessary to provide a working definition that clarifies the definitional boundaries of the research context. As no universally

⁴² The term *family firm* is also known as *family business* or *family enterprise*. In this study, the term *family business* is avoided due to the term's ambiguous meaning. Nonetheless, the term occurs in citations of original sources.

⁴³ E.g., Anderson, Jack, & Dodd (2005, pp. 136–139), Donckels & Fröhlich (1991), European Commission (2009, p. 4), Henssen, Voordeckers, Lambrechts, & Koironen (2011), Klein (2010, pp. 9–18), or Litz (1995; 2008, p. 216).

accepted definition is available and purpose-related differentiations can cause difficulties or can be problematic in the course of the research, the broad definition provided by Klein (2000) is applied. Accordingly, within the scope of this research, a firm is categorised as a family firm if it is substantially influenced by one family – either as shareholders or in the form of one family member’s or several family members’ active involvement.

3.1.2 Family and Entrepreneurial Family

For this research project, it is necessary to define not only the term *family* but also the term *entrepreneurial family*⁴⁴, since both contribute to a common understanding. In addition, the terms redound to build a profound basis for the project to be studied. Accordingly, both terms are defined and discussed, before thereupon for each term a definition for this study’s specific context is provided.

Several broad and narrow definitions for the term *family* exist. The term is used in different research contexts, such as social sciences and natural sciences, wherefore also context-related definitions exist (cf. Kertzer, 1991, p. 156). Accordingly, a rather broad definition is presented first, followed by a more specific one. One definition was already provided by Klein (2000), when defining *family firm*. According to Klein, “[a] family is defined as a group of people who are descendants of one couple and their in-laws as well as the couple itself” (p. 158). The *Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia* generally defines a family as first, “a group of people who are related to each other”, second, “a person’s children”, and third, “a group of related people including people who lived in the past” (Family, n.d., paras. 1–3). Over time, the family as a social unit changed to meet their members’ needs (Moore & Asay, 2013, p. 24), which also explains the definitional multitude. Families can for instance exist as nuclear families, extended families, single parent families, stepfamilies, or childless families respectively. Regarding this study, a social unit is defined as a family, preferably based on the nuclear family definition, which by definition is composed of a father, a mother, and their child or children (Hill & Kopp, 2013, p. 12). Since siblings are the research subject, the family has to be composed of a pair or a group of siblings. In this regard it is important, that the siblings grew up together, since otherwise the siblings’ influence on each other might be difficult to be determined. More detailed information regarding the term’s use within this research is provided after having defined the term *entrepreneurial family*.

⁴⁴ Aka business family.

With respect to the term *entrepreneurial family*, very few definitions exist and no universally accepted definition has been established. The German reference work *Duden* specifies the meaning of the equivalent German term *Unternehmerfamilie* as a family, from which already multiple entrepreneurs emerged (*Unternehmerfamilie*, n.d., para. 3). Following this explanation, and to define a family as an *entrepreneurial family*, the family would have to (1) be able to show at least two persons that are presently involved in the business – regardless of the ownership and management component, or (2) have at least one family member with a history of entrepreneurial activities.⁴⁵ The *Witten Institute for Family Business* (WIFU, n.d.) defines the term in more detail, as it uses the term for first, “a group of people who are related to one another whose development is linked to a company or association of companies owned by an individual family member or several family members”, and second, “[...] if this group or parts of it are concerned with the issue of how this ownership is to be passed on within the family association” (paras. 1, 2).⁴⁶ For this study, a family is classified as an *entrepreneurial family*, if (1) the family is at least a nuclear family, (2) the family members run a company in which at least one family member is actively involved, and (3) one family member is or a group of family members are the majority shareholder(s). By applying this definition, the family component, the management component, and the ownership component are defined up to the level needed for this thesis. As the definition of entrepreneurial family builds upon the definition of family and thereby incorporates it, the definition for *entrepreneurial family* is the definition applied to select the research partners.

3.1.3 Sibling

The *Oxford Dictionaries* define a *sibling* as “[e]ach of two or more children or offspring having one or both parents in common; a brother or sister” (*Sibling*, n.d., para. 1), and thereby provide a widespread definition within European countries. Kasten (2003, p. 22) refers to the biological component when defining siblings and states that in most cultures, siblings are defined as individuals that have identical or similar genes, since they have the same parents, the same mother or the same father. A second, genetically-related sibling constellation may occur, in the form of half siblings, if for instance the parents are remarried and additional children by the new couple are born. Besides, a non-genetically-related sibling constellation may also

⁴⁵ Based on this definition, a family that is operating a family firm in its first generation would only be categorised as an *entrepreneurial family*, if more than one person were involved within.

⁴⁶ In consideration of the association’s form, the researchers note its immateriality (WIFU, n.d., para. 2).

occur in the form of one or more stepsibling(s), for instance due to the remarriage of one or both parents, whereby the new stepparent already has a child or several children of his/her own. A further type of sibling constellation without a genetic relatedness may result from adoption. In addition, the definition of siblings is also subject to different cultural environments as in some cultures, individuals are already referred to as siblings if they are on kinship terms with each other. In such cultures, cousins are for example also categorised as siblings (cf. Kasten, 2003, p. 22). In academic literature, siblings are not solely differentiated based on gender, but also based on their birth order position. In this respect, siblings are ranked as firstborn, secondborn, thirdborn and so forth, up to the lastborn. With regard to categorisation, the child or children in between the firstborn and the lastborn is/are called middleborn(s). In this context, it has to be mentioned that these roles may change over time, for instance due to the birth of a new sibling or if a family is rebuilt due to remarriage. In such cases, a single child may become a sibling or in case of the latter, a firstborn may become a lastborn.

As mentioned, culture affects the definition of the term and for this study, the cultural impact is perceived as being more important than the siblings' biological relatedness. This study therefore focuses solely on Swiss entrepreneurial families, which means entrepreneurial families in a Western European culture. Accordingly, the Western European perception of siblings is applied. In this respect, individuals are by definition categorised as siblings, if they have the same parents or at least the same mother or the same father. If needed, and under the condition that the children spent most of their childhood together within the same family environment, stepsiblings as well as half siblings and adopted siblings were also regarded as siblings.

3.2 Family Firm Succession

Succession in family firms is regarded to be one of the most important issues a family firm can face (Christen et al., 2013; Handler, 1994). Aronoff, McClure, and Ward (2011) define succession as “[...] the transition of family business leadership and ownership from one generation to the next” (p. 6). To define this study's research context, the succession process, the stakeholders, the succession-related life cycles, the Swiss family firm succession environment, and primogeniture as birth order-related successor selection are discussed in the subsections to follow.

3.2.1 Succession Process

Several research studies address succession processes in various research directions and accordingly several research models with varying levels of abstraction and following different approaches have been developed.⁴⁷ In the following, the model by Halter and Schröder (2012) is discussed in detail. As part of the *St. Gallen Succession Model*, Halter and Schröder (2012, p. 129) propose a succession process model that divides the process into six phases, namely (1) Case history, (2) Prearrangements, (3) Search for successor, (4) Training of successor, (5) Implementation of succession, and (6) Postprocessing.⁴⁸ Although the model illustrates these phases sequentially, the phases might also run in parallel (Halter & Schröder, 2012, p. 128). Within Phase 1, the family firm is evaluated regarding its traditions, routines, and experiences that influenced the company and might influence the decision making process in the future (Halter & Schröder, 2012, p. 129). Phase 2 comprises the prearrangements, which also includes that succession is thematised among the family members (Halter & Schröder, 2012, pp. 129–130). Phase 3 represents the active search for a successor by the incumbent, within which has to be resolved the following questions (Halter & Schröder, 2012, p. 130): (1) Which family member(s) is/are willing to take over the family firm? (2) Which family member(s) is/are the most capable successor(s)? In this respect, an internal succession requires both questions to be answered positively. Regarding this study's research focus, Phase 3 is the most relevant, as in this phase has to be discussed if the family firm should be run by only one offspring or by several offspring in the form of a sibling partnership. Accordingly, it has to be discussed how many siblings are interested in management succession and how many are interested in ownership succession. In this respect, it is conceivable that the current owner or owning family has to choose one successor out of a pair or group of siblings. Within Phase 4, the successor is trained on the job as future CEO, whereby the incumbent provides the successor with the necessary competences and know-how and has to share responsibilities (Halter & Schröder, 2012, p. 130). Phase 5 represents the implementation of the succession with regards to financial, legal, and fiscal aspects (Halter & Schröder, 2012, p. 131). The succession model closes with Phase 6, in which the leaving generation and the new generation reorganise their new environments and

⁴⁷ See e.g., Cabrera-Suárez, De Saá-Pérez, & García-Almeida (2001), Le Breton-Miller, Miller, & Steier (2004), Murray (2003), Royer, Simons, Boyd, & Rafferty (2008), Sharma, Chrisman, Pablo, & Chua (2001), or Venter, Boshoff, & Maas (2005).

⁴⁸ Original text in German, translated by the author. Original wording: (1) Vorgeschichte, (2) Vorbereitung, (3) Suche eines Nachfolgers, (4) Einarbeitung eines Nachfolgers, (5) Umsetzung der Nachfolge, and (6) Nachbearbeitung der Nachfolge. According to Halter & Schröder (2012, pp. 128–129), the process can also be narrowed down into Phase 2 to Phase 5.

settle into their new lives (Halter & Schröder, 2012, p. 131).⁴⁹ It should be pointed out that the process model by Halter and Schröder (2012) is not limited to internal succession but can likewise be applied to external succession. Regarding the overall timespan for the succession process, research for Switzerland revealed that on average, a family buy-out takes 12.1 years, whereas a management buy-out takes 6.8 years, and a management buy-in takes 4.3 years (Halter & Kammerlander, 2014, p. 6). These figures show that internal succession occupies comparatively more time than external succession. With regard to the period between initial contact and transfer of responsibility, the research by Christen et al. (2013, pp. 30–31) revealed that on average, responsibilities were delegated after 1.6 years in a management buy-in, after 3.3 years in a management buy-out, and after 6.5 years in a family buy-out.

3.2.2 Stakeholders

According to Freeman (2010), “[a] stakeholder in an organization is (by definition) any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (p. 46). With regard to succession, it can be said that succession in family firms can affect different stakeholders and can be affected by different stakeholders on different levels – internally as well as externally. In this context, it is important to analyse the succession process from the perspectives of the family, the management⁵⁰, and the ownership system in order to identify as well as to understand the stakeholders’ perspectives (Brockhaus, 2004, p. 165). This explanation does not only further define family firm succession, but also points out the complexity of the research process. Resulting from these different perspectives, conflicts may arise that in turn may harm both the family and the family firm, since stakeholders often simultaneously belong to different systems (cf. Gersick et al., 1997, p. 5). As introduced, the succession process in family firms is very complex and the stakeholders involved are manifold. In this context, Tagiuri and Davis (1996, p. 200)⁵¹ introduced the three-circle model as an organising framework, which illustrates this complexity by three interrelated circles. The model, which is considered to be the primary conceptual model of family firms (Gersick et al., 1999, p. 287), is depicted in Figure 3.1.⁵²

⁴⁹ Cf. Aronoff, McClure, & Ward (2011, pp. 19–26).

⁵⁰ See fn 55, p. 4.

⁵¹ Reprint from Tagiuri & Davis (1982).

⁵² Tagiuri & Davis’ three-circle model is a consistent further development of the two-system model, which only accounted for the institutional overlap of *Family Norms* and *Business Norms* (cf. Lansberg, 1983, p. 44). Kepner (1991, p. 446, reprint form 1983) contrasts the systems *Family* and *Business* and discusses

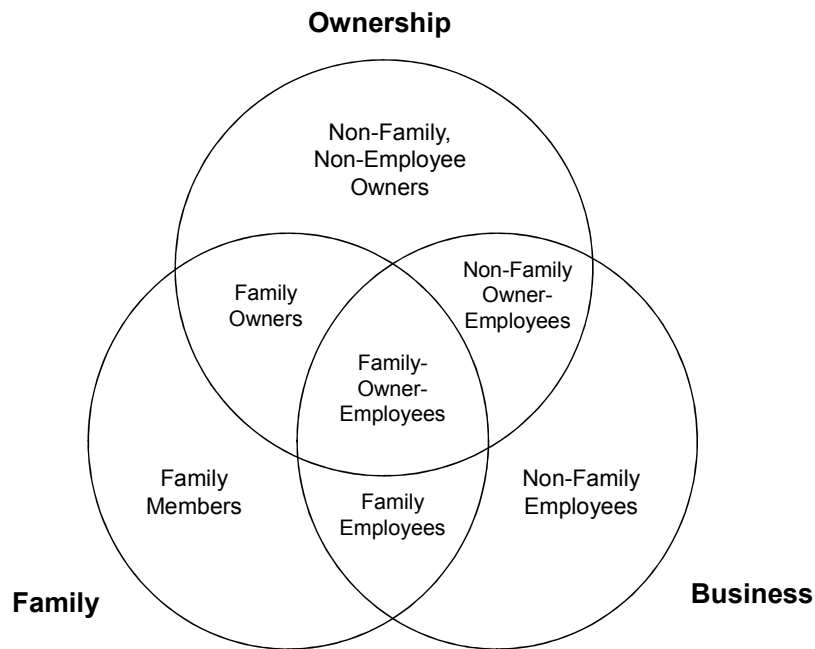


Figure 3.1. Three-Circle Model⁵³

Wirth regard to the model's application for this study, the circles represent the stakeholders that might influence succession, and accordingly demarcate the relevant fields in family firm succession. Based on the three-circle model, which applies the systems theory approach⁵⁴, a family business is defined as a system of three overlapping and at the same time independent subsystems representing *business*⁵⁵, *ownership*, and the *family* (Gersick et al., 1997, pp. 5–6). It is assumed that the degree of interaction between the circles may vary over time in dependence on the degree of involvement of the stakeholders.⁵⁶ Gersick et al. (1997) describe the three-circle model as “[...] a very useful tool for understanding the source of interpersonal conflicts, role dilemmas, priorities, and boundaries in family firms” (p. 7). Accordingly, the model reveals potential areas within which for instance interpersonal conflicts (e.g., sibling rivalry) or role dilemmas (e.g., succession dilemma) may arise, and furthermore might reveal priorities and boundaries for instance with regard to the successor(s) selection. In consequence, by researching succession holistically, all three subsystems are discussed within the interviews.

these systems from a dualistic view (i.e., focusing on one system at the expense of the other) as well as from a comprehensive view (i.e., none of the systems violate each other).

⁵³ Tagiuri & Davis (1982).

⁵⁴ Poza (2010, p. 8) accordingly names the model *The Systems Theory Model of Family Business*.

⁵⁵ Some researchers label the subsystem business by the term management or company (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996).

⁵⁶ In this context, Habbershon, Williams, & MacMillan (2003, p. 453) describe a static degree of interaction that is pictured by the overlapping circles, which lead to a tradeoff approach to strategy. This position should not be questioned; however, the description above aims at giving more weight to the changing roles that accompany succession. In this context, see Muske & Fitzgerald (2006, p. 195).

As illustrated, several stakeholders can be involved in the family firm and can thereby be involved in the succession process. Regarding this research project, the focus is set on siblings as potential successors in the family firm. In this regard, several scenarios are imaginable. With regard to the circle model, the offspring can move from being solely a family member to become a working and owning family member. A second possibility is the development from being a working family member to becoming a working and owning family member. The third possibility is the change from a family member and owner to the leading position as a family member, owner, and manager of the business. Accordingly, each stakeholder can be illustrated in these subsystems. The system's complexity results from its interrelated subsystems, whose goals and objectives might diverge. In consequence, stakeholders that belong to two subsystems might have to find a balanced solution to serve their position and responsibility within each sector.

Regarding the subsystem *family*, it is expected that children which grow up in an entrepreneurial family are exposed to familial values and attitudes that are influenced by the business environment (cf. Halter & Schröder, 2012, pp. 41–42). Furthermore, it is beyond dispute that the family is an important factor that may enable a family firm to survive due to close family ties (Dyer & Handler, 1994). It should also be pointed out, that many entrepreneurial families are involved in multiple businesses and thereby handle a dynamic portfolio of firms and not only one single firm (Sieger & Zellweger, 2012, p. 19).⁵⁷ In particular, more than half of the entrepreneurial families participating in the research by Sieger and Zellweger (2012, p. 19) reported to own three to ten family firms, whereas about one third of the entrepreneurial families was limited to only one company. These remarks reemphasise the importance of studying succession holistically, meaning in consideration of all three subsystems. Regarding succession as to the subsystems *ownership* and *business*, research by Christen et al. (2013, p. 32) revealed that if ownership is transferred before the management responsibilities are, the management is usually handed over one or two years later, whereas vice versa, longer time periods were identified. Concerning the offspring's overlapping roles regarding succession, LeMar (2001, p. 131) remarks that children of entrepreneurial families are often already perceived as successor(s) by the employees and states that it is more likely that an offspring is interested in taking over the business, if he/she could

⁵⁷ The research by Sieger & Zellweger (2012, p. 19) revealed that entrepreneurial families are on average involved in almost ten companies, with having 10% of equity at the minimum. However, other than this study, Sieger & Zellweger used the definition of an extended family to define entrepreneurial families. Furthermore, the analysis by Sieger & Zellweger is based on German, Austrian, and Swiss data.

develop his/her individual personality without strong guidance from their parents.⁵⁸ This remark by LeMar also implies how individuals are perceived differently, depending on the specific subsystem. An offspring is regarded as son, daughter, brother or sister in the family environment and is seen as junior CEO in the business environment. In this respect, if parents do not provide their children the necessary space to develop their own identity and expect them to take over the family business, the child can be stranded in a dilemma. In addition the family members' roles change over time and eventually in close relationship with the family firm's life cycle, which is in turn related to succession. Accordingly, in the subsection to follow, relevant life cycle considerations are presented.

3.2.3 Life Cycles

Every family firm goes through different developmental stages, whereby these life cycles are closely intertwined with succession. In addition, a family firm having more than 20 employees, on average employs more than 3.5 family members (Muske & Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 194). Therefrom can be assumed, that as the family firm follows its own life cycle, on the family side, more than one life cycle should be aligned with the one the family firm follows. By transforming the three-circle model, Gersick et al. (1997, pp. 60–61) developed the three-dimensional *Developmental Model* that specifically discusses the life cycles of the stakeholders, which were identified in the previous subsection (i.e., ownership, business, and family). As these dimensions are relevant for this research, each component is briefly discussed.

The ownership structure of a family firm may or may not change over time, depending on the type of succession. In this context, it is conceivable that the owner(s) change(s), but the ownership structure remains. Gersick et al. (1997) emphasise, that “[w]ith each change in the ownership structure, there are corresponding changes in the dynamics of the business and the family, the level of power held by employed and nonemployed shareholders, and the financial demands placed on the business” (pp. 30–31). This remark again confirms the interrelatedness between the family, the ownership, and the business system. In the following, Gersick et al.'s developmental dimensions are discussed. Gersick et al. (p. 31) summarise three types of ownership structures, which are (1) Controlling Owner (i.e., a company controlled by a single owner), (2) Sibling Partnership (i.e., a company controlled by a pair or group of siblings), and (3) Cousin

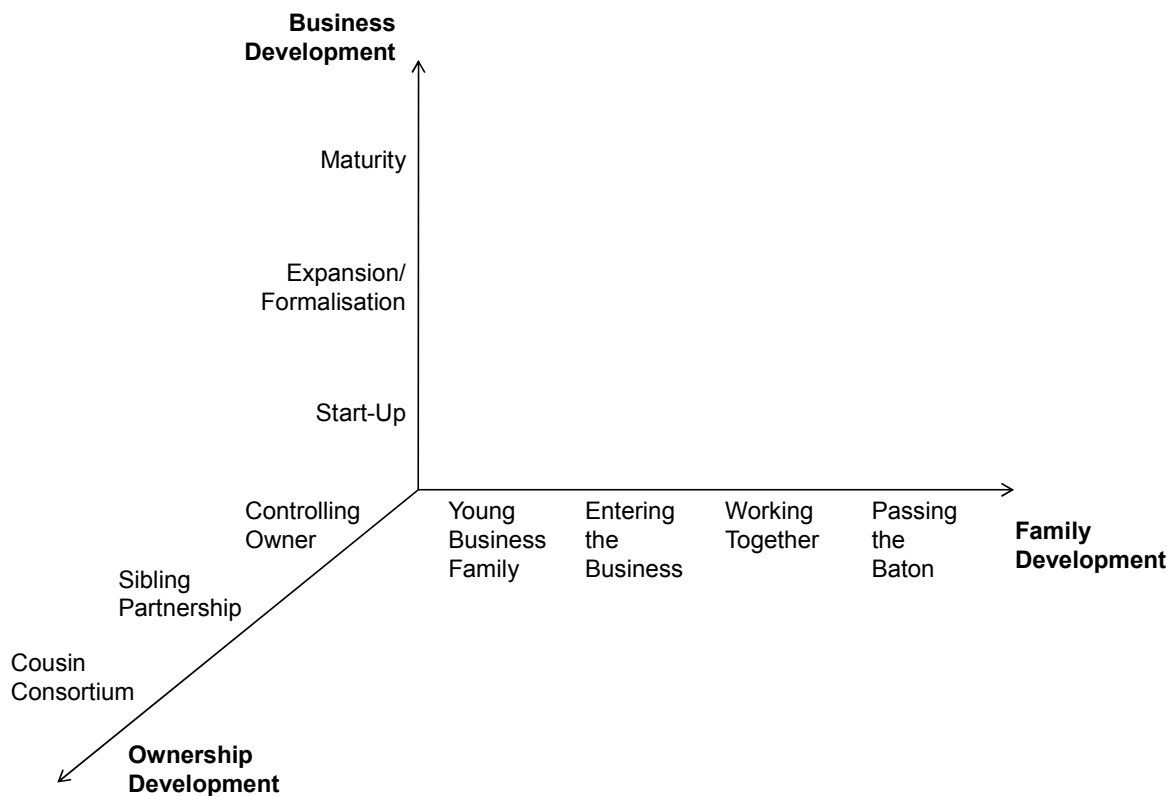
⁵⁸ Cf. Halter & Schröder (2012, p. 41).

Consortium (i.e., a company controlled by a pair or a group of cousins).⁵⁹ Within the scope of this research a family firm's potential development from an owner-managed company into a sibling partnership is of particular interest as if multiple potential successors are available, within the course of this transitional stage, it has to be resolved if only one child intends to enter the family firm or if more than one child intends to enter the family firm. With regard to a sibling partnership, it has to be pointed out, that siblings do not necessarily have to have an equal amount of shares. A sibling partnership with one principle shareholder is likewise conceivable. Furthermore, it has to be mentioned, that a sibling partnership does not require an active involvement in the business by each sibling (cf. Gersick et al., 1997, p. 39). Regarding the family side, a planned sibling partnership would provide a common socialisation process to all siblings (García-Álvarez, López-Sintas, & Saldaña Gonzalvo, 2002, p. 191). With regard to ownership structures, it should be mentioned, that in general, the more a family firm develops along Gersick et al.'s (1997) model, namely from a controlling ownership structure over a siblings partnership to a cousin consortium, the more dispersed the ownership structure of the family firm becomes.⁶⁰ In addition, it has to be mentioned, that the transition stages between the different stages throughout the model represent the most critical as well as challenging situations (Gersick et al., 1999, p. 287), which thereby includes succession. With regard to the developmental dimension *family*, the researchers reviewed various individual adult development concepts and family life cycle models and thereupon developed a model that specifically suited entrepreneurial families. According to Gersick et al. (1999, p. 288), an entrepreneurial family's developmental stages are (1) Young Business Family, (2) Entering the Business, (3) Working Together, and (4) Passing the Baton. Just as a family develops, so a family firm develops. Gersick et al. (1997, p. 106) define the developmental stages of the *business* component as (1) Start-Up, (2) Expansion/Formalisation, and (3) Maturity. Following Gersick et al. (1999, p. 106), maturity is reached, when the evolution of both the organisational structure as well as key products have slowed down. The business component might be of interest within the scope of this study, in the sense that some developmental stage of a business might be more attractive to an offspring with regard to his/her career

⁵⁹ Ward (2004, p. 31) proposes the three distinct stages *Owner-Managed*, *Sibling Partnership*, and *Cousin Collaboration*. For further variations for each stage clarifying different ownership motivations and/or different leadership and governance attitudes, see Ward (2004, p. 33).

⁶⁰ Acc. to Gersick et al. (1999, p. 288) the types of ownership transition are (1) Recycles (i.e., changing individuals but retaining the same ownership structure), (2) Devolutionary Transitions (i.e., changing into a less complex ownership structure, e.g., from a cousin consortium to a controlling ownership), and (3) Evolutionary Transitions (i.e., changing into a more complex ownership structure, e.g. from a controlling owner to a sibling partnership).

decision towards succession. However, each developmental stage has its particular opportunities and threats to handle with. Nevertheless, as the developmental dimension *business* is of minor importance for this study, it is not further commented. Figure 3.2 depicts the Developmental Model.



*Figure 3.2. The Developmental Model*⁶¹

Rutherford, Muse, and Oswald (2006) tested Gersick et al.'s (1997) Developmental Model for the first time empirically and identified key groups of variables, which may contribute to explaining family firm development. Based on a hierarchical regression analysis, the researchers studied 934 family firms and identified characteristics for each of Gersick et al.'s (1997) developmental dimensions. Rutherford et al. came to the conclusion that the Developmental Model provides a sound foundation for family firm classification. In addition, the researchers augment the initial model and provide an expanded model, which might be superimposed on the original one (see Rutherford et al., 2006, p. 329). However, as the model by Gersick et al. (1997, 1999) fits to portray the complexity by which this study is affected, the model by Rutherford et al. is not further discussed.

⁶¹ Based on Gersick et al. (1997); adapted from Gersick et al. (1999, p. 288).

3.2.4 Family Firm Succession in Switzerland

For a long time, only a small amount of research particularly addressed the Swiss SME and family firm environment (Frey, Halter, & Zellweger, 2004). This gap has been approached with recent studies in various research directions, which provides up-to-date research findings.⁶² Nevertheless, due to the priorly missing data, oftentimes no longitudinal comparisons can be made. As family firms represent about 78% of Swiss SMEs (Christen et al., 2013, p. 24)⁶³, family firm succession is important for the economy's welfare, for securing jobs, and in turn for the Swiss population's welfare. In consequence, the family firms' continuity is a vital topic to be researched. Since these aspects were already discussed with regard to the study's overall relevance (see Section 1.4), these considerations are not repeated.

Over time, five major forms of family firm succession developed, which are internal succession, external succession, going public, a trust/foundation, or liquidation. With regard to family firm succession, Gulbrandsen (2005, p. 73) notes that the option of an external manager should at least be discussed and that succession should be targeted at a time when the family firm is in a good condition. However, within the context of this study, only internal succession in the form of ownership and management succession is studied. As discussed, the stand-alone as well as overlapping subsystems *family*, *business*, and *ownership* develop alongside, whereby succession often initialises the next developmental stages. Research by Christen et al. (2013, p. 18) revealed that 22% of Swiss SMEs plan an ownership succession and 25% of Swiss SMEs plan a management succession within the time period from 2013 to 2018. As a consequence, ownership succession affects 70,900 companies, whereas management succession affects 81,200 companies within the same time frame. The survey also revealed that for family firms in terms of planned ownership transfer as well as in terms of planned management transfer – in both scenarios more than 40% – the family buy-out (FBO) is considerably the most preferred type of succession (cf. Christen et al, 2013, p. 26).⁶⁴ With regard to planned ownership succession, a management buy-in (MBI) represents the second most preferred solution, and a management buy-out (MBO) is in third place

⁶² See e.g., Bergmann, Fueglistaller, & Benz (2014), Christen et al. (2013), Fueglistaller, Fust, Brunner, & Althaus (2013), Halter, Schrettle, & Baldegger (2009), Sieger et al., (2014a).

⁶³ Previous research stated that family firms accounted for 88,14% of the Swiss economy (Frey et al., 2004, p. 5), and 87,92% as proportion of Swiss SMEs. The same definition was applied for both studies. A further decline is not expected by the researchers (Christen et al., 2013, pp. 24–25).

⁶⁴ N = 1,507; multiple answers possible.

(Christen et al., 2013, p. 26).⁶⁵ In respect of management succession, the preference is vice versa with the MBO in second place, followed by the MBI. However, reality shows that with 41% of responses, the FBO almost lies level with the MBI representing 40% – ahead of the MBO with 19% (Christen et al., 2013, p. 28).⁶⁶ In this context, the biggest variance as to completed versus planned succession arrangements, occurred for the MBI with 27% planned MBIs and 40% completed MBIs.⁶⁷ Table 3.1 presents the macroeconomic significance of succession in Switzerland with data for micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises and a succession outlook for the time period from 2013 to 2018.

Table 3.1. Macroeconomic Significance of Succession in Switzerland 2013–2018⁶⁸

	SMEs			Employees		
	Absolute Figures	SMEs affected by succession within 2013–2018		Absolute Figures	Employees affected by succession within 2013–2018	
		Ownership Succession	Management Succession		Ownership Succession	Management Succession
Company Size						
0–9	277,100	51,000 (18.4%)	55,100 (19.9%)	714,841	131,700 (18.4%)	142,000 (19.9%)
10–49	35,700	9,000 (25.2%)	10,000 (28.0%)	699,054	175,700 (25.1%)	194,800 (27.9%)
50–249	7,400	1,700 (23.0%)	2,300 (31.1%)	691,081	160,300 (23.2%)	213,700 (30.9%)
SMEs	320,200	70,900 (22.1%)	81,200 (25.4%)	2,104,976	466,000 (22.1%)	533,700 (25.4%)

Moreover, Christen et al.'s (2013, p. 27) research revealed that 90% of family firm entrepreneurs would encourage their offspring to become entrepreneurs themselves. Despite this parental support and although the FBO is the most preferred succession solution, the offspring's unwillingness is the most common reason that inhibits a family buy-out (23%), followed by the reason that the offspring are too young (18%), an external person is more suitable (15%), or that the entrepreneur is childless (13%)

⁶⁵ FBO stands for the sale of the company to one or several family members. MBO stands for the sale of the company to one or several senior employees. MBI stands for the sale of the company to an individual or to a legal entity that is not related to the company or stakeholders. (cf. Christen et al., 2013, p. 26)

⁶⁶ The proportion of FBOs stayed almost constant in comparison to the evaluation of 2009 (Christen et al., 2013, p. 28).

⁶⁷ Cf. Christen et al. (2013, p. 28) Figure 35.

⁶⁸ Based on Christen et al. (2013, p. 19). Original data was provided by the SFSO and by Credit Suisse. Data is based on full-time equivalents. Recent publications by the SFSO indicate a higher amount of micro firms, due to a change in the data collection methods.

(Christen et al, 2013, p. 27).⁶⁹ In this context, the predecessor's three primary reasons for a handover were stated as with 61% *Retirement and health*, with 13% *Desire for more leisure time*, and with 12% *Company financial problems* (Christen et al., 2013, p. 29).⁷⁰ On the successors' side regarding FBO succession, Christen et al.'s (2013, p. 29) study shows that the *Opportunity for self-fulfilment* is by far a bigger motivation for a takeover of the family firm (67%), than *Social pressure* (14%), or *Financial attractiveness* (11%).⁷¹ In comparison, with 83% for MBI and 80% for MBO succession, the opportunity for self-fulfilment as successor motivation is even bigger for both of these types of succession than for FBO (67%) succession. In addition, the open responses revealed for instance the *commitment to the company*, the *continuation of the company*, or the *general determination to become an entrepreneur* as further motivations for succession (Christen et al., 2013, p. 30).

This research intends to study in first place medium-sized family firms and only in second place large family firms. According to the definition provided by the European Commission (2005, p. 14)⁷² these categories both comprise firms having at least 50 employees. Based on this definition, more than 8,100 Swiss companies belong to one of the two categories, which in turn corresponds to around 4,800 companies in this study's research area.⁷³ The limitation regarding medium-sized and large firms has been made since it is assumed that these firms are more attractive for an offspring and at the same time, this constraint is assumed to provide a business environment that provides more than one offspring the possibility to enter the family firm (see Subsection 4.2.5.1). With regard to the research outlined, the amount of potential successors from within the family is of specific interest. In this context, Christen et al. (2013, p. 31) revealed that in 43% of FBOs, only one candidate from within the family was available. The absence of other potential successors further supports carrying out this project. However, the study also revealed that with 83%, the handover to a single child occurred most frequently and in this context, companies were handed over mostly to sons (Christen et al., 2013, p. 28).

⁶⁹ N = 1,507; 31% of participants did not respond to the question.

⁷⁰ N = 523; multiple answers possible. Answers in order of priority: (1) Retirement and health, (2) Desire for more leisure time, (3) Company financial problems, (4) Opportunity to sell the company for a good price, (5) Desire for new professional challenges, (6) Social pressure by spouse or children, (7) Death of entrepreneur, and (7) Unknown or no response. (Christen et al., 2013, p. 29)

⁷¹ N = 523; multiple answers possible.

⁷² See Subsection 4.2.5.1, Table 4.1 on p. 95.

⁷³ Calculation is based on data provided by the SFSO (2013b). The data are tentative data for the 2011 Swiss business census. The related total number of persons employed in Switzerland in 2011 was 4,202,884 and the total number of persons employed in the research area in 2011 was 2,432,247 (incl. part-time employees).

Career choice and therewith related succession intentions have been researched for instance by Schröder, Schmitt-Rodermund, and Arnaud (2011) or by Zellweger, Sieger, and Halter (2011). In this context, the *Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey* (GUESSS) particularly focused on students' entrepreneurial intentions worldwide. The survey revealed that 21.8% of students polled in Switzerland have a family firm background (Sieger, Baldegger, & Fueglistaller, 2014a, p. 22). However, with regard to these students' succession intentions, the survey revealed that immediately after finishing their studies, 86% of the students prefer a career entry as an employee, whereas about 2% aim at founding their own company, and about 0.6% have succession intentions of which in turn 0.4% aim at succession within the family firm (Sieger et al., 2014a, p. 12). This distribution shifts when questioning the students' career intentions five years from graduation, which indicate that 60.2% of the students then intend to pursue a career as an employee, 17.7% intend to found their own business, and 3.9% intend to take over an existing company.⁷⁴ From these students that intended succession, the intention to take over a company other than their own family's firm was measured with 2.3% and accordingly 1.6% of the respondents aimed at taking over the family firm (Sieger et al., 2014a, p. 12). These data for family firm succession represents the current mismatch between family firms that are facing succession (see Table 3.1 on p. 46 for SMEs) in relation to the next generation's willingness to succeed. In this context it should be mentioned, that succession not only depends on the offspring's career intention and later career decision, but also on the respective stakeholders' decision. This study focuses on succession in association with sibling research, in particular in relation to birth order research, wherefore this aspect is discussed in the following subsection.

3.2.5 Primogeniture

Successor selection is essential to sustain the family firm. One way of successor selection – in the sense of a predefined rule – is primogeniture, which is defined as first, “the state of being the firstborn of the children of the same parents”, and second, “an exclusive right of inheritance belonging to the eldest son” (Primogeniture, n.d., paras. 1–2), which may be given by law or custom. Primogeniture can therefore be regarded as an inner-family or inner-family firm rule that regulates the successor selection. As per definition, primogeniture is related to birth order and should therefore be discussed due to this study's particular focus on birth order and succession.

⁷⁴ N = 7,419; with 21.1%, most of the participants studied Business/Management (Sieger et al., 2014a, pp. 8–10).

King (2003, p. 174) points out that the successor selection among siblings is often based on non-relevant factors and thereby names the age of the siblings, birth order, gender, and the quality of the relationships between the siblings and other family members. In this respect, primogeniture has been discussed for instance by Vera and Dean (2005), Haberman and Danes (2007), or Nicholson (2008). Other research (e.g., Dumas, 1992, 1998) particularly focuses on the role of the female CEO, which again implies that primogeniture generally not only favours firstborns, but also male offspring. Accordingly, primogeniture terms the prevailing assumption that the eldest son or only sons are considered for family firm succession (cf. Barnes, 1988, p. 10). By hanging on to the approach of primogeniture, selection criteria such as knowledge and abilities are left out, since no real selection process is conducted. This proceeding might minimise conflict among family members, but at the same time – as it takes the option for succession from all successive offspring – may also cause conflict. Similarly, but in the context of sustaining trust within family firms, Sundaramurthy (2008, p. 96) notes that compensation, family firm entry, and succession can be addressed before personal or rational aspects preponderate such decisions and further emphasises that clear policies and guidelines can reduce role ambiguity, manage family members' as well as employees' expectations, and build system trust.

Selecting a successor based on laws or customs instead of choosing the most suitable person based on merit, might lead to a competitive disadvantage of the family firm in comparison to its competitors and in turn might harm the company. In this context and contrary to primogeniture, Barnes (1988, pp. 9–10) researches daughters and younger sons as company CEOs and itemises parental ambivalence, sibling rivalry, and self-esteem as obstacles that CEOs have to face when deciding who will take over the family firm. Barnes found evidence that both daughters and younger sons struggle with self-identity and changing role expectations by the family. According to Barnes, these problems arise due to two incongruent hierarchies – first, the inner-family position of the individual and second, the individual's position in the family firm. Referring to role allocation within the family firm, it is assumed that the higher the position in the hierarchy, the better. Barnes therefrom concludes that if, opposed to primogeniture, daughters or younger sons become CEO, incongruence occurred and the established status structures conflict. In addition, Barnes remarks that for family members as well as outsiders it is unclear which of these hierarchies they should rank higher, meaning if for instance the conflict that a younger son is to be regarded as higher ranked in the business or as lower ranked within the family – here only with regard to the birth order position in comparison to the eldest son. Barnes (p. 20) comes to the

conclusion that if daughters or younger sons become CEO, they become key persons within incongruent hierarchies, which may result in discomfort, tension, as well as agony not only for the siblings, but for all family members. According to Barnes, this imbalance – which Barnes ascribes as originating from structural problems – can be resolved by day-to-day actions and behaviour to adjust these hierarchies and to align expectations and perception with the new order. For the daughter or younger son, this means getting recognition as a mature and competent adult, as a person of authority, as well as meaning a new or modified identity and the reworking of existing relationships, by which high-status friends might help (Barnes, 1988, p. 20). The discussion of primogeniture by Barnes was selected to be cited in detail, as it describes the differing roles within the family and the family firm subsystems, which with regard to this study might (1) not follow the same hierarchy, and (2) change because of succession. By mentioning sibling rivalry, Barnes (p. 9) also links family firm succession to sibling research. In this context, primogeniture can become a means that either avoids sibling rivalry or might foster sibling rivalry based on birth order and gender preferences.

With reference to Darwinian theory, Sulloway (1996, p. 54; cf. Darwin, 1859, 2013) writes that primogeniture represents anti-Darwinian behaviour and that it is unlikely that primogeniture will result in the best possible outcome. The link between primogeniture and Darwinian theory is important to be made for this study, since Sulloway's Family Niche Model – which is the reference model in this study – is built upon Darwinian theory. Sulloway further points out that Darwin's principles clarify sibling differences within a pair or a group of siblings. These differences among siblings, which represent an essential part of sibling research, and Sulloway's standpoint are discussed in the following section.

3.3 Sibling Research

This section provides an overview on the development of sibling research, in particular birth order research, and presents major findings in the field. By reviewing the literature, the focus is set on research regarding (1) the Family Niche Model (FNM), (2) sibling identification and sibling deidentification, and (3) parent identification and parent deidentification. Since the FNM incorporates previous research findings in birth order research, birth order research is discussed in more detail.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Since the focus is clearly set on the discussion of the FNM, this section does not lay claims on entirely discussing sibling research literature, but on providing an overview about the research findings, that are important for this study's research environment and that contribute to a better understanding of the FNM as the study's main theoretical foundation.

3.3.1 Birth Order and Personality

Birth order can be assessed either as a biological or functional category, whereby biological birth order relates to the actual birth order position obtained at birth and functional birth order relates to the type of environment into which an individual is born.⁷⁶ With respect to research on personality, not only the biological, but also the functional birth order is important, since it affects the interaction between siblings. According to Sulloway (1996, p. 22), family niches are the key to birth order effects, for which reason Sulloway especially focuses his research on functional birth order, although often biological and functional birth order are identical. It has to be considered, that the functional birth order may change, for instance due to adoption or remarriage, whereby the biological birth order is unchangeable. Birth order as a research variable, is a variable that can easily be studied and related data are often collected in surveys (Adams, 1972). In addition, birth order as a research variable incorporates differences such as age, size, power, and privilege, and thereby acts like a proxy for several factors that have to be considered when conducting sibling research (Sulloway, 1996, pp. 21–22).

Research by Alfred Adler:

Birth order research mainly started with the research by Alfred Adler⁷⁷, who later founded the school of *individual psychology*. The beginning of birth order research was mostly driven by the effort to measure the birth order position's influence on personality. In this respect, researchers distinguish between (1) firstborn children (firstborns), middleborn children (middleborns), and lastborn children (lastborns), and/or (2) firstborn children (firstborns) and laterborn children (laterborns).⁷⁸ It was assumed that individuals develop differences in personality, based on their specific birth order position. In this respect, the firstborn – as a couple's first child – obtains a particular role. Due to its single-status, the child gets the whole attention of its parents and other family members. Only with the birth of the second child, the firstborn child has to share their attention. It is said that firstborns prefer conservative theories and

⁷⁶ Sulloway (1996) distinguishes the term *birth order* from the term *birth rank* and classifies birth order as more general. Sulloway uses the term birth order to distinguish firstborns (including only children) from laterborns, whereas Sulloway uses the term birth rank to indicate “[...] specific differences by ordinal position, such as being a first, second, or third child.” (p. 22). This approach implies e.g., that a firstborn, “[...] whose closest siblings are six or more years younger are functionally similar to only children” (Sulloway, 1996, p. 22).

⁷⁷ See Adler (1927, 1928, 1956).

⁷⁸ By applying this categorisation, researchers only distinguish between firstborn children and their younger siblings (i.e., all siblings from the secondborn to the lastborn, which can also be identical). Sulloway (1996) only distinguishes between firstborns and laterborns.

authorities, for example that in their environment everything has to be organised by unchangeable rules. Relative to their siblings, firstborns are often described as being more assertive, ambitious, dominant, or defensive regarding their position. In contrast, a couple's second child (which can be at the same time a lastborn or can become a middleborn) is regarded as being more cooperative than the firstborn, as it has to share the parents' attention from the very beginning. Furthermore, the second child has to compete with its older siblings and tries to be better than its older brother or sister, or otherwise tries to keep up with the older sibling. On the contrary, lastborns have the advantage that their place will not be taken over by another child, while at the same time having one or more sibling(s) from whom they can learn. Furthermore, as the youngest (and at least for some time) the weakest family member, it is not in a competitive position. In this respect, lastborns are assumed to be more creative in finding different ways to distinguish themselves from the older and more experienced sibling(s).⁷⁹

With reference to the Family Niche Model, Sulloway (1996, pp. 55, 467) points at Adler's research and remarks that according to Adler, the firstborn is "dethroned"⁸⁰ by the birth of the second child and as a consequence tries to imitate its parents. If a firstborn fails to regain its powerful standing, Adler claims, he eventually starts to rebel. Relating to Adler's research, it has to be pointed out that his hypotheses can be applied either way. According to Adler, a firstborn can either be conservative or rebellious, and a laterborn either competitive or lazy (cf. Sulloway, 1996, pp. 56–57), which makes Adler's approach rather impossible to be applied for this study. With regard to personality building, environmental factors are crucial to be considered in birth order research (cf. Ernst & Angst, 1983; Schachter, 1982; Sulloway, 1996). With regard to early sibling research, many researchers refer to the works by Helen Koch, who specifically studied the influence of siblings and peers on each other, and published thereupon a series of articles.⁸¹ In this context, it should be mentioned that Sulloway, the developer of the Family Niche Model also refers to the interaction effects studied by Koch.⁸² In this respect, Sulloway (1996) especially mentions that Koch's research showed that in relation to laterborns, "[...] firstborns were judged to

⁷⁹ Cf. Adler (1956), Brock & Becker (1965), Miller & Zimbardo (1966), Stein (n.d.), Sulloway (1996, p. xiv), Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg (1970).

⁸⁰ Cf. Adler (1927, 1928, 1956). See also Ernst & Angst (1983, pp. 85–87). The expert interviews within the scope of the pre-study revealed that this trauma is less present today, since parents support their children more individually.

⁸¹ See e.g., Koch (1956a, 1956b, 1956c, 1957, 1960).

⁸² It is important to discuss Koch's research from Sulloway's point of view, since he incorporated Koch's findings when developing the Family Niche Model.

be more self-confident, competitive, insistent on rights, emotionally intense, and upset by defeat” (pp. 75–76). Sulloway (p. 76) further cites that Koch summarised these personality differences that despite their self-confidence, firstborns were also judged as being anxious, intense, concerned about status as well as on the defensive. In this context has to be pointed out that Koch’s study researched children. In this respect, Sutton-Smith and Rosenberg (1970) state that personality development not only occurs during childhood but also later.⁸³ It is important to mention that “[m]uch of the continuing influence which molds personality comes not from parents but from siblings acting as role models for, or competitors with, each other” (Adams, 1972, p. 416), which points to the importance of sibling interaction on personality development. Koch’s research revealed 31 significant interaction effects for birth order and further substantiated the research on the influence of birth order on personality. With regard to Koch’s findings, Sulloway (p. 75) claims that these interaction effects are the reason why the influence of birth order was consistently underestimated in the literature. Sulloway (p. 79) further points out that Koch’s research showed that besides gender, the age gaps between the siblings as well as the siblings’ sex are the two most common causes for interaction effects. According to Sulloway (p. 79), these and other variables define a child’s family niche.

Shared and Nonshared Environment:

The term shared environment is a synonym for the family environment, whereby nonshared⁸⁴ environment stands for the social environment in which an individual grows up. Both of them influence personality development of individuals, however in different ways and different dimensions. In this context, research revealed that siblings that grew up within the same family are almost not more similar in their personalities than individuals from different families.⁸⁵ Although the family influence is perceived as being similar, the familial environment may change over time, for example due to changing financial conditions. In this regard, a distinction has to be made between resemblance that originates from nurture and resemblance that originates from nature. With regard to genetically determined resemblance, on average, siblings share about

⁸³ Cf. Adams (1972, p. 416).

⁸⁴ Rowe & Plomin (1981) discuss the importance of nonshared environmental influences in behavioural development and describe *nonshared influences* as influences “[...] that make siblings different from one another” (p. 517).

⁸⁵ Cf. Dunn & Plomin (1991), Loehlin (1992), Plomin (2011), Plomin, Chipuer, & Neiderhiser (1994), Plomin & Daniels (1987), Sulloway (1996).

half of their genes⁸⁶ (Sulloway, 1996, pp. 60, 86). Further, it has been proven that the higher similarity in personalities of biological siblings than of adoptees originates from shared genes and not from the shared family environment (Sulloway, 1996, p. 83). Due to individual family experiences, individuals develop a behavioural repertoire that is most relevant to this individual's life, hence, genetics as well as the particular environment influence personality development (Sulloway, 1996, p. 88). In addition, it has to be pointed out that family life only shapes general trends as to an individual's personality development and not details (Sulloway, 1996, p. xvi). Moreover, research showed that the shared environment accounts for about 7% of variance in personality (cf. Bouchard, 1994). It can be concluded, that the influence of the nonshared environment on siblings is bigger than the influence of the shared environment.

In addition, environmental influences on personality development are subdividable into chance experiences of which many arise outside the family (e.g., at school) and systematic experiences of which most arise within the family (Sulloway, 1996, pp. 21, 89). Sulloway (1996) discusses systematic experiences based on a Darwinian approach and states that "[...] one would expect systematic experiences, especially those occurring within kin groups, to be more important for personality development than idiosyncratic influences" (p. 90).⁸⁷ Furthermore, Sulloway (p. 90) declares that although the actual level of influence resulting from systematic experiences as opposed to chance events is unclear, his findings confirm the importance of systematic experiences as to personality development. Considering that the actual degree of influence from chance experiences and systematic experiences is not conclusively researched, it can only be summarised that some behaviour is determined, while other behaviour is not.

Since the shared and the nonshared environment are both important for personality development, this study incorporates interview questions regarding the shared as well as the nonshared environment's influence on the career choice towards succession in the family firm. However, since the nonshared environment is more difficult to be documented as its influence occurs differently within the family (cf. Sulloway, 2007b, p. 165) this aspect is only marginally taken into account to provide a comprehensive analysis. The study's main focus is on analysing the offspring's shared environment.

⁸⁶ Sulloway (1996) refers to Wright (1994) and remarks that "[s]iblings share much more than half of their genes with one another (as well as with other members of the species). On average, relatively *novel* genes will reside in half of all siblings. In dealing with the evolution of new behaviors or traits, these novel genes are the ones that generally matter (Wright 1994:158)" (p. 476).

⁸⁷ Sulloway (1996) refers to *systematic experiences* in the way of regularly recurring events "[...] as a result of attributes within individuals or their local environments" (p. 90).

Critique on Birth Order Research:

In 1983, Ernst and Angst compiled an extensive review of birth order-related literature from 1946 to 1980. During that time, the major focus was still on research regarding the effect of the birth order position on personality. The two Swiss researchers analysed birth order studies and concluded, that the findings regarding birth order effects cannot be confirmed. According to Ernst and Angst (1983, p. 128), previous research lacked methodological correctness and did not control for relevant background factors, such as sibship size⁸⁸ or social class. In addition, the sample sizes of many studies were regarded as being insufficient. Over time, the findings by Ernst and Angst have been approved by researchers.⁸⁹ In 1984, birth order research had almost come to an end. In response to Ernst and Angst's analysis, Sulloway (1996, cf. p. 49) collected and analysed his own data on all the variables considered by the two psychologists as being important confounders regarding birth order research. Sulloway defines sibship size as the most crucial one of the tested confounding variables, whereby family size could not be identified as a confounding factor (Sulloway, 1996, p. 49). Resulting from Ernst and Angst's analysis, it was unclear to what extent and also when birth order affects an individual's personality and how strong the impact of background factors is. Nevertheless, it is beyond dispute that additional background factors have to be taken into account when studying siblings. Since the findings are contradictory, this study does not concentrate on researching the personality of individuals but on how they find their position within the family firm. Based on their analysis, Ernst and Angst (p. 3) summarised three methods for birth order research as follows: (1) Unrelated individuals to whom a variable pertains are compared with a control group, birth order being the dependent variable, (2) unrelated individuals of different birth order are compared for a variable, with birth order as the independent variable, (3) comparison of siblings within the same sibship by either method.

With regard to this research project, the third method had to be taken into account. However, a real comparison within the sibships cannot be conducted, since it was not possible to interview full sibships. Nevertheless, this aspect is taken on again in the cross-case analysis, in which the sibship size can be regarded as a moderating variable. By comparing siblings within the same sibship, the influence of background factors

⁸⁸ The terms *sibship* and *sibship size* are used interchangeably to indicate the number of children in a family. This approach is in line with general sibling research literature. Sulloway (1996, p. 22) explicitly favours using the term *sibship size* instead of using the term *family size*.

⁸⁹ Cf. Schooler (1972).

such as social class can be minimised.⁹⁰ This research approach is regarded as the most adequate, since it excludes between sibship differences (cf. Ernst & Angst, 1983, p. 13). According to Ernst and Angst, this research approach is rarely applied due to the difficulties in finding large enough and representative research samples.⁹¹ Since this research does not focus on the effect of birth order on personality, this discussion is disregarded. However, the reasons why children differ from each other are important for this research project, as it is expected to influence the chosen niche within the family.

Meta-Analysis by Frank J. Sulloway:

Based on the research by Ernst and Angst (1983), Sulloway (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of their research to gain statistical power of the research findings. The method of meta-analysis was only in its infancy when Ernst and Angst reviewed the birth order literature and was therefore not applied, although considered (see Ernst & Angst, 1983, p. 3). To reanalyse the literature, Sulloway made use of the Big Five assessment, in order to apply a general taxonomy for the assessment of personality traits. The Big Five assessment groups personality traits into five dimensions, which are (1) extraversion, (2) agreeableness, (3) conscientiousness, (4) neuroticism, and (5) openness to experience. In this respect, Sulloway (p. 70) points out that although birth order literature is consistent with these dimensions, it is not widely acknowledged. Sulloway particularly focuses his study about the influence of birth order on scientific revolution on the fifth dimension, which is *openness to experience*. With regard to Ernst and Angst's survey, Sulloway's meta-analysis revealed that if all birth order-related research findings that lack control for the variables social class or sibship size, 196 controlled studies remained, which involved 120,800 subjects. Sulloway assigned the remaining studies to the Big Five personality dimensions for which each of the studies was most relevant.⁹² Sulloway (p. 72) found that 72 studies displayed significant results, which are consistent with his psychodynamic hypotheses, whereas 14 revealed contrary results, and 110 studies were not statistically significant. Although four of the personality dimensions revealed impressive trends, the dimension

⁹⁰ Social class has to be considered when comparing firstborns and laterborns, as they may be as well of different social classes (Ernst & Angst, 1983, p. 12). If the age gap between the siblings is rather big, a family can turn from a wealthy family into a poor family and vice-versa.

⁹¹ The qualitative research design allows studying pairs or groups of siblings, which would be impossible in a questionnaire-based quantitative survey.

⁹² See also Townsend (2000, p. 143) regarding the actual number of studies, since Sulloway counts research findings.

openness to experience delivered the most convincing results.⁹³ Sulloway's (p. 74) study also revealed that in relation to firstborns, laterborns are more adventurous, non-conforming, as well as unconventional. Subsequently, Sulloway developed the Family Niche Model, which is presented in Subsection 3.3.4.

3.3.2 Sibling Identification and Sibling Deidentification

Although research revealed that siblings have about 50% of genes in common (Kasten, 2003, p. 34; Sulloway, 1996, pp. 60, 86), it is often reported that in fact siblings are very different, for instance in terms of personality, achievements, or preferences – although they grew up within the same family.⁹⁴ Referring to this, research found that children from different families that grew up in comparable environmental conditions have a more similar personality than siblings (Kasten, 2003, p. 34).

One of the first research studies on diversity amongst siblings was conducted by Schachter et al. (1976, 1978). The researchers studied the processes of deidentification and split-parent identification. Deidentification describes the behaviour that siblings try to separate from each other in terms of developing their own identity. This development was found most intense, when the sibship only consisted of boys or girls, and when the age gap between them was small. To study resemblance among siblings, Schachter recommends studying similarities and differences between and within sibling pairs first and then enlarge the research on resemblance aspects (Schachter, 1982, p. 124). In this respect the result of the sibling deidentification phenomenon builds the basis for studying the split-parent identification that is discussed later on (see Subsection 3.3.3). Schachter (1982) studied the phenomenon by studying pairs of siblings in two- and three-child families, focusing on first pairs of children, second pairs of children or jumping pairs of children.⁹⁵ The research revealed that sibling deidentification is significantly higher, if the siblings are of the same sex and the age gap is rather small.

Schachter et al. (1976, 1978) studied sibling deidentification from two perspectives. The first study, studied how undergraduates evaluate their sibling(s) as being similar or different from themselves. In addition, the degree of dissimilarity was assessed by applying a set of semantic differential scales (e.g., developed by Osgood, Suci, &

⁹³ Cf. Sulloway (1996, pp. 68–74).

⁹⁴ E.g., Lalumière, Quinsey, & Craig (1996), Plomin, Asbury, & Dunn (2001), Plomin & Daniels (1987, 2011), Sulloway (1996), and Sulloway & Zweigenhaft (2010).

⁹⁵ In reference to a three-child family, a first pair is a pair of siblings consisting of the firstborn and the secondborn, second pair is a pair of siblings consisting of the secondborn and the lastborn, and a jumping pair of siblings is a pair of siblings consisting of the firstborn and the lastborn.

Tannenbaum, 1957), and a Sibling Polarisation score was developed. The analysis focused on between-pair comparisons in deidentification and within-pair comparisons in deidentification. The data revealed that regarding the between-pair comparison, only the first-pair siblings showed significantly higher frequency of deidentification. For the within-pair comparison, the only variable that significantly influenced deidentification was whether a pair of siblings was of the same or opposite gender. Sibling dissimilarities were identified the greatest for same-sex siblings. In addition, this effect was only proven for the first-pair of the three-child family. The study by Schachter et al. (1978) replicated the main findings of Schachter et al.'s previous study by cross-validation on a younger population and by using other measures. As in the first study undergraduates judged their siblings, in the follow-up study, mothers judged pairs of their own children using same-opposite and alike-different judgments. Schachter et al. (1978) concluded that these results support the psychoanalytic hypothesis that sibling deidentification is a defense against sibling rivalry. However, Schachter et al. (1978, p. 543) consider the mother's potential imposition of deidentification on the children. Table 3.2 summarises the research findings on sibling deidentification, based on the publications by Schachter et al. (1976, 1978) and Schachter (1982).

Table 3.2. Research Findings on Sibling Deidentification^{96, 97}

Reference	Main Findings
Schachter et al. (1976)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significantly higher levels of percentage deidentification for first pairs than for jump pairs and intermediate levels of percentage deidentification for second pairs in between-pair comparisons. Significantly higher deidentification for same-sex than for opposite-sex siblings in within-pair comparisons Research revealed that when siblings are judged as being different, it is meant that siblings polarise on a significantly higher number of personality traits compared to when siblings are judged as being alike.
Schachter et al. (1978)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significantly higher levels of percentage deidentification for first pairs than for jump pairs and intermediate levels of percentage deidentification for second pairs. Higher deidentification for same-sex than for opposite-sex siblings among first pairs. Global judgments covary with the semantic differential polarisation scores. Developmental analysis indicates a linear increment until age 6, when deidentification stabilises at extremely high levels for first pairs. Opposite and different judgments covary.
Schachter (1982)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just like sibling deidentification, also split-parent identification functions as a defense strategy against sibling rivalry

⁹⁶ The term *first pair* refers to three-child sibships and stands for firstborns judging secondborns or secondborns judging firstborns. Likewise, the term *second pair* refers to secondborns judging thirdborns or thirdborns judging secondborns. On the contrary, the term *jump pair* refers to firstborns judging thirdborns or thirdborns judging firstborns and in consequence bypassed middleborn children. (Schachter et al., 1976, p. 419)

⁹⁷ Aka nonadjacent siblings (cf. Sulloway, 1996, p. 96).

By analysing the research by Schachter et al. (1976), the lack of studying full sibships is noticeable. Since the undergraduate study was carried out by means of a questionnaire, only one child out of the sibship was asked about rating its sibling(s). Therefore, a comparison of answers within the same sibship was impossible. Although such a comparison was apparently not intended, this limits the explanatory power of the research findings, and simultaneously its applicability onto other research contexts. To explain the phenomenon of sibling deidentification, Schachter (1982) goes in line with other research that sees the reason for the deidentification process origins in the concept of conflict and defence, meaning that it is a defence strategy in order to avoid sibling rivalry. With regard to Schachter's research, Sulloway (1996) refers to the Darwinian perspective, which claims that the primary reason for the siblings' attempt to diversify is offensive instead of defensive. Sulloway further points out the siblings' ambition to exploit unoccupied niches as to obtain greater parental investment.

In 1985, Schachter and Stone published further research related to sibling deidentification, in which the researchers found that parents see their children as different as the children regard themselves as being different and that this attitude rarely changes. Regarding the outlined research study, this can be interesting when studying the way an offspring finds its niche in the family business. The research by Schachter and Stone may lead to the hypothesis that children see themselves as different which is carried forward by the parents and that the parents support the child accordingly, which can influence its intention towards the business or even the ability to be able to take over the firm. In this context, it could further mean that the parents assist one child inside the family firm and the other outside the family firm or that the parents support both of their children entering the family firm, but in different directions. This procedure would exclude direct competition inside the family, because the siblings would have no reason to compete with each other.

Whiteman and Christiansen (2008) studied the processes of sibling influence in adolescence within 191 two-child families. The participants were asked questions about whether their sibling influenced them. The study used open-ended questions and was analysed by means of coding methods. The analysis revealed that the differentiation influence was found more often for firstborns whereas the phenomena of modeling and modeling plus differentiation were more often for the studied secondborns. However, researchers do not agree on specific variables that are solely responsible for sibling deidentification (Feinberg & Hetherington, 2000). Nevertheless, it can be said that both the shared environment (i.e., the familial environment) and the non-shared environment, influence sibling deidentification. Therefore it is impor-

tant not only to consider the shared environment but also the non-shared environment in the main study.

In the course of time, parenting developed from suppressing individuality between siblings to an environment in which individuality between siblings is tolerated and even fostered. In the past, when parents had less time for their children than today and the older siblings were responsible for the supervision of the younger siblings, conformity and uniformity amongst the siblings was favoured (Kasten, 2003, p. 17). In this respect, older siblings might as well serve as role models for their younger siblings. On the contrary, the younger siblings were expected to be subordinates. In this context, since no specific comparable data for entrepreneurial families is available it has to be questioned if such families have a stronger focus on familial traditions. Therefore it is possible that entrepreneurial families even today show a stronger focus on established traditional behaviour within the family and in business than the families studied in mainstream family research (cf. Expert 2, 2011).

Resulting Research Question:

- How are the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification in entrepreneurial families transferable into the family firm succession context?

3.3.3 Parent Identification and Parent Deidentification

Similar to sibling identification, parent identification describes a child's identification with one of its parents. In contrast, split-parent identification describes a sibling pair's parental identification with one child identifying with their mother and one child identifying with their father (Schachter, 1982, p. 124). Researchers investigated these phenomena in various contexts.⁹⁸ However, Sulloway's (1996) Family Niche Model, which is this study's main theoretical basis, builds on Schachter et al.'s (1976, 1978) and Schachter's (1982) research. Accordingly, identification within the scope of this study is primarily discussed based on this research, with an emphasis on Schachter's research on sibling deidentification and parent identification. With regard to this study, the concept of split-parent identification was not researchable, since only male successors replaced male outgoing CEOs. Accordingly, and in line with the concept of sibling deidentification, the concept of split-parent identification was modified into the concept of parent deidentification. Schachter's (1982) research focused on pairs of

⁹⁸ E.g., Shaw & White (1965) and Granlund & Knowles (1969) who both researched the relationship between child-parent identification and academic underachievement, or Schachter (1985), who researched sibling deidentification in conjunction with split-parent identification in the clinic.

siblings, whereby the siblings' choice was dependent on the family constellation.⁹⁹ More precisely, instead of being dependent on a child-parent dyad, the new setting suggested a family tetrad consisting of two deidentifying siblings that furthermore contrast in their parental identification but build an intrafamilial unit (Schachter, 1982, p. 124). With regard to similarities and differences, the sibling pairs were analysed by means of within-family analyses and between-family analyses.¹⁰⁰

Based on the reanalysis of the preceding studies, Schachter (1982, pp. 129–139) discusses sibling deidentification as a defence against sibling rivalry and therewith introduces the follow-up study's underlying psychoanalytic hypotheses. Schachter's so-called rivalry-defence hypothesis encompasses sibling competition as well as sibling comparison (Schachter, 1982, p. 132). More precisely, Schachter (p. 130) compares sibling deidentification as a defence strategy against sibling rivalry and identification as a defence strategy against child-parent rivalry. Schachter researched sibling deidentification and split-parent identification first among undergraduate college students and second among children rated by mothers. By contrast, this study focuses on young adults and primarily on adults. The concepts are therefore applied to an older age group. Accordingly, as Subsection 3.3.3 discussed sibling identification within the scope of this study, this subsection aims at identifying the successor's main parental identification figure and tries to draw conclusions therefrom regarding their career decision towards succession. Furthermore, this study distinguishes from Schachter's et al.'s (1976, 1978) and Schachter's (1982) research, as it follows a qualitative research design. By applying the concept of parent identification to this study, it investigates (1) if the offspring identifies himself/herself with one or both of the parents, and (2) if the family-related identification can be transferred into the family firm context. If parent identification would be transferred into the family firm context, it might influence succession. It is assumed that if for instance a firstborn identifies with his father it is likely that he will enter the company with the intention of becoming successor. In addition, it is conceivable that a daughter that identifies with her mother, who is responsible for the family firm's bookkeeping, analogically might be interested in taking over the bookkeeping department. By implication, these concepts are used to reveal if identification could lead to a specific position in the family firm later on. Therefrom follows, that this study's focus is on child-parent identification and its transferability into the succession context, and not on gender issues as it is a major focus of

⁹⁹ The data were partly generated from Schachter et al.'s (1976, 1978) data pools (cf. Schachter, 1982, p. 137).

¹⁰⁰ Between-family comparison stands for comparing siblings from different families, whereas within-family comparison stands for comparing siblings of the same family (cf. Paulhus, 2008, p. 204).

Schachter's split-parent identification study. The concept of child-parent deidentification is researched instead as it is the counterpart to child-parent identification. Owing to the qualitative research design, statistically verifiable results are not within this study's bounds of possibility and are not intended. In consequence, and to handle this topic in a similar way to sibling-sibling research in this study, the child-parent relationship is studied as parent identification and parent deidentification, which includes the line of thought of split-parent identification. In this respect, parent identification and parent deidentification are assumed to have an influence on an offspring's career decision towards succession or non-succession. As exemplified, identification is assumed to not only influence the career decision, but also the position an offspring holds after succession. As a result, a direct influence and thereby a direct relationship regarding parental identification and an offspring's career choice of succession is assumed.

Resulting Research Question:

- How are the concepts of parent identification and parent deidentification transferable into the family firm succession context?

3.3.4 Family Niche Model

Based on the literature discussed and a quantitative survey on the effect of birth order and personality¹⁰¹, Sulloway (1996) developed the Family Niche Model (FNM).¹⁰² This concept of family niches¹⁰³ is based on the assumption that an individual's birth order position implies different needs to develop and to find its distinct niche within the family environment. Thus, just as at the beginning of the research in the field of birth order, Sulloway focused his research on the effect of birth order on personality development and thereby personality differences among siblings. More particular, Sulloway bases his research on the dimension *openness to experience* since this is an indicator of scientific innovation. With regard to Sulloway's research on birth order, it is important to mention, that Sulloway does focus on specific birth order positions, but often only distinguishes between firstborns and laterborns. In the following, relevant basic assumptions of the FNM and their application into the family firm succession context are discussed.

¹⁰¹ Sulloway analysed biographical data on more than 6,500 participants. See Sulloway (1996, p. 376).

¹⁰² Since the FNM is extensively discussed in Sulloway's publication *Born To Rebel: Birth Order, Family Dynamics, and Creative Lives*, this publication is the primary source for this section.

¹⁰³ In this context, it is noticeable that when discussing research findings related to split-parent identification, Schachter (1982) once also used the term *niche* to describe that resulting from split-parent identification, both children obtained "[...] a special niche in the family" (p. 148).

Darwinian Principles:

According to Sulloway (1996, p. 57) evolutionary theory provides an answer to why personality development is affected by birth order. Sulloway's Family Niche Model (FNM), correspondingly integrates principles of Darwinian thinking. Table 3.3 presents the Five Principles of Darwinian Evolution, supplemented by the categories *Conflict* and *Evolved Adaptations* as published by Sulloway (1996).

Table 3.3. Five Principles of Darwinian Evolution¹⁰⁴

Principle	Conflict	Evolved Adaptations
CLASSIC PRINCIPLES (CHARLES DARWIN, 1859)		
1. Natural Selection	Organism versus environment	Adaptations for survival
2. Sexual Selection	Between, and within, sexes	Secondary sexual characteristics, mating strategies
RECENT THEORIES (1963 TO THE PRESENT)		
3. Kin Selection	Between nonkin and kin (and among kin, by degree of relatedness)	Altruism and cooperation, parental investment
CONSEQUENCES OF KIN SELECTION: FAMILY DYNAMICS		
4. Parent-Offspring Conflict	Between parents and offspring	Weaning conflicts, infanticide, parental discrimination
5. Sibling Conflict	Between siblings	Sibling rivalry, sibling strategies, sibling differences in personality

As Table 3.3 reveals, natural selection, kin selection, parent-offspring conflict, and sibling conflict might be of importance for this research. In this context, natural selection¹⁰⁵, which is defined as “[t]he process whereby organisms better adapted to their environment tend to survive and produce more offspring” (Natural selection, n.d., para. 1), can be regarded as the underlying assumption for Sulloway's development of the FNM, since all further principles were developed based on this initial approach. Within the family context, natural selection aims at adapting to the family environment in order to survive. Transferred into the family firm context, this research questions if and how offspring specifically adapt to the family firm environment in order to survive also in the family firm.

¹⁰⁴ Sulloway (1996, p. 58).

¹⁰⁵ The theory of natural selection was developed by Charles Darwin, whereby Alfred Russel Wallace is regarded as codiscoverer (cf. Sulloway, 1996, p. 25).

The principle of kin selection is important as it includes conflicts over parental investment (Sulloway, 1996, p. 60). The *Oxford Dictionaries* define kin selection as “[n]atural selection in which an apparently disadvantageous characteristic (especially altruistic behaviour) increases in the population due to increased survival of individuals genetically related to those possessing the characteristic” (Kin selection, n.d., para. 1).¹⁰⁶ The principle was developed by William Hamilton and targets the phenomenon that although natural selection is geared towards an individual’s welfare, which implies an inherently selfish behaviour, organisms occasionally cooperate (cf. Sulloway, 1996, pp. 57–58). Hamilton makes use of genetic research and declares that copies of an altruist’s genes are usually passed on to close kin, which provides benefit to the kin (Sulloway, 1996, p. 58).¹⁰⁷

The fourth principle, the parent-offspring conflict that is developed by Robert Trivers, is based on a cost-benefit approach to the principle of kin selection (Sulloway, 1996, p. 60). The parent-offspring conflict is relevant for this research, as it incorporates parental investment and targets the at times differing opinions between parents and offspring as to the optimal level of parental investment (Sulloway, 1996, p. 60). In this context, Sulloway (1996, p. 60) emphasises that although the parent-offspring conflict and the sibling conflict are biologically inseparable, these principles have also to be seen separately, as the sibling conflict drives the parent-offspring conflict. According to Darwinian thinking, while parents generally propose equal shared resource distribution among their offspring, altruism among the offspring is limited (Sulloway, 1996, p. 60). Therewith related, the potential parental favour of one child over its sibling(s) has to be discussed, even though this treatment might be unintentional. Favouritism, also called parental discrimination, implies that resources are not allocated equally. In line with Darwinian thinking, offspring are sensitive to parental discrimination since if parental investment is insecure, the offspring has to follow alternative options to ensure its survival (Sulloway, 1996, p. 90).¹⁰⁸ One result of parental favouritism might be sibling conflicts, which represent the fifth principle. This chain of thought implies that the parent-offspring conflict and the sibling conflict might mutually influence each other. According to Sulloway (1996, p. 58), the principle of sibling conflict brings on sibling rivalry, sibling strategies, and differences in sibling personalities.

¹⁰⁶ Hamilton thereupon developed the notion of inclusive fitness, which describes the “[a]bility of an individual organism to pass on its genes to the next generation, taking into account the shared genes passed on by the organism’s close relatives” (Inclusive fitness, n.d., para. 1; cf. Sulloway, 1996, p. 58).

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Hamilton (1963).

¹⁰⁸ In this context, Sulloway (1996, p. 93) refers to research findings by Dunn & Plomin (1990) and Plomin & Daniels (1987) and highlights that offspring may not realise different treatment of siblings between families, but may realise different treatment within the family.

Therewith related and following a Darwinian viewpoint, Sulloway (1996) defines personality as “[...] the repertoire of strategies that each individual develops in an effort to survive childhood” (p. 86). With regard to this study, sibling conflicts are essential to be considered, since they might negatively influence the family as well as the family firm.

Sibling competition for parental investment¹⁰⁹:

Competition over scarce familial resources constitutes a fundamental source for sibling differences, which creates sibling rivalries, and in turn results in the phenomenon why siblings develop individual strategies by using individual physical advantages, which again is a competitive advantage compared to its sibling(s) (cf. Sulloway, 1996, p. xiv). Sulloway (1996, pp. 95–104) describes this sibling competition process as action to compete for scarce parental resources. Since more than one child lives in the family, the parents have to divide the resources among them. In turn, the sibling(s) may react with counterstrategies to protect their individual sphere. Personality differences and differences in social behaviour owed to birth order are the consequence of differing sibling strategies when competing for parental investment¹¹⁰ (Sulloway & Zweigenhaft, 2010). In line with the “principle of divergence”, siblings’ differentiation from one another is expected, to minimise competition among the siblings (cf. Sulloway, 1996, p. 85), whereby differentiation is carried out by siblings occupying different niches within the family (Sulloway & Zweigenhaft, 2010). According to Sulloway (1996, p. 105), divergence is adaptive if siblings compete for scarce parental resources, since it (1) minimises direct sibling competition, (2) parental investment tends to be increased, and (3) minimises the offspring’s dependency on its parents (Sulloway, 1996, p. 105).

The main goal and benefit originating from sibling diversification is the likelihood of increased parental investment, whereby the outcome for laterborns is higher, since firstborns are assumed to be favoured and by having the free choice of their family niche. The benefit of diversification for younger siblings is threefold. First, due to their birth order position, laterborns are usually physically and mentally in an inferior position, which can be balanced by developing specific skills in niches other than from the firstborn and thereby sidestep adverse sibling comparisons. Second, a comparison

¹⁰⁹ Sulloway (1999, p. 189) describes parental investment as the parents’ emotional or physical nurturing.

¹¹⁰ The term *parental investment* is used in evolutionary biology and is defined as “[...] any investment by the parent in an individual offspring that increases the offspring’s chance of surviving (and hence reproductive success) at the cost of the parent’s ability to invest in other offspring” (Trivers, 1972, p. 139, emphasis removed).

for parents will become more difficult, and in case of ambiguity, it is expected to work advantageously for the laterborn. Third, the addition that each child contributes to the parents' inclusive fitness is assumed to be proportional to the development of skills, which are not already represented. (Sulloway, 1996, p. 98)

The Concept of Family Niches:

The Family Niche Model (FNM) is derived from the concept of niches, established in ecology, whereupon different species make use of available resources within their particular environments (cf. Sulloway, 1996, p. 21). Within the context of sibling research, this concept takes sibling competition for scarce parental resources as a basis. Thereby, siblings compete with each other to assure physical, emotional, as well as intellectual resources of their parents (Sulloway, 1996, p. 21). Parental investment can occur in different ways, for instance as monetary assistance, emotional support, or in form of an inheritance (e.g., based on primogeniture). In this context, Sulloway mentions that “[...] a propensity for parents to invest wisely in offspring [...]” is innate, “[...] which tends to result in their maximizing their inclusive fitness”, whereby “[c]ulture determines how this goal is fulfilled” (Sulloway, 1996, p. 65).

To maximize parental investment, siblings choose different niches within the family, which make them unique within the family, which implies that the siblings avoid competition with one another. As already indicated in Section 1.1, the firstborn child has the free choice to choose its niche and simultaneously obtains (at least until the second child is born) the full attention of its parents. This can be regarded as a *first-mover advantage* compared to the laterborn sibling(s). Laterborns are, due to their later birth, usually – at least for some time – in an inferior position. As a result, to avoid competition in which they would presumably lose against the firstborn, laterborns strive for their own family niche, in which sibling competition is nonexistent. Sulloway describes the firstborn's unique opportunity of choosing niches, as that “[t]he family niche of firstborns is largely about being the first” and that “[t]o the extent that this niche entails advantages denied to other siblings, firstborns zealously defend their interests” and furthermore “[...] tend to be socially dominant and defensive” (Sulloway, 1996, p. 100). The outcome of the siblings' distinct cultivation of family niches is that differences among siblings are commonplace (Sulloway, 1996, p. 95). The concept of family niches might not only be present during childhood but also during the siblings' business life as potential successor(s) in the family firm. As siblings grow up, they develop unique interests and talents, which let them become increasingly diversified within their niches (Sulloway, 1996, p. 21, cf. p. 105).

Sibling Strategies:

Sulloway (1996, p. 85) claims that siblings are different due to their exemplification of Darwin's *principle of divergence*, in which species diversify as a strategic approach to compete for limited natural resources.¹¹¹ Based on Darwin's theory of natural selection, Sulloway (1996) hypothesises that adapted from its birth order position, each sibling develops individual strategies in order to maximise parental investment in itself. In this context, each sibling occupies its own niche, in order to minimise competition with its sibling(s) as a result to increase parental investment (Sulloway, 1996, pp. 83–118). It can therefrom be reasoned that sibling strategies are related to family structure and in particular to the sibship size – the more children are in one family, the more niches have to be found. This implies that the firstborn has the free choice to choose a niche, whereby laterborns have fewer choices since the older sibling(s) has/have already chosen the same niche or individual niches. If a laterborn intends to avoid sibling competition, he/she has to choose a niche different from the one(s) occupied by its older sibling(s). Therewith related, it should be mentioned that offspring inherit genes to successfully engage in the competition for resources, but no genes as to being a firstborn or a laterborn (Sulloway, 1999, p. 189). In this context, it has to be pointed out that sibling strategies aiming at maximising parental investment are shaped by various variables (Sulloway, 1996, p. xv). According to Sulloway (1996), emergent properties are typically entailed in sibling strategies and the variables “[b]irth order, gender, and temperament all interact to produce personality characteristics that could not be anticipated based on a simple aggregate of these influences” (p. xvi).¹¹² In addition, the shared as well as the nonshared environment are important to be considered regarding personality development (Sulloway, 1999, p. 190; cf. Subsection 3.3.1).

As introduced, siblings occupy different niches, to maximise their individual share of scarce family resources. In this context should be mentioned that the competition for parental investment and thereby the competition for scarce resources is the main cause for sibling rivalry (Sulloway, 1999, p. 190). Even if parents try their best to treat all children equally, parents occasionally favour some of the children, which is the social injustice that is felt most deeply and which can result in undermining of authority and can foster a revolutionary personality (Sulloway, 1996, p. xv). Nevertheless, a rather

¹¹¹ Sulloway (1999, p. 190) refers to William Hamilton's theory and states that sibling competition for limited resources is expected whenever the outcoming benefit is greater than twice the costs.

¹¹² Sulloway (1999) defines personality as “[...] a product of innumerable proximate causes that spur individuals to adapt themselves to the surrounding world” (p. 191).

revolutionary behaviour does not necessarily have to occur, since sibling strategies are to a great extent self-determined, which is a result of voluntary choices, since if siblings wish to pursue other than their typical strategies, they can easily behave accordingly (Sulloway, 1996, pp. xv–xvi, cf. p. 90). Sulloway (1996, p. 54) describes sibling strategies as Darwinian adaptations to enhance parental investment.

Due to the laterborns' time-related disadvantage regarding the choice of free niches, which results from birth order, the developmental challenges of laterborn children are different from those of firstborns, which causes a personality development in a disparate way (Sulloway, 1996, p. 54). Accordingly, children have to choose their individual strategy in relation to their birth order position and at the same time decide whether to choose or avoid competition. Based on Sulloway (1999, p. 190), sibling competition as such does not result in birth order differences in personality. Regarding the relationship between birth order and sibling strategies, Sulloway (1999) states that birth order "[...] provides a powerful proximate (and environmental) source of sibling strategies" (p. 190). Furthermore, with regard to personality and by referring to Darwinian theory, Sulloway (1996, p. 86) describes personality as the catalogue of strategies of which each individual develops the respective appropriate strategy in order to survive childhood. According to Sulloway (2001b, p. 14058), such strategies have a lasting effect on an offspring's personality. Moreover, from sibling strategies follows that siblings develop individual adaptive strategies, which means that an offspring can try to dominate its sibling(s) for instance by reducing its/their demand of family resources and thereby parental investment, whereas the dominated sibling(s) can adopt countermeasures, such as appeasement or rebelliousness, as its/their responding tactic (cf. Sulloway, 1995, 1996). It can be summarised that sibling strategies have to be aligned with an offspring's birth order position and the therefrom resulting circumstances, such as an offspring's physical size. Therefrom follows that, first, beside other influencers, birth order represents a powerful influencer for sibling disparities that contributes to personality (cf. Sulloway, 2001a, p. 39), and second, birth order represents a source of sibling strategies (Sulloway, 1999, p. 190).

Career Strategies:

Just as siblings pursue different strategies in family life, they pursue different strategies regarding their professional life. In this context it is important that natural selection not only occurs during childhood but also later on (Sulloway, 1996,

p. 117).¹¹³ However, siblings tend to show birth order-related differences in adulthood spontaneously and employ such behaviour in situations together with their siblings – since that is where this behaviour originates from – and also when interacting with nonfamily members (cf. Schwarz, 2010; Sulloway, 2000b, p. 197; Sulloway & Zweigenhaft, 2010). In this context, a person’s professional life represents an important part in life in which birth order-related behaviour might also occur. Therewith related, Sulloway researched career strategies in relation to scientific eminence (see Sulloway, 1996, pp. 109–112), and primarily analysed historical data. Sulloway (1996, p. 107) thereby associates the pursuit of multiple disciplines with scientific eminence. More precisely, based on four hypotheses, Sulloway studied careers of scientists as to openness and diversification. The following hypotheses were at the basis of this research: (1) If you are laterborn, diversify. (2) If parents have limited resources, diversify. (3) Diversify in proportion to the number of siblings. (4) Under certain circumstances, disregard the previous three rules and specialise.¹¹⁴ Sulloway tested these hypotheses on career histories of 3,890 scientists with the tendency to specialise or generalise as dependent variable. The study revealed that scientists engage in career strategies that are tailored to the development of family niches, and that the most creative scientists grew up with several siblings, as they had to be creative in finding unoccupied niches (Sulloway, 1996, p. 100). In numbers, 52% of the scientists concentrated their research on one field, 35% contributed significantly in two research fields, 9% in three fields, and only 3% in four fields of scientific research (Sulloway, 1996, p. 106). Furthermore, Sulloway (1996, p. 106) emphasises that Darwin, whom he describes as being very divergent, contributed research in five fields, which makes him a generalist. As the fifth of six children in his family and accordingly a laterborn, Darwin thereby represents an open personality that followed a diversification strategy in his professional life. However, since Sulloway’s study used between-family data, the data only allows making inferences for Darwin’s professional life, not for his private life and his role within the family and the sibship.

As demonstrated by Sulloway’s research, the concept of differing sibling strategies, which represents the Family Niche Model is transferable into the career strategy context. However, Sulloway tested the above listed hypotheses by using historical data, which could mean that this transferability is not existent for current data and thereby the hypotheses’ transferability might be limited. In consequence, the transferability

¹¹³ An individual’s behaviour in adulthood still reflects formative influences from childhood. Nevertheless, to fully express these behavioural dispositions, in general, the respective appropriate situations are needed. (Sulloway, 2001a, p. 39)

¹¹⁴ Sulloway (1996, p. 106). For further information, see Table 3.4 on p. 71.

cannot be taken for granted. This study transfers the concept of family niches into the family firm context and researches the transferability of individual family niches to the business context. As discussed in the context of family niche occupation, the firstborn obtains an advantageous position, resulting from its birth order position. With regard to succession, the firstborn is usually the first one to choose an area of responsibility within the family firm and in consequence, this niche might be taken for the laterborn sibling(s). Hence, a laterborn would have to adapt its career strategy according to the firstborn's or earlierborns' career choice(s) and in case the laterborn wanted to enter the family firm, he/she would have to choose between competing for the same niche or occupying an own niche. Therefore, this study also concentrates on the presumed influence of siblings on each other regarding career options and career choices within the family firm. Regarding the family environment and with regard to Hypothesis 4, Sulloway points out that in any family, an offspring's optimal strategy also partly depends on its sibling's/siblings' strategy/strategies, meaning that for instance the firstborn's strategy influences the secondborn's strategy (Sulloway, 1996, p. 108).

Sulloway's Conclusions:

As discussed, Sulloway builds his research on Darwinian thinking and studies siblings regarding birth order-related and rivalrous behaviour among siblings as well as the siblings' struggle to increase parental investment. In this context it should be pointed out that competition within sibships is not the reason for birth order differences in personality (Sulloway, 2001a, p. 44). However, birth order is one source for sibling strategies since within the family, birth order is correlated with age differences, physical differences, power differences, and differing status' (Sulloway, 2001a, p. 44). To study birth order differences, Sulloway hypothesised how the birth order position determines an individual's openness to novel ideas and tested these hypotheses on biographical and historical data of famous personalities in history (cf. Sulloway, 1996, pp. 105–109). Sulloway then quantified the data and analysed it toward potential behavioural principles regarding scientific revolutions, related to the birth order position of the individual. Among other results, Sulloway's (1996, p. 107) research revealed that laterborn scientists tend to be more diversified compared to earlierborn scientists. Beside birth order, Sulloway points out the need to consider additional factors such as gender, ethnicity, family size, socioeconomic class, relationships with parents, and genetically endowed temperament. Table 3.4 summarises Sulloway's initial hypotheses with the study's research findings.

Table 3.4. Hypotheses for Diversification¹¹⁵

Hypotheses	Explanation
Hypotheses 1: If you are laterborn, diversify	<p>All things being equal, it is wise for laterborns to adopt multiple interests. As a rule, parents invest heavily in eldest children. Whether they invest as much in subsequent offspring may depend on the prospects of a superior “return” on investment. The more talents a laterborn offspring exhibits, the more parents are likely to nurture the most promising ones.</p> <p>> Rule is confirmed. The higher an individual’s birth rank, the more intellectual diversity he or she achieved. Within each family, youngest children tended to be the most diversified individuals.</p>
Hypotheses 2: If parents have limited resources, diversify	<p>Whenever parents are unable to nurture all of their children’s interests and abilities, they are likely to invest more in those offspring who display the greatest talent and zeal. When resources are limited, the benefits of diversification ought to apply to all offspring – firstborns and laterborns alike.</p> <p>> Rule is confirmed. Lower class scientists (incl. firstborns) pursued more interests than upper-class scientists.</p>
Hypotheses 3: Diversify in proportion to the number of your siblings	<p>The same logic that dictates diversification by laterborns, and when family resources are limited, also applies whenever numerous rivals are competing for parental investment.</p> <p>> Rule is confirmed, although the confirmation includes an unanticipated twist. In general, individuals having many siblings were more scientifically diverse than those who had few siblings.</p>
Hypotheses: Under certain circumstances, disregard the previous three rules and specialise	<p>When family resources are limited, it may be wise to consider specialisation. If other siblings are striving to be generalists, specialisation is a “divergent” strategy that may work to one’s advantage. Paradoxically, by demanding less from parents, offspring may end up receiving more. Several conditions favour success with this “contrarian” strategy. First, interests must be chosen very carefully. Second, mastery of these interests should be enhanced by study or practice. Third, specialisation is likely to be a good strategy for enhancing parental investment whenever siblings closest in age have opted for generalist niches.</p> <p>> In any given family, the optimal strategy depends in part on the strategies employed by other offspring. Firstborns typically preempt the best strategy given the amount of available family resources. Firstborn strategies then dictate secondborn strategies, and so on down the line.</p>

According to Sulloway (1996, p. 98) and based on Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection, the primary benefit of sibling deidentification is the likeliness of increasing parental investment. In this context, Sulloway presents three advantages regarding the diversification of younger siblings that are (1) given, differences in age, the laterborn will lag behind its older siblings as to the development of similar skills,

¹¹⁵ Adapted from Sulloway (1996, pp. 105–108), word for word citations.

and thereby aims to minimise adverse comparisons with its older sibling, (2) regarding the fact that siblings differ in their abilities, the parents will find it more difficult to compare the children, and (3) the supplement, which each child contributes to the parents' inclusive fitness will tend to be proportional as to the deployment of skills that are to date not represented within the family.

Sulloway (1996, p. 118) concludes that the childhood as well as the family are central as to human behaviour, since they represent the necessary causal context for these developmental considerations, whereby the childhood represents the search for an inner-family niche. In addition, Sulloway states the differentiation between the siblings, especially for laterborns, as the first rule within a sibship, since sibling diversity is regarded as a testimony for the major role an individual's environment plays regarding personality development. Therefore, personality development is influenced by genetic potentials and an individual's environmental opportunities. Adapted from Darwinian thinking, sibling differentiation avoids competition for scarce resources between the siblings, whereby at the same time, differentiation provides an opportunity to identify unoccupied niches. Sulloway (p. 118) further concludes that sibling divergence is not necessarily aimed at increasing parental resources, and remarks that the overall process of differentiation tends to diversify the division of labour within the family, and furthermore to expose the family members to a wider variety of social and intellectual viewpoints.

With regard to the family firm context, especially the increase regarding division of labour might favour the family. However, this may partly depend on the family firm's size and the therewith related possibility to offer niches to family members. Relatedly, research revealed that within mercantile societies, parents tend to follow the strategy of investing equally in their offspring, whereas in societies where wealth is related to land, primogeniture as inheritance practice has been found frequently (Sulloway, 2001a, pp. 44–45). As to this study and by considering changes in child-rearing over time, an attitude to treat children equally and to invest equally in all offspring is assumed. Nevertheless, Sulloway points out that even if parents treat their offspring equally, sibling competition still influences family life (Sulloway, 2001a, p. 45). Sulloway (2001a, p. 45) further states that the change as to understanding the family as a collection of microenvironments or niches instead of as one single environment has also changed the understanding of how personality develops. Since laterborns can choose between (1) occupying the same niche as a sibling and thereby choosing competition, (2) occupying a free niche or (3) creating a new niche, it is assumed that an offspring can also occupy several niches. This assumption is based upon the under-

standing of the family as a collection of microenvironments or niches. In practice, this might mean a child competing with a sibling in sports might also be active in music, an activity that no other sibling pursues. This assumption implies that in summary children are able to follow different talents, but maybe only to the detriment of one or more single talent(s) since the child's input might be higher. In this context, and since a child can also create new niches it is further assumed that a child is able to develop multiple talents. This assumption is supported by Sulloway's research on scientists, of which some scientists successfully contributed to several fields of research. As discussed, a decision for another niche than that of a sibling implies that the comparison between siblings is aggravated for the parents.

Discussion of the Family Niche Model:

The Family Niche Model (FNM) was published in 1996 and since then the model has been controversially discussed. Sulloway's research was and still is either criticised, due to the analysis of ancient data and for not studying pairs and/or groups of siblings respectively, or praised for his exact and comprehensive analysis and the complexity of his research study, data analysis, and documentation (e.g., J. R. Harris, 2002b; Townsend, 2000).^{116, 117} A clear position regarding these critiques is not made within this study, since it is beyond the scope of this research to solve this controversy. In addition, since this study does not primarily concentrate on the effect of birth order on personality, the critique is irrelevant for the further course of this project. It can be concluded that it is reasonable and interesting to try to adopt the concept of family niches in the family firm succession context. As this project's purpose is to transfer the model's basic assumptions and to study the applicability of the Family Niche Model within the family firm context, no further comments are made on these critiques. Nevertheless, as far as possible criticism is considered in the research design. In this respect, the study does not use any historic data, however instead collects its own primary data in the form of qualitative interview data. In addition, only within-family siblings are studied, so that between-family comparisons as to specific birth order positions are avoided. This is realised by using case study research and in this context analysing each family firm as a single unit of analysis before conducting cross-case analyses to provide summarising research findings. In addition, by studying primarily medium-sized enterprises, a preferably comparable research sample is guaranteed.

¹¹⁶ See e.g., Coles (1997), Falbo (1997), Freese & Powell (1998), Greene (1999), J. R. Harris (2002b), Y. Marshall (1997), McDermott (1997), Mendelsohn (1996), Orzack (1998), Rowe (1997), Simonthon (1997), Sprey (1998), and Townsend (1996, 1997a, 1997b, 2000).

¹¹⁷ Sulloway responded to several of these reviews, see e.g., Sulloway (1998, 2000a, 2000b).

Nonetheless, the family firms operate in very diverse industries, which also makes the sample heterogeneous. The research questions resulting from these considerations are presented in the following paragraph.

Resulting Research Questions:

Related to the discussed phenomena, siblings develop individual strategies to protect their status and thereby their individual place within the family (i.e., the family niche). In this context, the birth order position and the sibship size seem to be the most crucial factors regarding the sibling's strategic choices (Sulloway, 1996, p. 79). In addition, based on Darwinian thinking, the maximisation of parental investment can still be regarded as an overall goal for each of the children. In consequence, the research questions for this section are as follows:

- Are the siblings' family niches transferable into the family firm succession context?
- How should succession be handled within the family firm, if several children as potential successors within the entrepreneurial family are available?

3.4 Theoretical Framework

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013) “[t]he theoretical framework represents and elaborates the relationships among the variables, explains the theory underlying these relations, and describes the nature and direction of the relationships” (p. 77). The theoretical framework thereby represents the foundation upon which the primarily inductive study is based and – through the literature review as a solid basis – identifies and defines the potentially relevant research variables for the research problem under study (cf. Sekaran & Bougie, 2013, pp. 77–78). Related to the study's qualitative nature and the outlined assumptions, Creswell (2013, p. 44) explains that assumptions plus the use of interpretive and theoretical frameworks respectively are at the beginning of qualitative research, as they provide specific information on the research problem.

For the research problem under study, the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification, the concepts of parent identification and parent deidentification, and most importantly the Family Niche Model were identified as the most promising theories to study the presumed relationships. In consequence, this study is built upon these concepts, meaning a focus on sibling-related research variables in the context of

succession in family firms. By connecting theories from sibling research with family firm succession research, this research combines hitherto separate research fields and discusses them interrelatedly. Thus, the independent variables or cause variables *Sibships in Entrepreneurial Families* and *Siblings in Entrepreneurial Families* are assumed to be the presumed causal factors for the dependent variable or effect variable *Succession in Family Firms*. The theoretical framework is presented in Figure 3.3.

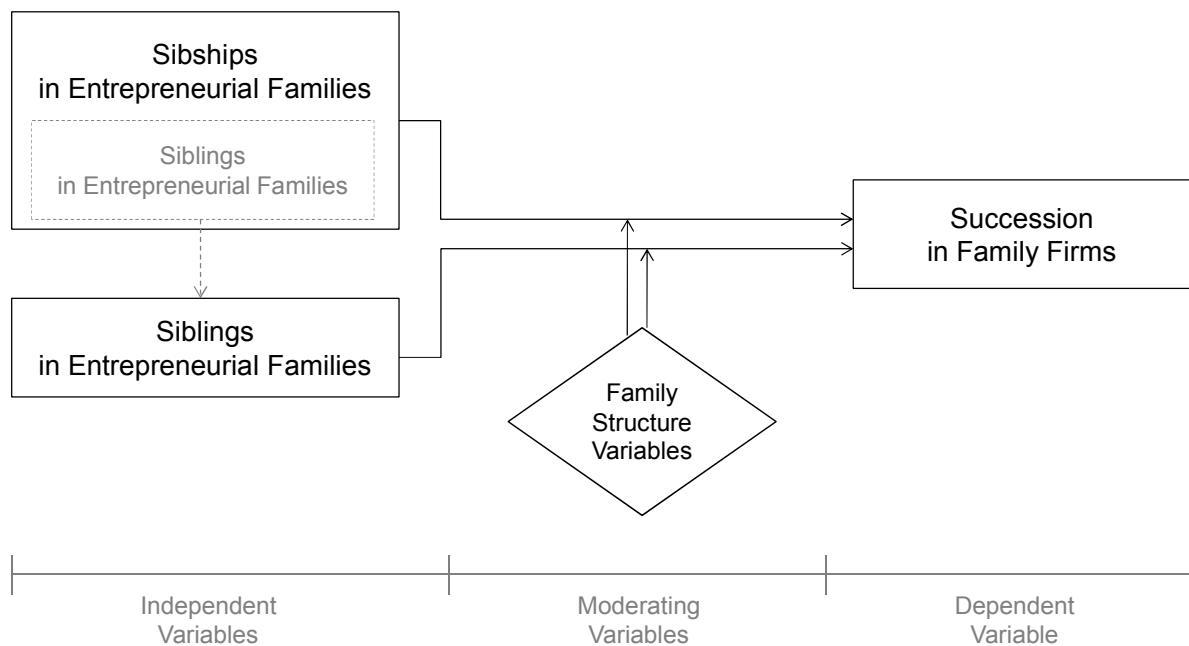


Figure 3.3. Theoretical Framework

With regard to the definition of the relevant research variables, the literature review revealed a contingent effect of the heretofore stand-alone and summarising independent variable *Family Structure Variables* on the presumed relationship of the independent variables *Sibships in Entrepreneurial Families* and *Siblings in Entrepreneurial Families* on the dependent variable *Succession in Family Firms*. In this context has to be emphasised that the independent variables are related with each other, with siblings being part of the sibship. However, in respect of the research questions, a separate treatment of these variables is reasonable. As distinguished from the conceptual framework (see Section 2.5), the variable *Family Structure Variables* (i.e., the variables *birth order*, *sibship size*, and *age spacing*) represents a moderating variable within the theoretical framework and thereby reveals the variable's contingent effect on the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable (cf. Sekaran & Bougie, 2013, p. 71). The variable *Family Structure variables* thereby modifies the assumed causal relationship between sibships respectively siblings in entrepreneurial families on succession. This change from an independent variable to a

moderating variable can be justified by the sibling research literature, which states different behaviour of siblings in dependence on birth order, sibship size, and age spacing. In this context, it is noteworthy to mention, that it has been desisted from discussing the individual family structure variables *birth order*, *sibship size*, and *age spacing* in a separate chapter within the literature review, since these variables are considered within the discussion of sibling research literature.

Regarding the applied case study research strategy, Yin (2014, pp. 37–38) emphasises that case study research without any preliminary theory development is not desirable. The use of established research concepts accounts for this prerequisite. Yin (p. 40) further points out that the use of theory or theoretical propositions may enable the analytical generalisation of the research outcome. Although this study does not primarily aim at generalisable research findings, a preferably high level of generalisability is sought for. To achieve this aim, the research makes use of the Family Niche Model's already existing four rules and transfers them into the new research context. By following this approach, the subsequent aspects have to be considered. When opposing the choice of a niche within the family with the choice of a niche within the family firm, one difference strongly influences the comparison. In family life, an offspring has either the choice to compete with its sibling(s) within the same niche or to avoid sibling competition by choosing a separate niche. Regarding the career choice, and especially towards succession in the family firm, each offspring has the option to avoid competition by not entering the family firm. By deciding for a job outside the family firm, this *exit strategy* seems to be more attractive for a laterborn than for an earlierborn. This claim can be justified by considering that if an earlierborn already works in the family firm, by the time the laterborn has to decide for or against a career within the family firm, the laterborn may not only enter the family firm, but also enter competition with its already involved older sibling. This move could imply that siblings that were not in a competitive situation before – due to their different family niches – then may have to face competition, which in turn could impact the family life and the sibling relationship in general. However, it is assumed that parents have the possibility to avoid sibling competition by helping them to find separate niches or by allocating separate niches to each offspring beforehand. Due to their birth order-related and context-excluding phrasing, the Family Niche Model's rules for diversification¹¹⁸ are one-on-one adaptable into the family firm succession

¹¹⁸ I.e.: Rule 1: If you are laterborn, diversify. Rule 2: If parents have limited resources, diversify. Rule 3: Diversify in proportion to the number of your siblings. Rule 4: Under certain circumstances, disregard the previous three rules and specialise.

context. In consequence, Sulloway's original rules can be applied for the study as research hypotheses (cf. Sulloway, 1996, p. 105). As discussed in Subsection 3.3.4, by applying the Family Niche Model, the research transfers Darwinian theory into family firm succession research. The research thereby attempts to combine two until then separate research fields. However, the model's developer, Frank J. Sulloway, pursues consulting in the area of family firm succession, but did not publish on these activities. Nonetheless, this also demonstrates the relevance of this research project. In addition, Chaponnière and Ward (2003) specifically discuss family firm continuity in the context of *Darwin's Theory of Species*, and thereby regard the business as well as the family as species. The researchers contrast the survival of species with the survival of family firms, since both are focusing on survival and continuity.¹¹⁹ However, Chaponnière and Ward do not follow up on this idea and did not publish further material thereupon. Gottlieb (2004) reviewed the publication and states that it is "[...] based on an intriguing, if not entirely novel, proposition – that Darwin's theory of evolution is in many ways an apt model for determining a family business biology" (p. 179). Although the study at hand is not explicitly focusing on the link between family firm continuity and Darwin's theory, the study is therewith closely related, since succession means family firm continuity. Furthermore, by applying the Family Niche Model and Darwin's thoughts of natural selection this study indirectly attempts to establish a connection between Darwin's theory and family firm succession. The consulting activities by Sulloway, the publication by Chaponnière and Ward, and its review by Gottlieb – all these activities can be regarded as justifications for combining sibling research concepts with family firm succession research as presented in the theoretical framework in Figure 3.3. An advanced version of the theoretical framework enriched by the research questions is provided in Section 4.1.

¹¹⁹ Chaponnière & Ward (2003, p. 13) provide a summary of Darwin's work and then discuss a family firm's typical stages of development by applying six distinctive parts of Darwin's theory, which are *Struggle for Existence*, *Adaptation*, *Variation*, *Natural Selection*, *Procreation*, and *Inheritance*. Cf. Darwin's (1859, 2013) publication *The Origin of Species*.

4 Research Questions and Research Methodology

This chapter subsumes the research questions and subsequently outlines the research methodology. The methodology section is subdivided into ten subsections, namely (1) Research Approaches and Rationales, (2) Research Design and Research Strategy, (3) Research Method, Research Instrument, and Research Process, (4) Researcher's Role, (5) Research Object, (6) Data Collection Methods and Procedure, (7) Data Preparation and Data Management, (8) Data Analysis, (9) Quality Management, and (10) Generalisability of the Research Findings.

4.1 Research Questions

Research questions are part of the overall research framework and have therefore to be framed in relation to the chosen research goals and research methods (Trede & Higgs, 2009, p. 13). Punch (2014, pp. 60–62, 352) generally defines research questions as questions that arrange a study by revealing the study's purposes. Punch differentiates between general and specific research questions and specifies general research questions as that they guide the study as they disclose the research aim; however, due to their generality too broad to be answered directly. On the contrary, Punch refers to specific research questions as questions that specify the general research questions in greater detail and connect them to the data. With regard to research questions in qualitative research approaches, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, p. 35) refer to the link between the problem under study and the review of the literature as dynamic interaction and point out the tentative character of research questions, which are mostly not formulated as research hypotheses. Regarding this, Hesse-Biber and Leavy underline the goal of theory generation, which is in line with the goal of this research study. The guiding research questions for this study are initially discussed in Section 1.3 and the inherent specific research questions were outlined in the respective sections of Chapter 3, after having reviewed the literature. In this section, these questions are summarised, whereby the guiding research questions are adopted as general research questions.

Based on the literature review and the results retrieved from the pre-study interviews, two research topics were identified on which the specific research questions were developed. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate (1) how sibships in entrepreneurial families, within the scope of sibling research, influence succession in family firms, and (2) how siblings in entrepreneurial families influence each other regarding succes-

sion in family firms, considering the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing. These main research topics represent the general research questions for this study. The specific research questions that have been defined based on the knowledge and assumptions discussed in the preceding two chapters are now presented in combination with the study's general research questions. Following the aforementioned definitions, the general and specific research questions are as follows:

GRQ1.0: How do sibships in entrepreneurial families, within the scope of sibling research, influence succession in family firms?

SRQ1.1: How are the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification in entrepreneurial families transferable into the family firm succession context?

SRQ1.2: How are the concepts of parent identification and parent deidentification transferable into the family firm succession context?

SRQ1.3: Are the siblings' family niches transferable into the family firm succession context?

SRQ1.4: How should succession be handled within the family firm, if several children as potential successors within the entrepreneurial family are available?

GRQ2.0: How do siblings in entrepreneurial families influence each other regarding succession in family firms – considering the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing?

SRQ2.1: How do siblings influence each other regarding career options – considering the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing?

SRQ2.2: How do siblings influence each other regarding career choices – considering the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing?

As required, the specific research questions specify the general research questions and are practicable to be answered by qualitative research. Upon these research questions, the theoretical framework was modified as illustrated in Figure 4.1. The resulting research framework depicts the further course of the research.

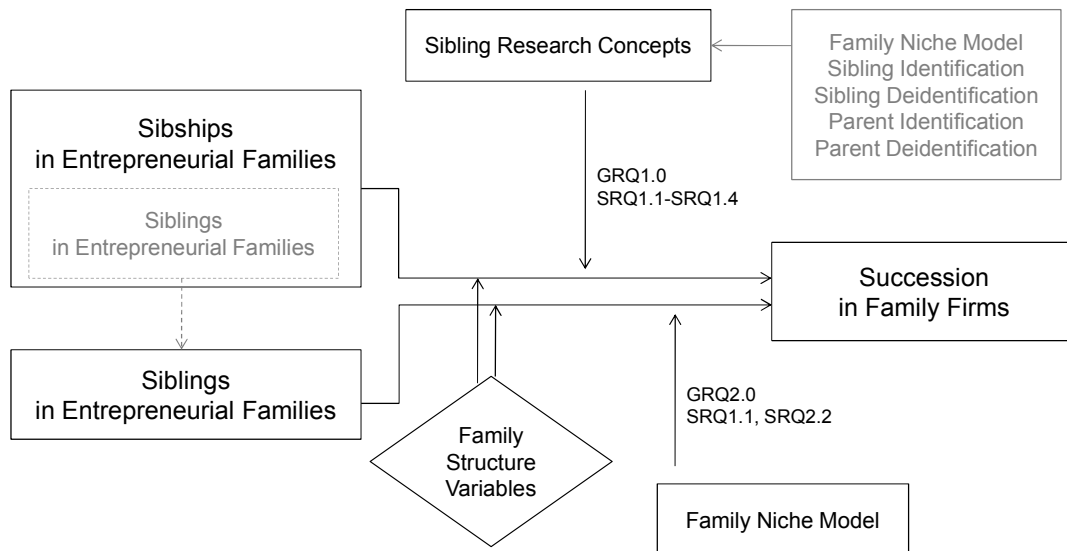


Figure 4.1. Research Framework

All research questions are designed to be answered empirically by means of the main study's qualitative interviews, whereby the approach to answer the specific research questions SRQ1.4, SRQ2.1, and SRQ2.2 does not follow specific sibling research-related concepts. Figure 4.1 shows the presumed two-sided influence of the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing on both the first and second general research question. This two-sided influence is justified first by the variables' presence in the concept of family niches, and second by their impact on determining siblings' interaction. The family structure variables therefore have to be perceived as moderating variables¹²⁰ for the assumed relationships of sibships and in consequence of siblings on career options as well as career choices toward succession in the family firm. In the following, the assumption of how these variables influence family firm succession is amplified.

It has already been discussed that the first offspring entering the family firm might obtain a first-mover advantage. With regard to birth order, a firstborn child is the first of the siblings to decide whether to make use of this potential advantage or reject this opportunity. Compared to the firstborn, each younger sibling has to decide delayed in time and is thereby affected by the decision of the earlierborn. Following the concept of niche selection, a younger offspring has to decide between competing for the same niche as the earlierborn, occupying a new niche, or creating a new niche. Transferred into the family firm succession context, the concept of niche selection might mean that the firstborn has the free choice as to choosing a niche within the family firm, whereby each sibling entering the company at a later point in time and given the assumption

¹²⁰ Aka moderators.

that the earlierborn entered the company, the laterborn has less free choice. By analogy with niche selection within the family context, since the earlierborn is already occupying a niche within the company, the laterborn has to decide whether to compete for the same niche or to strive for an unoccupied niche. With regard to this study's research sample, six interview partners are firstborns, two are middleborns, one interview partner is a thirdborn, and two interview partners are lastborns. Furthermore, in Case 7, a non-family member was interviewed.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the sibship size is of major importance within the analysis of sibships, as it – according to the concept of family niches – affects niche allocation within the family. Following this school of thought and since a firstborn has the free choice of a niche whereby each younger sibling has to decide between competition or no competition, it can be concluded that the more siblings there are within one family, the more difficult it becomes for younger siblings to find an unoccupied niche. The same phenomenon is assumed for the family firm succession context. It is assumed that the more children as potential successors there are within one entrepreneurial family, the more difficult it will become for laterborn siblings to enter the family firm if already several earlierborns entered the company. However, this assumption might strongly depend on the company characteristics such as the company size. Regarding the research sample, this study provides insights from three two-child sibships, four three-child sibships, one four-child sibship, and one five-child sibship. Further, Case 1 to Case 7 represent sibships with both male and female offspring, whereas Case 8 and Case 9 solely comprise male offspring, and only in Case 6 the firstborn is female.

Under normal conditions, in the event of competing within the same niche, a younger sibling has to cope with an older sibling's advantages, which results from the age spacing in between and the concomitant more experience of the earlierborn. By developing equally, an earlierborn stays ahead of its younger sibling(s) and obtains a competitive advantage. However, for instance based on talent, a younger sibling might compensate this disadvantage resulting from his/her younger age. Translated into the family firm succession context and assuming that the children pursue a similar education as well as enter the family firm at a similar age, it can be concluded that the wider the age gap, the more experience an earlierborn obtained compared to a laterborn. With regard to this study, the sample includes cases with age spacings ranging from 1 to 15 years. Accordingly, the age spacing in all cases is rather small, which allows for a need-based comparison in line with sibling research, which revealed that siblings having an age gap of six or more years should not strictly be regarded as siblings (cf. Kasten, 2003, pp. 75–87, Sulloway, 1996, p. 22).

4.2 Research Methodology

The choice of a research methodology should be closely connected to the problem under study (Flick, 2007a, p. 7; cf. Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 279). Following this advice, the research undertaken primarily requires a methodology that (1) allows the research phenomenon to be studied comprehensively, (2) coincidentally allows for the specific family- and family firm-related research context, and (3) permits qualitative research; since the latter is the major precondition for the main study derived from the pre-study interviews (see Section 2.4). Figure 4.2 represents the methodological framework for this study. The figure's components are discussed in detail in the subsections to follow.

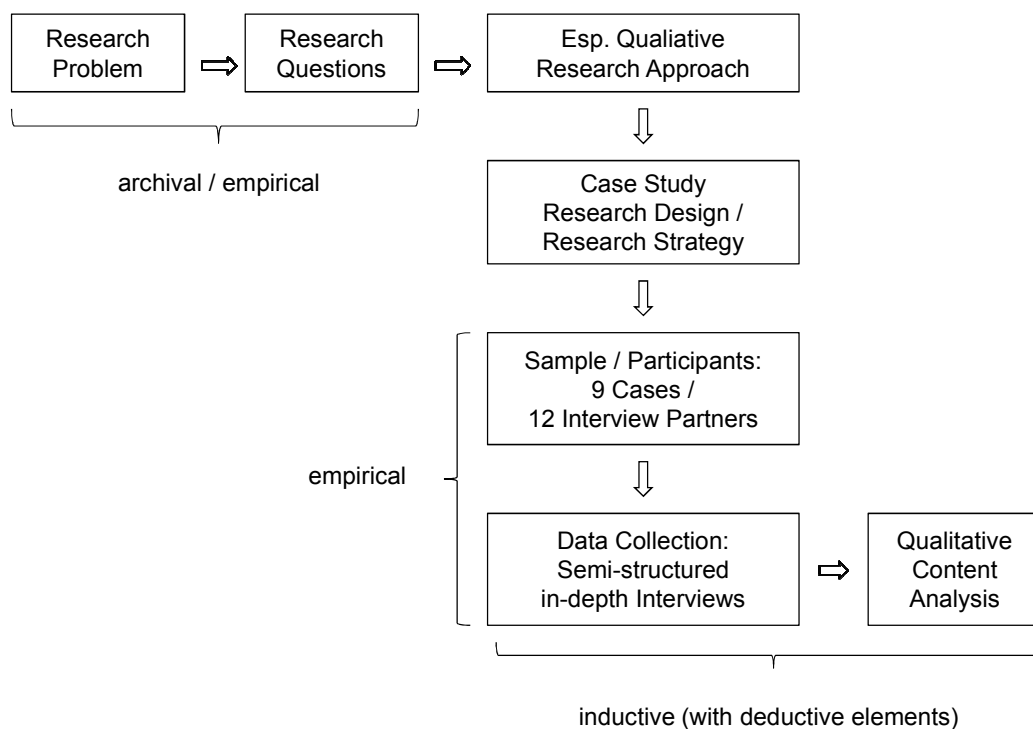


Figure 4.2. Methodological Framework

Figure 4.2 shows the primary research approach, which is a qualitative research approach and the primary research strategy, which is a case study research strategy. However, with regard to a distinct categorisation as to research approach, research method, and research design, contradictory literature exists. Therefore, the following subsections present the interconnections of these categories as to the context of this study and thereby develop a reference system for the research. Since several assumptions affect the study on different levels, they are elucidated when relevant as to the specific topic discussed.

4.2.1 Research Approaches and Rationales

Six research approaches are central for this study, namely (1) the empirical approach, (2) the methodological approach, (3) the pragmatic approach, (4) the constructivist approach, (5) the interpretive approach, and (6) the deductive/inductive approach. Although these research approaches are stand-alone research approaches, they can be regarded as interrelated approaches as they altogether specify the research proposition.¹²¹ Hereinafter, each approach is discussed as to its significance for this project.

This study aims to provide results derived from real phenomena, and therefore applies an empirical approach, meaning based on actual experiences and observations (cf. Punch, 2014, pp. 2–3, 348), together with primary data. The pivotal methodological approaches in social science research however are quantitative research and qualitative research, supplemented by mixed methods research, which combines the two.¹²² The qualitative research paradigm is a more open-ended approach than quantitative research, is directed on how to best learn from research participants, focuses on a central phenomenon, and builds on an emerging research design (cf. Creswell, 2002). Besides other aspects, qualitative research is defined as a method applicable to research people's experience of a social or human phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 44)¹²³. As to the research problem under study, a research approach that is structured at a rather lower level had to be chosen, since it was aimed to provide the research participants as much space as possible. This approach was necessary, to account for the openness needed throughout the research, since a semi-structured initial situation was intended. Qualitative research especially offers this methodological latitude, concomitantly provides the semi-standardised research methods, and accommodates for this precondition during the data analysis. Particularly the feasibility to study a person's lived experiences as to a specific phenomenon justified the decision to conduct the study on the basis of a qualitative research approach. Accordingly, these strengths of qualitative research represent the rationales for the qualitative approach.

¹²¹ The interrelatedness of the empirical approach with the methodological approach becomes obvious when considering that quantitative and qualitative research is often built on empirical findings.

¹²² Cf. Morgan (2014, p. 10).

¹²³ Creswell (2013) defines qualitative research as follows: "Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change" (p. 44, emphasis removed). Creswell's definition incorporates elements of Denzin & Lincoln's (2011, p. 3) definition of qualitative research, but focuses more on the research design and the usage of explicit approaches to inquiry.

Bryman (2012, pp. 405–406) summarises four points of criticism connected to qualitative research inquiries that are (1) qualitative research as being too subjective, (2) the difficulty to replicate, (3) the problem of generalisation, and (4) the lack of transparency. Bryman’s critique is reasonable, although the impact of these criticisms can be, at least to some extent, narrowed down by means of a sound research design that by implication accounts for these aspects. Hence, it was aimed to counteract the criticism as effectively as possible. In this respect, details concerning the quality management are discussed in Subsection 4.2.9.

In line with the request for this initially rather open research policy, this study applies a pragmatic approach¹²⁴, meaning that the research begins with the research questions and thereupon appropriate methods are chosen (cf. Punch, 2014, p. 17). As discussed, the research questions are based on the literature review as well as on the pre-study findings, and in consequence, so is the pragmatic approach. From this, an underlying pragmatic worldview can be assumed.¹²⁵ In actual fact, the study underlies the social constructivist worldview but incorporates elements of the pragmatic worldview.¹²⁶ According to Creswell (2009, p. 6), the pragmatic view is characterised by a focus on consequences of actions, problem-centredness, pluralism, and real-world practice orientation. Further, Creswell (pp. 6, 8–9) states the elements of constructivism¹²⁷ as understanding, multiple participant meanings, social and historical construction, and theory generation. Concerning the rationale to apply in the main a constructivism stance is its enablement for a semi-structured research design and its appropriateness to generate theory. Moreover, Creswell (p. 8) remarks that constructivism is often combined with interpretivism.¹²⁸ As to this study, the combined approach is valid, since in addition to the advantages of constructivism, the interpretive approach focuses

¹²⁴ Acc. to Punch (2014, p. 17) the planning of a research project can proceed in two main ways that either follow a paradigm-driven approach or follow a pragmatic approach. In this context, Silverman (2010, p. 15) emphasises that it may be useful to make pragmatic choices among different methodologies as to the research problem and research model.

¹²⁵ In social research, the term *worldview* is used as a synonym for terms such as paradigm (cf. Creswell, 2009, p. 6). In addition, several subcategorisations exist. Creswell (2009, pp. 5–11) distinguishes between four philosophical worldviews a researcher can hold, as a study’s underlying philosophical idea or assumption, namely postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism. Punch (2014, pp. 16–17) discusses a selection of paradigms and narrows them down to positivism that is likely to be associated with quantitative research, and either interpretivism or constructivism, likely to be associated with qualitative research. Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011, p. 15) outline three primary approaches to qualitative research, namely post-positivist, interpretive, and critical.

¹²⁶ This dual belonging is hardly surprising, since the pragmatic view is closely connected to mixed-methods research, which in turn is composed of quantitative and qualitative research.

¹²⁷ Aka constructionism (cf. Gomm, 2009, p. 64).

¹²⁸ Acc. to Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011, p. 5) the three major methodological approaches in qualitative research are post-positivist, interpretive, and critical. Deductive research is emphasised in post-positivism, whereby inductive research is usually applied within the frame of interpretive and critical belief systems.

on subjective experience, small-scale interactions, seeking understanding, and meaning making (cf. Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 16).

Lastly, the inductive approach has to be discussed in opposition to the deductive approach.¹²⁹ Qualitative research is typically associated with inductive, subjective and contextual research purposes or research goals (Morgan, 2014, p. 9). The research presented includes inductive as well as deductive elements. Deductive approaches start with a well-known theory and apply it, whereas inductive approaches follow a theory-building process and start for instance with observations (cf. Wilson, 2010, pp. 302, 304). Applying this strategy, on the one hand enables to further develop the research concepts employed – primarily the Family Niche Model (i.e., an inductive approach) – and on the other hand, enables to transfer the existing concepts from the context of sibling research into the context of career choice as to family firm succession (i.e., a deductive approach). As a consequence thereof, and as discussed before, the research purpose of this study is to comprehensively combine the applied theory, to generate new theory or a theoretical model, and to build hypotheses thereupon. It follows from the foregoing, that the research approach is deductive as well as inductive. Hereupon, the inductive category development within the data analysis is reasoned.

4.2.2 Research Design and Research Strategy

The research design guides the research as to its planning and realisation (Flick, 2007a, p. 37). Every empirical research study needs a research design, either implicitly or explicitly (cf. Yin, 2014, p. 28), in order to guide the research. In this context, it specifies and defines for example the data collection process and illustrates the linkage between the research questions and the data collection activities. The research design can be defined as a plan that logically structures the research endeavour by linking the research questions with the research aim and organises the interplay of the philosophical worldview, the strategy of inquiry, and the research methods applied (cf. Creswell, 2009, p. 5; Creswell, 2014, pp. 5–6; Yin, 2014, p. 240). Accordingly, research designs are influenced by several factors, such as the assumptions of the researcher, the procedure of inquiry, specific methods applied (e.g., with regard to data collection, data analysis, and interpretation), the research problem's nature, the researcher's experience, and the study's audience (Creswell, 2009, p. 3). Hence,

¹²⁹ Acc. to Bryman (2012) the terms *deductive* respectively *deduction* are defined as “[a]n approach to the relationship between theory and research in which the latter is conducted with reference to hypotheses and ideas inferred from the former” (p. 711), whereas the terms *inductive* respectively *induction* are defined as “[a]n approach to the relationship between theory and research in which the former is generated out of the latter” (p. 712).

pursuant to the qualitative research approach, the research design is a qualitative research design. As the generic advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research have been discussed before, they are not further outlined as to research design.

With regard to strategies of research inquiry and preliminary considerations for this study, phenomenology and case study research were contemplated.¹³⁰ Creswell (2013, p. 76), describes phenomenology as a strategy, which is applicable to describe a common, lived experience (i.e., a concept or phenomenon) that happened to several individuals. Bryman (2012, p. 709) defines case study as a research design, which implicates an in-depth and explicit analysis of one single case or, to the end to compare cases, the analysis of multiple cases. As per these definitions, the term case study may either refer to a type of research strategy or a type of research design, for example a single-case study or a multiple-case study. In addition, Yin (2014, pp. 16–17) developed a twofold definition of case study and emphasises its characteristics as an all-encompassing method, as it incorporates the design logic, the data collection techniques, and specific data analysis approaches. As to the scope of a case study, Yin defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that (1) investigates a current phenomenon in detail and within its real-world context, in particular when (2) the boundaries between the research phenomenon and the research context are not clearly apparent. As to the features of a case study, Yin points out that a case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation. The result thereof can be that the inquiry relies on multiple sources of evidence, or that the inquiry benefits from theoretical propositions that were developed beforehand to guide the data collection and the data analysis.¹³¹ Following these definitions of phenomenology and case study, both strategies would be conceivable to be applied. However, phenomenology incorporates a strong philosophical element (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). Otherwise, case study research particularly allows studying a real-life phenomenon in-depth whereby the boundaries as to phenomenon and context do not have to be fully explicit, which accounts for the semi-structured approach. Beyond, case study research is feasible to identify an organisation's or individual's common as well as unique features, which potentially would remain hidden in large-scale surveys (Bell, 2010, p. 9).¹³² Accordingly, by conducting case study research, a more comprehensive as well as more appropriate insight into each case is obtained.

¹³⁰ Case study research may also be categorised as research design (e.g., Flick, 2011, p. 69) or research method (e.g., Yin, 2014, p. 3), depending on the underlying definitions of these terms.

¹³¹ Further differentiations of the term case study exist, however are not needed for this study and therefore not described.

¹³² The pre-study results confirmed this statement, see Section 2.3 and Section 2.4.

With regard to this study, case study research as a research strategy suits the research problem for three reasons. First, case study research is appropriate to answer how and why questions and focuses on contemporary events (Yin, 2014, p. 9). Second, case study strategy allows being in accordance with aspects criticised in sibling research, since when studying siblings, it is important to study within-family siblings instead of between-family siblings. Third, case study research permits studying succession in direct relation to the family and family firm-specific context. The boundaries of the research context are based on sampling decisions (cf. Miles et al., 2014, p. 29), the selection of the field of study, and the definition for the targeted focus of comparison as incorporated in the research questions. In the context of this research, nine cases within the bounded context of the Swiss family firm environment were studied. Denscombe (2007) summarises that a case “[...] needs to be a fairly *self-contained entity*”, as well as it “[...] needs to have fairly *distinct boundaries*” (p. 44). To be more precise, the study is built according to a holistic multiple-case design (Yin, 2014, pp. 50, 53–56), meaning each case representing one unit of analysis.¹³³ Following from this categorisation, each succession event represents a single case that entails a single unit of analysis. This unit of analysis focuses on and simultaneously combines family, family firm, and sibship/sibling-related elements, and thereby justifies the holistic way of proceeding. Alternatively, an embedded design with multiple units of analysis would have been conceivable. When applying an embedded design, within each case, the combined subunits could represent three separate embedded units of analysis. This alternative approach was rejected, due to the interrelatedness of these subunits as well as to the need to study the single events holistically that was both owed to the case-specific intertwined nature of the subunits.

Since this study investigates succession events from a reflective point of view, the study can further be categorised as a retrospective study¹³⁴ that is conducted by means of case study research. Accordingly, this study employs case reconstruction to research past succession events. This focus is assumed to facilitate more potential biases than prospective studies, due to the time period lying in between the succession event and the time of research. Hence, since most of the succession events under research already took place a long time ago, attention has to be paid to potential biases resulting from this time span. These potential biases are discussed within the scope of the study’s limitations in Section 7.3. Nevertheless, since case study research is the

¹³³ The research accounts for the perception of succession as a *process* (see Subsection 3.2.1). However, the unit of analysis is defined as the *succession event*, because for this research, the process as such is not the central phenomenon to be investigated.

¹³⁴ Cf. Flick (2011, pp. 69–70).

superordinated term for this study's research design, in the following, the term case study is used over retrospective study.

As any research design or strategy, case study research has its specific boundaries. In particular the concern regarding generalisability was raised and discussed as a major critique by several researchers (e.g., Punch, 2014, pp. 122–125), since the research findings of case study research are oftentimes built on small samples. The limited ability to deliver generalisable results is strongly affected by the predefined boundaries regarding the case-specific research context. However, Denscombe (2007, pp. 44–45) points out that without any notion of a boundary, a case cannot be defined. Denscombe highlights the boundaries' capability to separate the social phenomena under research as to its distinctiveness from kindred subjects as well as from the relevant social context. Related to this, Yin (2014, pp. 16–17) emphasises that the boundaries of a case and its specific context are not always clearly evident and have to be discussed. In addition, due to the rather unstructured approach and the emerging research design of the applied holistic research procedure, another potential problem may be that the project's entire nature may shift during the research process, without the researcher recognising it (Yin, 2014, p. 55).

To overcome these concerns, this study tried to select a sample that best reflects the Swiss family firm environment, although no entirely identical companies exist. Distinguishing factors may arise for instance due to specific family constellations, the size of the company as to the number of employees or the amount of turnover, the product range, or the influence of the current economic crisis on the business and the industry in which the company is operating. As a consequence, it was intended to acquire family firms that are not much subject to environmental or market changes, as would be the case if a company were solely operating within an environment that is strongly influenced by trends. Despite all the above, it was aimed to define contextual boundaries that minimise the dependency on uncontrollable environmental factors, and by following this proceeding to increase generalisability (see Subsection 4.2.10).

4.2.3 Research Method, Research Instrument, and Research Process

Research methods have to be on the basis of, as well as have to be derived from, the chosen research paradigm, which means that in reverse the paradigm influences the methods selection (Punch, 2014, p. 15). Since this study applies a qualitative research approach, as a consequence thereof the research methods have to belong to the qualitative research repertoire. In addition, methods of inquiry are grounded on

different types of assumptions, for instance assumptions about the study's nature (Punch, 2014, p. 14). Assumptions underlying the qualitative research approach are philosophical and organise beliefs regarding methodology, knowledge, as well as reality (cf. Hathaway, 1995, p. 535). The choice of the research methods therefore underlies the assumptions introduced before, which indicates that they are related to the beliefs about the methodology chosen (i.e., a qualitative research approach with case study research), the knowledge incorporated (i.e., the way it is discussed in the literature review), and the reality taken as the status quo (i.e., the worldview applied). The choice of the research method employed simultaneously implies the choice of the research approach, which is as to this study, the choice of a qualitative approach over a quantitative or mixed methods approach. To be more precise, the choice of case study research as research strategy¹³⁵ in return incorporates the application of a qualitative research approach. In this context, this subsection dovetails with the previous ones and was hence the logical next step to be defined.

A best possible question-method fit enhances the conceptual clarity of a research study (Punch, 2014, p. 25). To ensure that the research methods and research questions are related as closely as possible, it is advisable to derive research methods from research questions (cf. Punch, 2014, p. 23). With reference to this research, the wording of the research questions already implies methodological implications concerning case study research. These implications are accounted for by the use of *how* and *why* questions, which are suited to be answered with case study research (Yin, 2014, p. 9). In consequence, the research questions contain an indirect implication for the qualitative research approach, since case study research belongs to this research domain. Although the use of the word *variables*¹³⁶ might suggest a quantitative research approach, the context puts the meaning right as to its qualitative research setting. Resulting from these considerations, the research method employed for this research is to collect qualitative data through the research instrument of semi-structured in-depth interviews¹³⁷, which are at the same time problem-centred interviews.

The research process is subdivided into four phases. Phase I comprises the pre-study interviews, the accompanying literature review, the development of the guiding research questions as well as the elaboration of the general and specific research questions. This research phase is completed by an online survey concerning the

¹³⁵ In this connection should be remarked that Yin (2014, p. 3) classifies case study as a research method.

¹³⁶ See GRQ2.0 and the related SRQ2.1 and SRQ2.2 in Section 4.1.

¹³⁷ Since the research instrument of semi-structured in-depth interviews is discussed within the context of the pre-study (see Subsection 2.2.2.1), it is not explained in more detail at this point.

research partner acquisition for the main study (see Section 9.2). Altogether, Phase I represents the pre-study and its concomitant preparatory work for the main study. Phase II implies the qualitative interviews, conducted using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Hence, Phase II portrays the data collection stage. Phase II also constitutes the beginning of the case study research and at the same time the beginning of the main study. Following this, Phase III covers the data analysis, which includes the qualitative content analysis (cf. Kohlbacher, 2006) of each case's interview(s) (i.e., within-case analysis), the comparative analysis (i.e., cross-case analysis), and the study's overall evaluation including theory generation and hypotheses development. As illustrated in Figure 4.3, the research process is completed by Phase IV, which contains the write-up of the research findings and the conclusions.

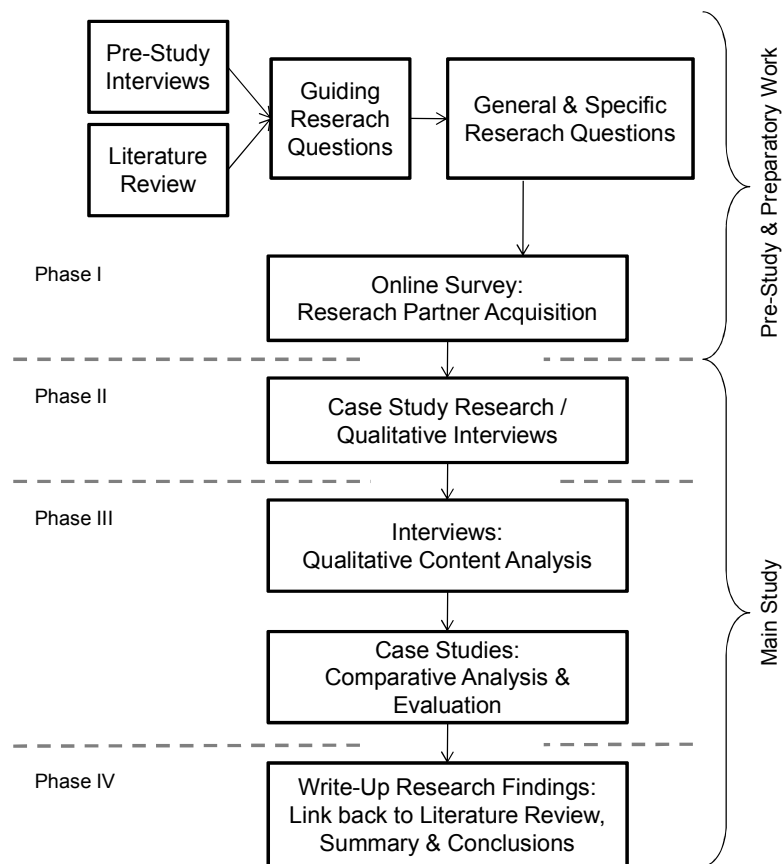


Figure 4.3. Research Process

On account of the usage of a multiple-case study design, this self-developed process should be balanced with Yin's (2014, p. 60) multiple-case study procedure. Yin's approach is divided into three main phases, namely *Define and Design*, *Prepare, Collect, and Analyse*, and *Analyse and Conclude*. In principal, the procedures are comparable; however, Yin begins the research procedure with *Develop theory* and in this respect finalises the procedure with *Modify theory* within the last step. Following the primarily inductive research approach, as this study intends to generate theory in

first place out of the case study's research findings, it was desisted from developing theory in advance. Nevertheless, technically speaking, the theoretical framework can be regarded as a theory developed in the forefront of the main study. Applying this classification onto this study, the theoretical framework finalises Research Phase I.

4.2.4 Researcher's Role

Piantanida and Garman (2009, p. 59) discuss researchers as an *instrument of inquiry* and furthermore consider the role of *reflection* in the scope of interpretive inquiries, the researchers' *voice* and *stance*, as well as the *disciplinary perspective's* role in shaping researchers' understanding of the studied phenomenon. Miles et al. (2014, p. 42) likewise discuss the researcher as an information-gathering instrument and outline five points that are (1) good familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under study, (2) a multidisciplinary approach, as opposed to a narrow grounding or focus in a single discipline, (3) good investigative skills, the ability to draw people out, and meticulous attention to detail, (4) being comfortable, resilient, and nonjudgmental with participants in the setting, and (5) a heightened sense of empathetic engagement, balanced with a heightened sense of objective awareness. Furthermore, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, p. 40) refer to philosophical assumptions and impute that these are found in a researcher's individual concept of reality, underlying any research problem. This entails that already at the beginning of the research, the study is influenced by the researcher, due to the researcher's individual life and work experience. These biases can be summarised as *interviewer effects* (cf. Gomm, 2009, p. 181; see Section 7.3). Yin (2014, p. 79) describes the researcher's role in qualitative research as a role that has been trained beforehand so that the researcher can take the position of a *senior* researcher. Moreover, once the researcher has started the data collection, he/she should think of himself/herself as independent and not reliant on fixed rules that guide the research (Yin, 2014, p. 79).

As these remarks show, multiple concerns as to the researcher's influential role within the entire research process exist. Furthermore, due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research, the researcher's role and thereby his/her impact on the research outcome in qualitative studies can be assumed to be higher than in quantitative studies. When adapting these concerns to the research conducted, especially during the interviews, the researcher influences the research outcome by actively participating in the conversation. As the interviewer, the researcher composed the interview guide beforehand, asks the questions during the interview and thereby actively leads the interview. In addition, the researcher has to respond to the interview partner's

questions and responses spontaneously, which requires profound knowledge within the research area for being able to answer questions immediately as well as tactfully. According to these remarks, the application of semi-structured interviews further intensifies the researcher's influential position. Furthermore, due to the interpretive elements of qualitative content analysis (cf. Mayring, 2000), the researcher plays an important role not only during the interview sessions but also in the successive analyses. Regarding this research project, it can be registered that the researcher has practical experience in conducting interviews.¹³⁸

4.2.5 Research Object

Sampling is a crucial part in designing qualitative studies (Flick, 2007a, p. 33). To illustrate the research environment, it is important to highlight sampling procedures in terms of the rationale for selecting the research location as well as the rationale for selecting the research partners. The reasoning is presented in the following subsections that describe and justify the choice of the research population, the sample size and the sampling procedures as well as the research sample.

4.2.5.1 Research Population

Creswell (2012) defines a research population as a “[...] group of individuals having one characteristic that distinguishes them from other groups” (p. 381). In this context, the research project concentrates on family firm successors and non-successors in German-speaking Switzerland. Consequently, the research population is part of the Swiss family firm community. As a research location, Switzerland provides a great diversity of companies that operate locally as well as internationally, and are simultaneously located in a relatively contained geographic area. It has to be given weight to the fact that the research population cannot be exactly defined. However, as to the 6.5% share of the Swiss population assumed being entrepreneurial families¹³⁹, the research population is even smaller than 6.5%, since not every entrepreneurial family has at least two offspring as potential successors. To provide detailed information on the research population, the rationale for selecting the research location, the rationale for selecting the family firms, and the rationale for selecting the entrepreneurial families are outlined in the following paragraphs.

¹³⁸ The herewith related issues of objectivity and subjectivity are discussed in Subsection 4.2.9.3.

¹³⁹ See Section 1.4, Figure 1.2 on p. 12.

Rationale for Selecting the Research Location:

As to the research location, two considerations were important to make; the choice of the research country and the selection of the region in which the study is conducted. With about 78% of Swiss companies being family firms (Christen et al., 2013, p. 24), Switzerland is an adequate research location for family firm studies.¹⁴⁰ Switzerland further offers diversity as to the family firms' size, type of business(es), and industry sectors within a manageable area. However, with four official languages, Switzerland is shaped by language diversity. To conduct the research across the whole country, a translation of the research guide would have been needed in order to ensure that the questions were not misinterpreted. It is assumed that the interview results are most significant if the participants are interviewed in their native language. Therefore, to provide the most significant results possible, the research is restricted to German-speaking Switzerland. In addition, potential cultural differences had to be taken into account due to both the French and/or Italian influence respectively if researching all across Switzerland (cf. Hofstede, n.d., para. 1; cf. Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, pp. 4–7)¹⁴¹. In particular when studying siblings, cultural differences have to be avoided or at least minimised (cf. Kasten, 2003, pp. 27–32).

The constraint on German-speaking Switzerland is reaffirmed by the fact that for a long time, not much research specifically focused on the Swiss family firm environment.¹⁴² This study aims to contribute to the advancement of the literature and thereby to contribute to the closure of this information and research gap. In addition, qualitative research is often characterised by small sample sizes. Accordingly, to provide the most generalisable results possible from the limited amount of data, the cases should be as similar as possible, which is assumed to be prepossessed if the family firms are located in the same geographical area and within the same cultural identity.

¹⁴⁰ Compared to other European countries, the share of family firms in Switzerland is rather low. However, due to potential calculatory differences, comparisons can only be made with reservation. Reported European data are e.g., France: 83% (Cambieri, 2013), Austria: 90% (Dörflinger, Dörflinger, Gavac, & Vogl, 2013, p. 2), Germany: 92% (Stiftung Familienunternehmen, 2011, p. 16), and Italy: 93% (Mussati, 2008, p. 4).

¹⁴¹ Hofstede (n.d.) analysed the Swiss culture by means of the 6-D Model©, which comprises the cultural dimensions *Power Distance*, *Individualism*, *Masculinity*, *Uncertainty Avoidance*, *Long Term Orientation*, and *Indulgence*. In this context, Hofstede (para. 1) emphasises the importance of considering potential cultural differences when comparing the Swiss population of different cantons and explicitly highlights that the scores for the above mentioned dimensions can widely vary between the German-speaking part, the French-speaking part, and the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland.

¹⁴² Early publications targeting Swiss family firms are e.g., Frey, Halter, & Zellweger (2005), Fueglistaller & Halter (2005), and Fueglistaller & Zellweger (2004).

Rationale for Selecting the Family Firms:

As to the composition of an adequate research sample, the participating family firms should fulfil two selection criteria. The first selection criterion is that the companies should represent an attractive career option for the next generation. Enterprises can be categorised into micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and large enterprises.¹⁴³ This categorisation is carried out based on a firm's headcount, and either on its annual turnover or its annual balance sheet total. More precisely, to qualify for one of the enterprise categories, an enterprise has to fulfil the staff headcount threshold and the turnover or the balance sheet threshold. The European Commission (2005, p. 14) suggests a categorisation of enterprises as micro, small, or medium-sized enterprise based on the thresholds shown in Table 4.1.¹⁴⁴ With regard to the categorisation of family firms in the research sample, the definition for SMEs provided by the European Commission is applied. Following this approach allows the comparison of the research findings with a broader range of related research.

Table 4.1. Thresholds for SME Definition¹⁴⁵

Enterprise category	Headcount¹⁴⁶	Annual turnover	or	Annual balance sheet total
Medium	< 250	≤ €50 million		≤ €43 million
Small	< 50	≤ €10 million		≤ €10 million
Micro	< 10	≤ €2 million		≤ €2 million

To acquire family firms meeting the predefined first selection criterion, no family firms with less than 50 employees were contacted. Hence, only potential interview partners of medium-sized and large family firms were asked to participate. By collaborating with companies having more than 50 employees, the firms were assumed to provide several career options for one or even more potential successor(s), in case more than one offspring intends to join the family firm. As discussed, the family firm should provide this characteristic for being perceived as an attractive opportunity to be taken over. In addition, since these family firms have developed to become a medium-

¹⁴³ As to the European Commission's (2005) new definition of small and medium-sized enterprises, an enterprise is defined as "[...] any entity engaged in an economic activity, irrespective of its legal form" (p. 12).

¹⁴⁴ Following this categorisation, a family firm having 250 or more employees, and an annual turnover equal to or exceeding EUR50 million or a balance sheet total equal to or exceeding EUR43 million is categorised as a large enterprise. The new definition took effect on January 1st, 2005 (European Commission, 2005, p. 2).

¹⁴⁵ Based on information provided by the European Commission (2005, p. 14).

¹⁴⁶ AWU = Annual Work Unit

sized or large enterprise, they are presumed to have a company history, which may include experience with succession management. Nonetheless, as personal preferences are assumed to be crucial as to an offspring's career decision¹⁴⁷, if the occasion to study smaller family firms had been offered, for instance due to personal recommendations, this opportunity would have been taken as well. Albeit, this opportunity was not provided. Without question, micro and small firms can be equally attractive to be taken over. However, due to the company size, in general, a medium to large company is presumed to be more appropriate if more than one offspring intends to enter the company. This implies that at least for the first child, the possibility to choose between more than one niche should be given. In addition, such companies are assumed to provide several options for an offspring to choose a workspace best suiting his/her aptitudes, abilities, competences, and preferences. Furthermore, these family firms are assumed to provide an environment in which a team of siblings could work together in the same company, whereby each sibling could obtain his/her personal sphere of responsibility (i.e., find its own niche). Moreover, a medium-sized or large family firm could offer the possibility to be split, if siblings want to take over the company, but at the same time do not want to work together in a sibling partnership or want to be more autonomous and thereby more independent from each other. The pre-study interviews revealed that the family firm's industry sector oftentimes does not influence an offspring as to his/her decision for or against succession. Nevertheless, attention has been paid to the type of business, meaning that the participating companies are not primarily operating in a heavily trend dependent industry. This aspect may be important since a business that is highly dependent on trends and lifestyle may complicate the continuity of the family firm, which in turn could make the company less attractive for the next generation. Self-evidently, this can also be seen as an additional challenge for a successor. However, to avoid such potential influences, this aspect has been considered as a crucial precondition.

The second selection criterion is closely related to the first criterion, as it is also related to the structure of the Swiss family firm landscape. As discussed¹⁴⁸, the majority of firms has less than ten employees and thereby belongs to the category of micro firms. As a consequence, it would be reasonable to concentrate on micro firms and on securing their continuity. However, considering the number of employees, Swiss medium-sized and large firms have the strongest impact on the Swiss economy. In summary, by

¹⁴⁷ E.g., some offspring may prefer to take over a small enterprise, whereas others may prefer a medium-sized enterprise, and again others may prefer a large enterprise.

¹⁴⁸ See Subsection 3.2.4, Table 3.1 on p. 46.

employing about 49.2% of all Swiss employees (SFSO, 2014b, p. 17), medium-sized and large enterprises represent almost half of the Swiss working population and are therefore an important constituent of the Swiss economy. The second criterion thereby purports that the participating family firms should represent this high share of the Swiss working population. In respect thereof, this research accounts for this high share.

Based on these selection criteria, homogeneity among the participating family firms was achieved only to a limited extent. By employing a minimum of 50 people, the family firms are either medium or large enterprises and are thereby assumed to be an attractive career option. At the same time, it is assumed that these family firms provide the option that more than one offspring could enter the family firm and thereby a sibling partnership might be conceivable. Furthermore, the fact that none of the firms operates in a heavily trend dependent industry is assumed to also support the estimation of the participating family firms as an attractive career option. However, due to the diverse industries in which the participating family firms are operating, the goal of a fully homogeneous sample on the company side could only in parts be accomplished. This potential disadvantage was accepted, since this result is owed to the fact that respective limitations during the research partner acquisition process were not made. In this context, it has to be highlighted, that family firms from different industries were intentionally desired, since the research findings should not be limited to only one industry. This limitation would have only been accepted, if the research partner acquisition had provided the pertinent results.

To conclude, with regard to the family firm characteristics, the research sample rather represents a heterogeneous research sample. In addition, the family firm's branch of industry might influence an offspring's career decision regarding succession either way. However, it has to be pointed out that the company size represents the most important characteristic on the family firm side, as it may limit the option to enter the family firm for siblings that come in second. Meeting this selection criterion was therefore specifically accounted for, which is met by all the participating family firms. In consequence, with regard to the crucial family firm characteristic *company size*, the research sample is appropriate for the intended research. By following this approach and by selecting medium and large enterprises, the research sample represents at first an attractive career opportunity for offspring and at second, by belonging to the categories of medium-sized or large companies, the research sample also represents the highest share of the Swiss working population.

Rationale for Selecting the Entrepreneurial Families:

The selection of the participating family firms is contingent on the characteristics of the entrepreneurial families behind the firms. In contrast to the desired homogeneous sample on the company side, heterogeneity was sought in order to be able to study various family constellations. Much research targets only two- or three-child families (e.g., Schachter et al., 1976; Schachter et al., 1978) and research explicitly focusing on entrepreneurial families is rare. To obtain a comprehensive insight into family firm succession considering multiple potential successors, family constellations with four or more children should be studied as well. Furthermore, studying only two- or three-child families in order to provide research findings that are more generalisable is not intended, since this research is not primarily intended to provide results viable for generalisability. To obtain additional information on the functioning of sibling teams, a search was made for teams of two or three siblings managing the business. Taking into account the option of a sibling partnership, a family firm in which more than three siblings have comparable management positions, was expected to be a large company. However, since large companies in Switzerland account for only 0.2%¹⁴⁹ of all companies, the focus was on acquiring entrepreneurial families running a medium-sized enterprise.

The major given condition on the family side that has to be fulfilled is that the participating families have to have more than one child, meaning that in turn the family firm has to have more than one potential successor. Since the main focus of this study is on studying the influence of multiple potential successors on family firm succession, the entrepreneurial family has to have at least two offspring. Accordingly, the aim was to acquire family firms that are/were preferably managed by a single owner and are planned to be handed over or were handed over to the owner's offspring, which means either to one sibling or to a pair or group of siblings. This approach implies that the partnering firms may also be only in their first generation of business. However, firms were sought that already had experience with succession management, which necessitates that at least the 2nd generation is in business and is handing down leadership from the 2nd generation to the 3rd generation. Detailed information on the research sample is provided in Subsection 4.2.5.3.

¹⁴⁹ Calculation based on data provided by the SFSO (2013b).

4.2.5.2 Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

Pursuant to M. N. Marshall (1996, p. 523), the appropriate sample size in qualitative research studies is a sample size that sufficiently answers the research question. It can therefore be concluded that the sample size is interrelated to the research question(s). M. N. Marshall discusses three strategies for compiling a qualitative research sample, which are convenience sample, judgement sample¹⁵⁰, and theoretical sample. Regarding case study research, sample sizes vary across research studies¹⁵¹ and small sample sizes are not unusual.¹⁵² Therewith related, Eisenhardt (1989, p. 545) recommends a sample size of four to ten cases and emphasises that by studying fewer than four cases, the development of complex theory is difficult. To find the adequate sample size, it has to be referred to the questions under study. This study investigates (1) how sibships in entrepreneurial families, within the scope of sibling research, influence succession in family firms, and (2) how siblings in entrepreneurial families influence each other regarding succession in family firms, considering the family structure variables *birth order*, *sibship size*, and *age spacing*. To answer the research questions, and simultaneously accounting for the family-related attributes, family firms that are owned or managed by families with pairs or groups of siblings have to constitute the research sample. As a consequence, the research sample results from a combination of family firm and family characteristics. With regard to the final sample size, a sample was sought consisting of five to eight family firms and in conjunction therewith one or two interview partners either actively or inactively related to the family firm.

To build theory from case study research and obtain a preferably high level of generalisability, Eisenhardt (1989, p. 537) advocates composing the research sample based on theoretical sampling. In this context, Eisenhardt emphasises the choice of cases that presumably replicate or extend theory as the goal of theoretical sampling. Arber (1993, pp. 38, 70) however names the two functions of such sampling as (1) confidence about the sample's representativeness and (2) such representativeness enables the stating of broader inferences. For this study, a combination of theoretical and judgement sampling was applied, depending on the sampling subject (i.e., the family firm or the entrepreneurial family). Accordingly, first judgement sampling was used when sampling

¹⁵⁰ Aka purposeful sample (M. N. Marshall, 1996, p. 523) or purposive sample (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 55).

¹⁵¹ The literature review revealed sample sizes ranging from 3–154 cases within one qualitative study. E.g., Brenes, Madrigal, & Molina-Navarro (2006) used a sample size of three cases, just as Nordqvist & Melin (2010), whereas Steier & Miller (2010) and Cabrera-Suárez (2005) chose a sample of seven cases.

¹⁵² Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011, p. 55) refer to small samples as that they often characterise qualitative research approaches and add that the reason behind is the goal to obtain in-depth information. Accordingly, the underlying idea can be regarded as a tradeoff of breadth in respect of depth.

types of family firms, namely medium-sized and large family firms. Such environmental control is reasonable, since this precondition is assumed to ensure the required variety of niches and even so does not the reverse, which would be overly narrowing the research context. The underlying assumption therefore is as follows: The bigger the family firm, the more niches are available and the more attractive the family firm could be for an offspring. This in turn could influence the career choice towards succession. As a consequence, the a priori judgemental limitation on these types of businesses limits the research findings to them but as a tradeoff guarantees the research context needed.

Second, theoretical sampling is used on the family-related part of the sample. In this context, Eisenhardt's advice is taken into account for theoretical sampling when pursuing theory generation. As the study is built in due consideration of sibling research concepts and most importantly the Family Niche Model, the study subliminally makes allowance for theoretical prerequisites as to the family-related part of the sample and is therefore also theory-driven, which represents the study's deductive element. Since variety in sibship size is crucial for this research, the sample is not predetermined to pairs of siblings or to a specific group of siblings. As to the application of the Family Niche Model, a specific focus is set on lastborn children. Accordingly, a particular aim was to interview lastborn children and to contrast their statements to the ones of the earlierborn sibling(s). In summary, the aim was to acquire research partners with successful or unsuccessful succession experiences within medium-sized and large family firms, in which the entrepreneurial families are shaped by diversity in sibship size.

In the first step, since only companies in German-speaking Switzerland were targeted, 634 family firms were analysed as to their canton of origin and as to information about the management and ownership structure.¹⁵³ In the second step, potential research partners were contacted by e-mail or by telephone. The companies that were contacted by e-mail were sent a link to an online questionnaire and company representatives were kindly asked to fill it in.¹⁵⁴ The emphasis of the survey was on obtaining information about firm- and family-related characteristics, which are (1) the type of business as to number of employees, (2) the generation in charge, (3) the sibship size, and (4) the industry of the family firm, meaning a production company or a service company. The questionnaire was developed to identify the most similar and thereby

¹⁵³ The analysis was carried out based on publications and statistical information on Swiss family firms, however, the data were not intended to be exhaustive in any direction.

¹⁵⁴ A flowchart outlining the basis upon which the questionnaire was compiled is attached in the appendix (see Section 9.2). The survey was carried out using *EFS survey*, an online research tool developed by *Unipark*, who supplies the tool as professional survey software for academic research.

most comparable family firms and as a result of this to build an – in varying degrees – homogeneous sample on the business side and a rather heterogeneous sample regarding sibling constellations.¹⁵⁵ The homogeneity on the company side reduces potential variation arising from different types of businesses (cf. Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 46), whereas the heterogeneity on the family side provides diversity, which facilitates a more substantiated insight. This approach not only provided access to potential interview partners, but also further information on the research population. In addition, the respondents were asked regarding their willingness to participate in the interview sessions. Based on the company analysis, 159 out of the 634 preselected family firms were contacted, of which 76 company representatives filled in the questionnaire. This corresponds to a response rate of 47.8%. Of these respondents, 14 agreed to participate in the main study, of which two later cancelled their participation. Despite the high response rate, the number of participants is rather small. However, the approach of building a research sample of homogeneous family firms, consisting of medium-sized and large family firms, and heterogeneous sibling constellations within the entrepreneurial families, could be sustained. Nevertheless, the varying industries the participating family firms are operating in, also bring in heterogeneity on the family firm side. With nine cases in total, the aspired sample size of five to eight cases was even exceeded. Further information on the research sample is provided in Subsection 4.2.5.3, which generally discusses the research sample and in Section 5.1, in which the individual case descriptions are provided.

When discussing sampling procedures, sampling bias or more specifically selection bias has to be debated. Gerring (2007) defines selection bias as “[a] form of *bias* that is introduced whenever the treatment (the causal factor of interest) is not randomly assigned across cases, thus violating the *ceteris paribus* assumption of causal analysis” (p. 217).¹⁵⁶ As discussed, the participating family firms were selected according to the predefined selection criteria¹⁵⁷ introduced earlier this subsection, whereby the selection process was carried out via a web-based online survey. However, due to the rather limited number of interviewees, all respondents of the web-based survey were listed to participate in the main study. In addition, within the research process, the research sample was increased by one additional case, due to a personal recommendation. Nonetheless, it can be concluded that based on the predefined selection criteria, in the main, the research sample was randomly selected.

¹⁵⁵ See Subsection 4.2.5.1.

¹⁵⁶ Further remarks on selection bias are discussed in Subsection 7.3.2.

¹⁵⁷ The selection criteria are outlined in Subsection 4.2.5.1.

4.2.5.3 Research Sample

Punch (2014, p. 352) defines a research sample as a smaller group that is drawn from the defined research population and actually studied instead. In this context, data are collected from the sample, analysed in relation to the sample, and inferences are subsequently made to the population. Gerring (2007) provides a case study-related definition by defining a sample as “[t]he set of cases (and observations) upon which the researcher is focused” and states that a sample is “[a]ssumed to be representative of some population, which is usually larger than the sample” (p. 216, emphasis removed). Sampling in relation to a population indirectly points to generalisability, which should be aimed when compiling the sample – the better the sample represents the population, the higher the generalisability of the research findings. In addition, Eisenhardt (1989, p. 535) classes the concept of a population as being crucial, since a set of entities from which the sample is then drawn is determined by the population.

This study’s research sample consists of nine family firms, whereof seven family firms are medium-sized firms and two are large firms. Thereof, eight companies are 3rd generation family firms and one is a 2nd generation family firm. Overall, the research sample is rather small, which however is a prevalent state in qualitative research (cf. Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 45). The high share of 3rd generation family firms is assumed to enable the interview partners to comment reflectively, from a retrospective viewpoint on more than one succession event. As to the succession status at the time of the interviews, two firms were confronted with succession planning. This aspect also contributes to the aforementioned unintended heterogeneity among the participating family firms, which was already discussed as to the diverse industries the family firms are operating in. Nevertheless, despite this primarily heterogeneous research sample, the participating family firms represent an adequate research environment for this project. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, research by Ward (2011, pp. 1–2) revealed that about 30% of enterprises are handed over to the 3rd generation, 13% of enterprises survive through the 3rd generation, and about 3% of enterprises exist beyond. Accordingly, this study’s research sample also reflects a population that is challenged by succession management, meaning that at that point in a company’s history, many companies are not handed over to the next generation.

On the entrepreneurial family side, the sample is intended to be heterogeneous and thereby includes pairs of siblings as well as groups of siblings up to five siblings. The interviews were conducted with two retired owner-managers and hence former successors, seven current CEOs as successors, two non-successors and one successor as non-family member. Whenever possible, more than one family member was interviewed.

Following this approach, allows studying succession from different perspectives since the family members hold different appointments inside and outside the company. The initial plan to interview full sibships or even all family members had to be retained, since the web-based survey did not generate as many contacts as would have been needed to hold onto this plan. It can be summarised that the sample was composed based on judgemental and theoretical considerations and was therefore not only randomly chosen. Details and particularities for each case are provided within the case descriptions in Section 5.1.

To provide an overview on the research sample, the family structure variables *birth order*, *sibship size*, and *age spacing* have to be discussed. In this context, Table 4.2 provides information on the single cases in relation to these family structure variables.

Table 4.2. Family Structure Variables within the Research Sample

Case	Sibship Size (Birth Order)	Age Spacing
Case 1	5 siblings (m/f/m/m/f)	Firstborn (1 year) Secondborn (1 year) Thirdborn (3 years) Fourthborn (5 years) Fifthborn/Lastborn
Case 2	3 siblings (m/f/f)	Firstborn (2 years) Secondborn/Middleborn (6 years) Lastborn
Case 3	3 siblings (m/m/f)	Firstborn (15 years) Secondborn/Middleborn (5 years) Lastborn
Case 4	3 siblings (m/m/f)	Firstborn (3 years) Secondborn/Middleborn (8 years) Lastborn
Case 5	3 siblings (m/m/f)	Firstborn (3 years) Secondborn/Middleborn (4 years) Lastborn
Case 6	2 siblings (f/m)	Firstborn (1 year) Secondborn/Lastborn
Case 7	2 siblings (m/f)	Firstborn (1.5 years) Secondborn/Lastborn
Case 8	2 siblings (m/m)	Firstborn (4 years) Secondborn/Lastborn
Case 9	4 siblings (m/m/m/m)	Firstborn (1 year) Secondborn (1 year) Thirdborn (2 years) Lastborn

With regard to the variable birth order, the research sample is composed of seven firstborn offspring, two secondborn offspring as middleborn offspring, one thirdborn offspring, and one lastborn offspring.¹⁵⁸ Therewith related, it should be noticed that five out of the seven firstborn interview partners became CEO in the family firm. This situation was found in Case 1 with two firstborn interview partners as successors as well as in Case 2, Case 4, and Case 5 with one interview partner as successor in each case. In this respect, in about half of the family firms represented in this study, the firstborn took over the company at least in one succession process.¹⁵⁹ These birth order differences further underline the research sample's heterogeneity as to sibling constellations, which was discussed in the previous subsection. With regard to the variable

¹⁵⁸ The birth order position of the non-family interview partner (see Case 7) is not considered for this detailed record, since he did not grow up in the entrepreneurial family that is analysed.

¹⁵⁹ These family firms are presented in Case 1, Case 2, Case 4, and Case 5.

sibship size, the research sample comprises three two-child families (i.e., Case 6, Case 7, and Case 8), four three-child families (i.e., Case 2, Case 3, Case 4, and Case 5), one four-child family (i.e., Case 9), and one five-child family (i.e., Case 1). Again, the indented range of sibling constellations also contributes to the research sample's heterogeneity on the family side. It can be summarised, that the research sample primarily consists of two- and three-child families. Regarding the variable age spacing, it is important to distinguish between biological birth order and functional birth order, meaning the actual birth order and how birth order affects the sibship (cf. J. R. Harris, 2002a, paras. 44–45). In this context, an age gap of about more than six years is perceived as having the affect that two biological siblings grow up almost like only children within the same family, since their interaction and sibling bond is less marked.¹⁶⁰ Following this categorisation, the research sample includes one sibship (i.e., Case 3), in which the functional birth order has to be considered in addition to the biological birth order. Case 3 thereby implies the peculiarity that the secondborn has to be seen as a potential firstborn, whereby the thirdborn as lastborn child keeps his/her position as lastborn child. Further variables such as gender, are only considered up to the extent needed for this research and thereby only play a minor role for this study.

4.2.6 Data Collection Methods and Procedure

It is important that the data collection procedure is guided by the research question (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 268), and is thus linked to the research aim. This study's overall purpose is to gain insight into subjective viewpoints of the interview partners by applying an explorative approach and collecting primary data. Following this perspective, Flick (2007a, p. 11) recommends semi-structured and narrative interviews as methods of data collection. Bryman (2012, p. 716) defines semi-structured interviews as a type of interview that offers researchers the freedom to adjust the sequence of questions as well as to add questions in response to the interviewee's replies that seem to be intrinsic for the research.¹⁶¹ Flick (2011, p. 112) outlines the semi-structuredness not only as to the type of interview but also as to the interview questions and describes this method as a technique that enables studying an individual's view on a phenomenon. Flick also refers to the interviewer's rather high

¹⁶⁰ For more detailed information, see Kasten (2003, pp. 75–87).

¹⁶¹ Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011, p. 128) describe semi-structured interviews as a research method that contains specific research questions, however not following a stringent order and thereby highly depending on the interviewer, up to what extent he/she reacts on responses. In this respect, it has to be pointed out that in contrast to Punch (2014, p. 352), Hesse-Biber & Leavy do not differentiate between general and specific research questions. Accordingly, their use of the term *specific* research question has to be interpreted as research questions that lead the course of the interview.

impact as he/she actively leads the conversation. This approach requires constant reflection on the responses during the ongoing interview by the researcher. Hence, the interviewer has to instantaneously react to the answers given and decide how these responses may impact the research outcome. Accordingly, this data collection technique implies a substantial influence of the interviewer on the research outcome.

With regard to this research project, a combination of semi-structured in-depth interviews is applied. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, pp. 94, 126) refer to in-depth interviews¹⁶² as a data gathering method that presumes unique and important knowledge of the interview partner about a specific phenomenon being studied and classify it as an appropriate method to obtain information on a person's lived experiences and points of view. In respect thereof, semi-structured in-depth interviews constitute an appropriate research method, as it allows for researching a social phenomenon based on individual's personal experiences and knowledge, and at the same time accounts for potential realignments of the interview guide during the interview. In addition, as to the problem-centredness, the interviews include elements of problem-centred interviewing (cf. Witzel, 2000).

The main study interviews were conducted over a period of seven months, ranging from July 2011 to January 2012, whereby the order of the interviews depended on the interview partners' availability. In summary, twelve face-to-face, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. As the advantages of this technique were already described (see Subsection 2.2.2.1), they are not further discussed. As recommended by Flick (2007a, pp. 30–31), the aim was to carry out the interviews in the interview partners' natural environment. Since the interview partners' and the interviewer's native language is German, all interviews were conducted in German.¹⁶³ As in the pre-study interviews, the author offered the possibility to answer questions regarding the overall background of the study. However, detailed questions related to the research goals were only answered after the interview, in order not to manipulate the responses. Answering specific questions post hoc allowed the obtaining of additional information, then maybe with a different way of thinking with regard to the same question. If needed, during the interviews, only questions to improve clarity were answered. This proceeding ensures not only that the interview partners were sufficiently informed and provided the interview partners the possibility to add further information by themselves, but also allowed a concluding discussion at the end of the interview.

¹⁶² Aka intense interviews (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 94).

¹⁶³ The interview guides are attached in the appendix (see Section 9.3).

4.2.7 Data Preparation and Data Management

According to Miles et al. (2014, p. 50), the main issues of data management are to ensure (1) high-quality, accessible data, (2) documentation of the data analyses carried out, and (3) retention of the data and the related analyses after the study has been completed. Since ethical issues, such as anonymity and confidentiality, have been addressed in Section 1.5, these aspects of data management are not discussed again. Like the pre-study interviews, the main study interviews were recorded using a digital audio tape recording system. Following each interview, the recording was transcribed using the transcription software *f4*¹⁶⁴. The recordings were transcribed by the author herself following the transcription guide by Hautz and Hartmann (2009). Accordingly, no speech recognition software was used. To prepare the text for the qualitative content analysis, a detailed transcription that accounted for the linguistic particularities (i.e., stress of words, pauses for reflection, overlap of speeches, etc.) was carried out. In case of Swiss German dialect use, the wording was adjusted only in order to obtain comparable transcripts for the later analysis.

4.2.8 Data Analysis

With regard to data analysis, Gibbs (2007, p. 3) discusses the option of merging data collection and data analysis, which is one speciality of qualitative research. Accordingly, the oftentimes separate treatment of these work stages that is common in some other types of social research is omitted. Miles et al. (2014, p. 70) explicitly encourage researchers to carry out these tasks concurrently, since this approach may result in higher quality data. Regarding this study, the two stages are not treated entirely separately, since the use of semi-structured interviews specifically enables to modify the interview guide during the course of the research. As a consequence thereof, this proceeding may partly imply that previous interviews influence subsequent interviews by incorporating lessons learned. Nevertheless, the discussion of preliminary results with interview partners to follow was avoided.

However, the techniques for analysing case study evidence are still not well defined (Yin, 2014, p. 132). As discussed, this study intends to generate theory and thereupon to develop hypotheses, but also builds on sibling research. In this respect, Yin's (2014, p. 136) approach of *Relying on theoretical propositions* is applied as general strategy. This approach was chosen due to the study's characteristic of carrying out inductive research supplemented with deductive elements. In consequence and as apparent from

¹⁶⁴ For further information, see <http://www.audiotranskription.de/f4.htm>.

the research questions, the study follows specific theoretical propositions from sibling research. In addition, these propositions partly define the case study research design and simultaneously guide the analysis as a priori concepts¹⁶⁵ – with the Family Niche Model leading the way. Regarding the analysis techniques for the qualitative content analysis, a combination of Saldaña's (2013) very detailed coding approach and Yin's (2014) *Cross-Case Synthesis* approach is used. In this way both techniques' advantages were combined and an analysis technique which in turn suited the research project was developed. The way of proceeding can be separated into three main steps, which are (1) the assignment of codes to identify reoccurring textual passages within each case, (2) the clustering of similar codes to superordinated categories, and (3) the identification of interrelationships among these categories and thereby across the cases.¹⁶⁶ Respectively in terms of within-case analyses, in a first step, each succession event is analysed independently of one another and in a second step, within the framework of cross-case analyses, identifying across-case similarities and/or differences respectively are sought. Subsequently thereupon, theory is generated and hypotheses are developed.

As the research is based on qualitative interviews, data in the form of interview transcripts, have to be analysed, which means regarding this study, by means of a qualitative content analysis.¹⁶⁷ Qualitative content analysis' underlying goal is to extract each interview's core content and the related meaning so as to answer the research questions. Bryman (2012, p. 715) defines qualitative content analysis as an approach to construct meaning in and of texts, which emphasises the investigator's role. The definition further underlines the characteristic of categories emerging directly from the data and the emphasis of considering the significance to understand the research context's importance. The interview transcripts are analysed by use of manual coding. Gibbs (2007) defines coding as “[...] a way of indexing or categorizing the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas about it [...]” (p. 38).¹⁶⁸ Conformably, Miles et al. (2014, p. 73) describe coding as a method of data condensation, which enables researchers to filter the most meaningful text passages, to cluster similar data, and to prepare the data for the further analysis. In line therewith, Miles et al. describe codes as “[...] labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Gibbs (2007, p. 5).

¹⁶⁶ See also Miles et al. (2014, p. 73).

¹⁶⁷ A succeeding quantitative analysis (e.g., frequency analysis) of the qualitative research findings is not viable, since – to the usage of semi-structured interviews – the interviews slightly deviate from each other and a quantitative analysis would therefore not necessarily reflect reality.

¹⁶⁸ Regarding coding in qualitative research, different terminologies exist (see Lewins & Silver, 2007).

inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 71).¹⁶⁹ By applying Saldaña’s (2013) approach and as to coding methods applied in this study, at the stage of First Cycle coding, Grammatical Methods (i.e., Attribute Coding¹⁷⁰, Subcoding, and Simultaneous Coding), Elemental Methods (i.e., In Vivo Coding), and Procedural Methods (i.e., Causation Coding) are used, whereas the main coding methods applied are In Vivo Coding and Causation Coding. The within-case analyses in Section 6.1 are regarded as Eclectic Coding, which enables the combination of First Cycle coding methods. At the stage of Second Cycle coding, Pattern Coding is utilised.¹⁷¹ These pattern codes were used to develop statements that link the data to the a priori theoretical constructs. Table 4.3 provides further information on the applied coding methods.

Table 4.3. Coding Cycles in Relation to the Applied Coding Methods¹⁷²

Coding Cycle	Coding Method	
First Cycle coding	Grammatical Methods	Attribute Coding = Coding of descriptive variable information about the data as well as the participants’ demographic characteristics.
		Subcoding = Adding details and enriching already coded information by the assignment of second-order tags.
		Simultaneous coding = Detailing of data by applying more than one code to the same qualitative datum whereby codes may overlap.
	Elemental Methods	In Vivo Coding = Coding by using words the interview partners use themselves.
	Procedural Methods	Causation Coding = Locating, extracting, and/or inferring of causal beliefs from the interview transcripts.
First to Second Cycle coding	Eclectic Coding = Combination of multiple First Cycle coding methods.	
Second Cycle coding	Pattern Coding = Coding of explanatory or inferential codes to identify emerging themes and thereupon to build a superordinated unit of analysis.	

¹⁶⁹ Saldaña (2013) defines a code in qualitative research as that it “[...] is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of a language-based or visual data” (p. 3), and adds that “[i]n qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes” (p. 4).

¹⁷⁰ In this context, Saldaña (2013, p. 70) refers for instance to Miles & Huberman (1994), who describe this coding method as Descriptive Coding.

¹⁷¹ Saldaña (2013, pp. 58–59) groups coding methods into First Cycle coding methods, Second Cycle coding methods, and one First to Second Cycle coding method lying in-between; with each coding method having at least one ‘submethod’. For refining the First Cycle coding results and as a hybrid method in-between First and Second Cycle coding, Eclectic Coding is applied.

¹⁷² Cf. Saldaña (2013, pp. 59, 69, 91–92, 163, 188–193, 209–210).

One primary goal of coding is to find repetitive patterns and consistencies in the texts to be analysed (cf. Saldaña, 2013, p. 5). Therefrom follows that coding aims at pattern detection and is to some extent tailored to this goal. To build categories and thereby impute meaning, the codes are clustered to patterns.¹⁷³ Ensuing, the coded data are further grouped and linked with each other into superordinated categories (cf. Saldaña, 2013, pp. 9–10). The coding decision as to which coding methods are applied to achieve this goal of finding repetitive patterns and consistencies was taken after the audio recordings were transcribed and perused. This practice implies that the decision is grounded on an emergent conceptual framework rather than on methodological considerations (cf. Saldaña, 2013, p. 61). With this in mind, for instance In Vivo Coding was selected to honour the interview partner's voices as this enables to ground the content analysis from the interviewees' perspectives (Saldaña, 2013, p. 61). In addition, the choice of In Vivo Coding is further supported as it is recommended if the research goal is to develop new theory (Saldaña, 2013, p. 62). In-between First and Second Cycle coding, the codes were analysed and rearranged in further iterations, in order to discern potential categories, which prepares the data for Pattern Coding as Second Cycle coding method. By availing of these different analytic approaches described in this subsection, the study's accountability should be enhanced and as a consequence thereof, the depth and breadth of the research findings (cf. Saldaña, 2013, p. 60). The analytical framework, which summarises the elucidations above, is presented in Figure 4.4.

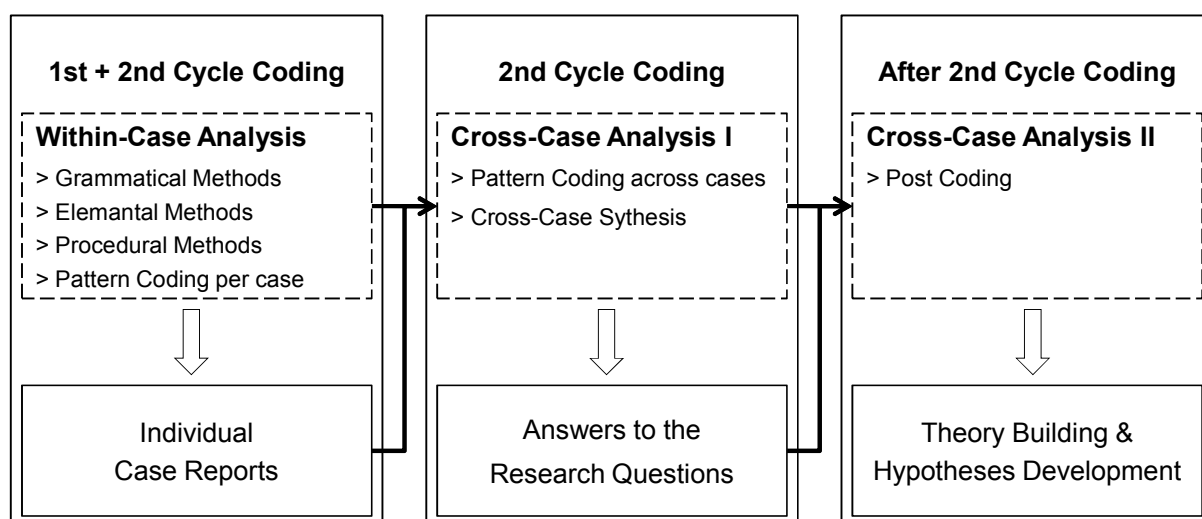


Figure 4.4. Analytical Framework

¹⁷³ Acc. to Saldaña (2013, pp. 6–7) patterns can be characterised by similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence, and/or causation.

By taking theory generation into account, this study's overall codifying process follows a basic, streamlined codes-to-theory model starting with particular as well as real codes and subcodes, developing over categories and subcategories to themes or concepts, and ending with general and abstract assertions or theory respectively that is discerned from the content and meaning of the original data (cf. Saldaña, 2013, pp. 12–13).¹⁷⁴ In keeping with the partly deductive research approach, a provisional list of codes was determined beforehand. This way of proceeding enables an analysis that is specifically geared towards answering the research questions at the best possible rate (cf. Saldaña, 2013, p. 62). Gibbs (2007, pp. 44–45) refers to this approach of constructing codes that lack an incipient reference to the data as concept-driven coding. These pre-established codes were deliberately developed on the basis of the theoretical frameworks applied with regard to succession as the central research phenomenon under study. The reason behind this was to ensure that integral components of each concept are studied as to their validation within the new research context. In addition, data-driven coding was applied, meaning that codes were derived from the data (cf. Gibbs, 2007, pp. 44–46). As recommended by Saldaña (2013, p. 64), the initial coding scheme¹⁷⁵ was pilot tested with a few pages of transcript before all data were coded. Due to its comprehensive and detailed instructions, the coding manual by Saldaña is used as main reference guide for this analysis. Further information on the constructed and derived codes is provided in Section 6.1.

4.2.9 Quality Management

When commenting on quality management within qualitative research, Flick (2007a, pp. 5–8) refers to the opposing approaches in the field, since no generally-accepted agreement on quality management in qualitative research exists. Flick (p. 6) sees the source for these disagreements as diverse approaches (i.e., generalist approaches or contrariwise approach-specific criteria as well as standards and guidelines) in the fact that qualitative research can be regarded as a kind of umbrella term. Flick further adds that beneath this umbrella, several approaches with diverse theoretical backgrounds, methodological principles, or research issues and research aims are matched. As a

¹⁷⁴ In this context, and as deployed in this study, Saldaña (2013, p. 13) points to writings by Corbin & Strauss (2008, p. 55), Layder (1998), and Mason (2002) that refer to the role of pre-existing theory that – as an influencing factor – may lead the research endeavour.

¹⁷⁵ Instead of using the term *coding scheme*, Gibbs (2007) uses the term *codebook* (aka coding frame) and defines a codebook as “[a] list of the codes in use in a qualitative data analysis project, usually containing their definitions and a set of rules or guidelines for coding [...]” (p. 148). In comparison, the definition provided by Gibbs lets assume a more detailed manual than needed for this research project. Accordingly, by applying Saldaña's approach, the term *coding scheme* is used.

consequence, this study is composed in consideration of its specific research environment that allows for the respective context, the applied case study-specific nature, the research topic, and the research aim of contributing to the closure of the currently existing research gap by means of answering the research questions, generating theory, and developing hypotheses.

The classical assessment criteria of research quality in social research imply validity, reliability, and objectivity (cf. e.g., Bortz & Döring, 2009, pp. 326–328)¹⁷⁶, and are used in its traditional way or at best modified for qualitative research alike (cf. Flick, 2007a, p. 15). In this context, Krefting (1991, p. 214) points out that as to the assessment of qualitative research two issues have to be addressed; at first, models to evaluate quantitative research endeavours are rarely applicable in qualitative studies, and at second, strategies applied to assess quantitative research are rarely the same for qualitative studies. Regarding trustworthiness, some researchers support the notion that conventional quality criteria are not applicable for qualitative research and thus have to be adjusted accordingly (cf. Guba, 1981). Following this, the universally accepted quality criteria for empirical research have to be revisited as to the applied qualitative research approach as well as to each study's particular setting. Regarding case study research, Thomas (2011, p. 63) emphasises that the assessment criteria validity and reliability are not principal concerns in case study research and that their relevance at this is less explicit. Thomas' stance is plausible, when considering that case study research frequently follows an inductive approach, meaning that at the point of planning oftentimes merely a rather incomplete framework is used. It can therefore be concluded, that the use of these methods of verification in qualitative research and/or case study research respectively, is not advisable without any reservation.

Different approaches to reassess and/or rename the traditional quality criteria with regard to qualitative research exist (e.g., Mishler, 1990). However, many of them are not fully developed. An advanced approximation is available by Yin (2014, pp. 45–49), who provides case study related tactics when defining the quality criteria validity and reliability, and at the same time indicates the phases of research in which these criteria have to be considered. Applying the established terms, Yin subdivides validity into construct validity, internal validity, and external validity. Table 4.4 depicts the tactics developed by Yin.

¹⁷⁶ Different approaches with different quality criteria exist. E.g., Miles et al. (2014, pp. 310–314) summarise the quality criteria as (1) Objectivity/Confirmability, (2) Reliability/Dependability/Auditability, (3) Internal Validity/Credibility/Authenticity, (4) External Validity/Transferability/Fittingness, and, (5) Utilisation/Application/Action Orientation.

Table 4.4. Case Study Tactics for Four Design Tests¹⁷⁷

Tests	Case Study Tactic	Phase of Research in which Tactic Occurs
Construct validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of multiple sources of evidence • Establish chain of evidence • Have key informants review draft case study report 	Data collection Data collection Composition
Internal validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do pattern matching • Do explanation building • Address rival explanations • Use logic models 	Data analysis Data analysis Data analysis Data analysis
External validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use theory in single-case studies • Use replication logic in multiple-case studies 	Research design Research design
Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use case study protocol • Develop case study database 	Data collection Data collection

Yin (2014, p. 45) provides the most detailed way of proceeding to handle quality in case study research, wherefore Yin's approach is applied for this research study. In the following subsections, each of the above introduced quality criteria is therefore described and adapted to this study's research setting. The tactics suggested by Yin are hence deployed based on their high degree of sophistication and specification for case study research. These remarks are then supplemented with a discussion on objectivity and subjectivity.

4.2.9.1 Validity

As discussed, the assessment and interpretation of validity in qualitative research varies from the perception of the term in general social research.¹⁷⁸ Within the scope of general social research methods, Bryman (2012) defines validity as “[a] concern with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research” (p. 717), and names four aspects of validity that are (1) measurement validity, (2) internal validity, (3) external validity, and (4) ecological validity. Bryman further points out that validity used on its own is typically used in relation to measurement validity. A qualitative research related, but rather wide definition of validity is provided by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) who refer to its differing application within the qualitative research paradigm and declare that in general it is one issue “[...] researchers address as they make a case or argument that the knowledge they have produced is reflective of the social world and/or is compelling” (p. 56). Moreover, Hesse-Biber and Leavy

¹⁷⁷ Yin (2014, p. 45).

¹⁷⁸ Cf. e.g., Creswell (2013, pp. 244–250) or Flick (2007a, p. 15).

(p. 48) classify validity in qualitative research as not being easily achieved and describe it as a process in which the researcher obtains the reader's confidence. The same researchers further emphasise the issue of researcher bias and measurement bias that may constitute threats to validity.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, a project's validity is enhanced by an optimal question-method fit, which is a central criterion as to validity (Punch, 2014, p. 24). As introduced in the preceding paragraph, Yin (2014, pp. 45–48) defines validity in far more detail as he distinguishes between construct validity, internal validity, and external validity (i.e., in line with quantitative research) and specifies each subcriterion regarding tactic and research phase in which the tactic occurs (see Table 4.4). Yin's proceeding of approaching validity in case study research is applied for this study. Accordingly, the following paragraphs provide an adaptation of Yin's case study tactics for four design tests¹⁸⁰ discussed within the context of this research.

Construct Validity:

Yin (2014) defines construct validity as “identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (p. 46). According to Yin, within case study research, construct validity is related to the composition and data collection phase (see Table 4.4). Correspondingly, these case study tactics were transferred to this study's research context and validation arrangements were set up. Table 4.5 presents these arrangements.

Table 4.5. *Construct Validity – Case Study Tactic and Validation Arrangements*¹⁸¹

Case Study Tactic	Phase of Research	Validation Arrangements within this Study
Use of multiple sources of evidence	Data collection	Whenever possible, two interviews per case were conducted.
Establish chain of evidence	Data collection	Established theories were applied.
Have key informants review draft case study report	Composition	First research findings were outlined in the preliminary study, in preparation for this dissertation and discussed with the referees.

To assure a high level of construct validity, all three case study tactics recommended by Yin (2014, p. 45) were considered in the respective phases of the research. In this respect, firstly, to comply with Yin's advice of using multiple sources of evidence, construct validity is approached by conducting more than one interview for each case whenever possible. Following this strategy provides insights into the research phenomenon from different perspectives as well as from different birth order positions.

¹⁷⁹ See Subsection 7.3.2.

¹⁸⁰ See Yin (2014, p. 45) or Table 4.4 on p. 112.

¹⁸¹ Based on Yin (2014, p. 45, see Table 4.4 on p. 112).

Regarding multiple sources of evidence, at the beginning of the research, a triangulation approach was considered. However, this approach could not be implemented due to a lack of comparable documentary data for each case. Instead, secondly, and to build a chain of evidence, qualitative interviews in consideration of selected theoretical foundations were conducted. In this context, the Family Niche Model as the main theoretical research concept, the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification as well as the concept of parent identification and parent deidentification build the basis for the research. This approach was followed to link the research question to the data collection and in turn to the research results. Due to research by Sulloway (e.g., Sulloway, 1996), validity relating to the Family Niche Model is taken for granted. However, for this method, the strongest argument for construct validity is that whenever possible, two interviews per case were conducted. As discussed, this course of proceeding provided the possibility to cross-check the interview partners' statements and to bring in different viewpoints. Ergo, the theoretical foundation which to some extent also guided the data collection, ensured construct validity. Thirdly, and by referring to the composition of the study, Yin recommends having key informants review draft case study reports. To comply with this advice, the research findings from the pre-study as well as the results from the interviews of Case 1, the pilot case of the main study, were outlined in the preliminary study and discussed with the referees. The therefrom resulting suggestions for improvements were then incorporated for the further course of the research.

Internal Validity:

Yin (2014, p. 46) defines internal validity in relation to explanatory or causal research studies and deliberately excludes descriptive or exploratory studies. Yin defines the term as “seeking to establish a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are believed to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships” (p. 46). As stated in Table 4.4¹⁸², Yin's related case study tactics refer to the data analyses procedures. In addition, Yin (p. 47) raises two concerns over internal validity that (1) internal validity is mostly an issue for explanatory case studies¹⁸³, and (2) the concern of making inferences. Similarly as Yin comments on his first concern, Eisenhardt (1989, p. 542) emphasises the aspect of causal relationships (explained by means of qualitative data) and potential impact of additional variables that were not

¹⁸² See p. 110.

¹⁸³ Cf. Section 2.1.

identified on time. Table 4.6 puts Yin's case study tactics in relation to this study's validation arrangements.

Table 4.6. Internal Validity – Case Study Tactic and Validation Arrangements¹⁸⁴

Case Study Tactic	Phase of Research	Validation Arrangements within this Study
Do pattern matching	Data analysis	Carried out as a subsequent step of pattern coding within the cross-case analyses.
Do explanation building		Addressed during the analyses and within the case study reports.
Address rival explanations		Addressed by interviewing several family members whenever possible.
Use logic models		Addressed by searching for replication logic within the individual cases.

To ensure internal validity, Yin recommends pattern matching, explanation building, addressing of rival explanations, and the use of logic models as case study tactics. As to this study, pattern matching is incorporated during Second Cycle coding and hence as part of the cross-case analyses. In addition, explanation building is addressed during the within-case analyses, the cross-case analyses as well as when writing the case study reports. To draw comprehensive inferences, the recommendation of allowing for rival explanations is addressed by the attempt to interview several persons per case whenever possible. In this context it is important to analyse each individual case first as a standalone case as part of the within-case analysis and only then draw cross-case inferences within the cross-case analyses. Therewith related and also in association with pattern matching, the tactic of using logic models is addressed by searching for replication logic when comparing the cases within the cross-case analyses. It can be summarised that allowances have been made for all of Yin's tactics to provide the highest level of internal validity possible. In this respect, the tactics were incorporated in the within-case analyses as well as in the cross-case analyses.

External Validity:

With regard to general social research as well as qualitative research, external validity is defined as to the generalisability of research findings beyond the bounded research context from which they were derived (cf. Bryman, 2012, p. 711; Yin, 2014, p. 46). Furthermore, Yin (2014, p. 48) emphasises the original research questions' impact on analytical generalisability¹⁸⁵ and refers to the more suitable use of *how* and *why*

¹⁸⁴ Based on Yin (2014, p. 45, see Table 4.4 on p. 112).

¹⁸⁵ See Subsection 4.2.10.

questions to generate a high level of external validity. As stated before, the issue of external validity has to be addressed already when developing the research design. Table 4.7 presents the validation arrangements regarding external validity as to the specific context of this study.

Table 4.7. External Validity – Case Study Tactic and Validation Arrangements

Case Study Tactic	Phase of Research	Validation Arrangements within this Study
Use theory in single-case studies	Research Design	Use of established research concepts, namely the Family Niche Model by Frank J. Sulloway (1996), the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification as well as the concept of parent identification and parent deidentification.
Use replication logic in multiple-case studies		Core elements of the interview guides were used for every interview

To ensure a high level of external validity, Yin (2014, pp. 45, 48) recommends the use of theory in single case studies. In this context, to comply with this recommendation, established theories are used likewise for each individual case. The theories applied are the Family Niche Model, the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification as well as the concepts of parent identification and parent deidentification. In respect of the fact that Yin's tactic especially refers to single-case studies, it has to be pointed out that within the scope of this research, a single-case is interpreted as one case within the multiple-case research design. With regard to the intended replication logic in multiple-case studies, which represents Yin's second case study tactic, this study applies slightly different interview guides adapted for the interview partners' position as company representative and/or family member (i.e., successor, non-successor, retired CEO, etc.). Nonetheless, although the interview guide was adapted to the individual interview partners and specific interview situation, core questions were used in every interview in equal measure. In the core analysis, each single case was first analysed based on established theory, and second as to replication logic analysed by comparative analyses.¹⁸⁶ Following Yin's advice of using *how* and *why* research questions and applying Yin's case study tactics is assumed to provide an adequate level of external validity. However, with regard to generalisability as the intrinsic goal of external validity, it is mentioned that generalisability is not a primary goal of this study¹⁸⁷. As a consequence, external validity as to this project is of minor importance.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Subsection 4.2.8.

¹⁸⁷ See Subsection 4.2.10.

4.2.9.2 Reliability

Yin (2014, pp. 46, 49) defines reliability as that it demonstrates that the procedures can be repeated and then produce the same results and in addition states the goal of this test in minimising errors and biases. Similarly, Punch (2014, p. 352) defines reliability of data in qualitative research as the dependability of the data.¹⁸⁸ In this context, Thomas (2011, p. 63) explicitly highlights the particularity for a single-case study, in which reliability clearly diminishes, since only one case is investigated that might even be a very specific case. Despite these remarks, Yin (pp. 45, 49) suggests the use of case study protocols and the development of a case study database (see Table 4.4 on p. 112), in order to provide the researcher the possibility to replicate the study. The author of this work acted on this advice and compiled a one page case study protocol for each of the interviews. A further aspect that can minimise reliability are ambiguous interview questions, that can foster misunderstandings of a question by the interviewee, and thereby lead to wrong responses, which in turn would result in misinterpretations during the data analysis. To diminish this potential threat to reliability, the interview guide was refined whenever needed. Accordingly, the use of semi-structured interviews also contributed to obtain a preferably high level of reliability.

When applying qualitative content analysis, in particular coding, intracoder¹⁸⁹ and intercoder¹⁹⁰ reliability have to be considered. Intracoder reliability is defined as the relative consistency by which a researcher codes over time (Chen & Krauss, 2004, para. 1; van den Hoonaard, 2008, para. 1), meaning that the same coder would obtain the same results when coding the same material again. Allowance was made for intracoder reliability, as the author reviewed the transcripts over again, after having finished the First Cycle coding. In contrast, intercoder reliability is regarded as the extent to which different coders agree independently on the same results when applying the same coding scheme to analyse the same content (Cho, 2008, para. 1). Since this study is only conducted by one author, intercoder reliability is no threat to this study and thus irrelevant. In turn, this proceeding means that the research outcome is only based on the inferences of one researcher, which at the same time excludes a potential positive influence of additional researchers. To minimise this effect, the assigned codes were checked in further iterations.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Krippendorff (2011).

¹⁸⁹ Aka intraobserver reliability (see Chen & Krauss, 2004, para. 1).

¹⁹⁰ Aka interrater reliability (see Chen & Krauss, 2004, para. 1).

4.2.9.3 Objectivity and Subjectivity

The fourth classical quality criterion, objectivity, is often contrasted to subjectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 292). Flick (2007a, p. 142) defines objectivity as “[t]he degree to which a research situation (the application of methods and their outcome) is independent from the single researcher”. Accordingly, objectivity in terms of data analysis is given, when different researchers analyse the same data independently of one another and arrive at the same conclusion. It can further be divided regarding execution, evaluation, and interpretation of the research (Bortz & Döring, 2009, p. 195). According to Gomm (2009, p. 351), if objectivity points towards being able to transcend a situation from an outsider’s point of view, then subjectivity pertains assessment from a personal viewpoint, which may be blinkered in case of disapproval or authentic in case of approval. Regarding qualitative content analysis, which is used for this study, this analysis technique is closely connected with both of these criteria. Since qualitative content analysis requires deductive reasoning from the researcher, the research findings are undeniably influenced by the researcher’s ability to stay objective (cf. Saldaña, 2013, pp. 7–8). As visible from these remarks, objectivity and subjectivity are closely related to reliability and subjective bias¹⁹¹, since the research outcome is affected by the researcher. As reliability was discussed in the preceding subsection, as is researcher bias discussed regarding methodological limitations later on (see Subsection 7.3.2.3), to avoid repetition, these aspects are not further discussed with respect to objectivity and subjectivity at this point. With regard to the data analysis technique *coding*, which is applied for this study, objectivity is closely connected with intercoder reliability¹⁹², which refers to the extent to which independent coders agree separately on the same coding when applying the same coding scheme onto the same data. However, objectivity refers to data analysis in general, whereby intercoder reliability refers to coding in particular.

4.2.10 Generalisability of the Research Findings

To assess the level of generalisability in qualitative research and in particular in case study research, several approaches exist. The intended level of generalisability is a major part in constructing qualitative research, as the link between qualitative research and generalisability is often regarded as being weak (Flick, 2007b, p. 41). In addition, Flick (p. 102) even alludes researchers to avoid over-generalisation. Eisenhardt and

¹⁹¹ Aka researcher bias.

¹⁹² See Subsection 4.2.9.2.

Graebner (2007, p. 27) discuss theoretical sampling regarding generalisability and its potential to increase the generalisability of the research findings. However, research findings are generalisable only as to the frame of the sample's predefined theoretical boundaries. The limited or sometimes impossible goal of generalisability as to qualitative research findings is often criticised (cf. Punch, 2014, p. 122), although generalisability and thereby representativeness is oftentimes not the primary goal of qualitative research studies. In the following, the approaches to improve generalisability by Punch (2014), Yin (2014), Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), and Denscombe (2007) are discussed.¹⁹³

Punch (2014, p. 123) elucidates two approaches, by which case studies may produce generalisable results, whereby both approaches depend on the case study's purpose and particularly on the data analysis. These approaches are by conceptualising and by developing propositions. Punch adds that the degree of generalisability depends on the level of abstraction, which means the higher the level of abstraction, the higher the generalisability of the research findings. On the other side, Yin (2014, pp. 40–44) discusses generalisation as the use of theory to generalise from case studies and thereby distinguishes between analytic generalisation and statistical generalisation respectively, and links this distinction to the level of inference.¹⁹⁴ Yin refers to analytic generalisation when the research project is theory-based, and contrasts it to statistical generalisation, which stands for generalising results from empirical studies, for example based on a questionnaire survey.¹⁹⁵ In addition, Yin (p. 41) highlights that analytic generalisation also aims at the generalisation of research findings, and not only to add to abstract theory generation. To emerge generalisability from case study findings alone, analytic generalisation may be based either on (1) the corroboration, modification, the rejection, or the advancement of theoretical concepts, or (2) new concepts that were built upon the finalisation of the case study (Yin, 2014, p. 41). In this respect, Yin's approach is similar to the suggested proceeding by Punch, as both approaches account for the use of theoretical propositions to improve generalisability. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, pp. 260–264) likewise suggest positioning a research study regarding its research goal and research purpose on a continuum of perspectives ranging from high generalisability over transferability¹⁹⁶ to a focus on the particular

¹⁹³ See also Stake (1978).

¹⁹⁴ See also Yin (2014, p. 48).

¹⁹⁵ Yin (2014, p. 40) further accentuates that statistical generalisation is unfeasible in case study research, since the case or the cases do not represent sampling units as well as the small number of cases would make it impossible to generalise for a larger population.

¹⁹⁶ In dependence on Lincon & Guba (2000). C. Marshall & Rossman (2011, p. 252) discuss transferability in relation to first and second decision span in generalising. To be exact, first decision span means the

case study. With regard to the research under study, the perspective of high generalisability has to be discussed in detail. Hesse-Biber and Leavy describe the main tenet of this perspective as to maximise generalisability through comparative analysis that is accompanied by the advantages of facilitating theoretical conclusions as well as potential strengthening of the applied research. Accordingly, especially the facilitation of theoretical conclusions contributes to the goal of theory generation and hypotheses development. Alternatively, Denscombe (2007, pp. 43–44) makes a point in respect of generalisability from case study research by providing three arguments that facilitate generalization, which are (1) each case is unique, however as well a standalone example from a broader class, (2) the extent of generalisability depends on the degree of similarity among cases of the same type, and (3) case study reports provide sufficient information to make a proficient judgement as to the comparison of findings from one case to others in the class. It can therefore be concluded that generalisability depends on the degree of comparability and uniqueness of the cases under study as to the cases studied.

As introduced, this study aims to generate theory and thereupon to develop hypotheses. As apparent from the theoretical framework¹⁹⁷, this research project is based upon different sibling research concepts¹⁹⁸, but only in an ancillary manner. Accordingly, the research uses existing theory to research the phenomenon under study. The use of existent, already approved theories is assumed to increase the degree of generalisability. Following this analytic generalisation approach, the pursued theory generation and hypotheses development is assumed to be a reachable goal for this study.¹⁹⁹ As a consequence, when assessing the level of generalisation for this study's research findings on the continuum of perspectives, as advanced by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, p. 260), the findings should be ranked within the perspective of generalisability. It can thus be concluded, that the actual level of generalisability for this study should be adequate and reasonable.

transferability of results from the sample to the population the sample was drawn from, and second decision span standing for the transferability of the findings from the first population of interest to a second, then by another researcher.

¹⁹⁷ See Section 3.4.

¹⁹⁸ I.e., Family Niche Model, the concepts of sibling identification, sibling deidentification, parent identification, and parent deidentification.

¹⁹⁹ This approach is equivalent to developing propositions, which is suggested by Punch (2014, p. 123).

5 Case Studies

This chapter first provides a brief overview of the participating family firms and the appertaining families, with information on the company management, the company history, the sibship constellations, and so forth. Subsequent to these case descriptions a summarising section which provides an overall insight into the research sample is presented. Concludingly, Table 5.1 summarises the main family firm- and family-related information.

5.1 Case Descriptions

In qualitative data analysis, one major subject matter is to provide a rich description of the phenomenon under research (cf. Gibbs, 2007, p. 4). However, anonymity of the research partners is a major concern as well. In accordance with the ethical considerations for this project, the interview partners' names as well as the company names will not be disclosed. Instead, this research follows Creswell (2013, p. 174) who discusses the possibility to assign numbers or aliases to the participants in order to protect the informants' anonymity. Based on Creswell, the author aims to reflect the composite picture based on the individual cases and not primarily the individual picture. In line with this prerequisite, the individual cases are not described in full detail, however detailed enough to provide the overall picture of each succession event. Contrary to the sample description (see Subsection 4.2.5.3), this section focuses on the individual cases, which are in turn the succession events.

Case 1:

The family firm was established in the early 1920s as a tool manufacturing company and still concentrates on this core competence. In the 1950s, the founder handed the company over to his two sons. Under the leadership of the 2nd generation, the company expanded outside Switzerland and opened its first subsidiaries in neighbouring European countries. Currently, the company is run by the 3rd generation and is operating throughout Europe and the United States of America. In total, the company currently employs about 400 people. With regard to the family constellation behind the business, the family firm moved from a controlling ownership via a sibling partnership to a cousin consortium in the present time. The interview partners representing this succession event were the retired CEO and the current CEO, meaning father and the firstborn son.

Case 2:

This second case portrays a metal construction company, whose beginnings date back to the 1920s when the company was founded as a metalworking shop. The company's name giver only joined the company later as a general partner and took it over in 1960. Accordingly, the company is currently run by the 3rd generation, but by the 2nd generation within the same family. Especially as housing construction massively collapsed in 1970, the company launched a new product line based on solar energy. Over the years, the company continuously expanded its business, for instance also through company takeovers. At the time of the interview, the company employed about 550 full-time employees and thereby represents a large family firm. Also in 1970, the company representative for this case entered the family firm and took over the administrative management ten years later. In addition, the interview partner is not only the CEO of the company but also the president of the board of directors. Regarding birth order positions, the interview partner is the firstborn child of a group of three siblings.

Case 3:

This case portrays a family firm with more than 60 years of experience in the bindery and printing business. Nevertheless, one year after the interview took place, the company had to cease manufacturing and went into liquidation. The company management reasons this step as a consequence of the financial crisis, the big drop in prices, the foreign competition, and the changing market which has been increasingly replaced by online products. The family firm was found in 1944, when the interview partner's grandfather bought a small bindery, further expanded the company, and transformed it into a public limited company. Over time, the company grew by means of further take-overs. The first succession took place in 1981 and the second, when the interview partner took over the company, in 2010. Accordingly, the succession from the 2nd to the 3rd generation is the focus of this study. In contrast to the interview partners involved in this study, the succession experience in this case results from a rather recent occurrence, namely one year prior to the interview. At the time of the interview, the family firm had about 60 full-time employees and about 20 employees that were available on demand, which placed the company within the category of medium-sized companies. The related sibship consists of one stepchild, one son, and one daughter. Since only the second and the third child grew up together, the sibship is predominantly characterised by the last two children. For this case, the siblings' inner-family roles can therefore not be determined solely biologically.

Case 4:

The interview partner representing this company is the CEO of a 2nd generation family firm that is active in the electronics industry. As an international manufacturer of printed circuit boards, the company's products are found in products such as cardiac pacemakers, hearing aids, airplane electronics, and automotive safety technology. Compared to the other research partners in this study, this company is a rather young family firm, as it was only founded in 1985. Nevertheless, the company is a medium-sized enterprise as it has about 120 employees in total. As is characteristic for family firms, the company is majority-owned as well as managed by the founding family. Regarding the family constellation behind the company, the founder's firstborn child is the current CEO and the secondborn child is the president of the board of directors whereas the lastborn child only works occasionally for the company. The succession process was completed in 2000, which leads to a discussion on the succession process from a retrospective view.

Case 5:

The fifth participating family firm runs a retail business in the fashion industry and operates stores for women's and men's clothing as well as brand-specific, monolabel stores in Eastern Switzerland. The company was founded in the late 1910s and is currently run in the 3rd generation by a cousin consortium. At the time the interviews were conducted, the company had about 220 employees. The interview partners for this case were the current CEO who is the firstborn son, and the secondborn son who is currently not involved in the business. The same applies for the lastborn daughter, who is not involved either. Accordingly, the case discusses succession from the successor's point of view as well as from the non-successor's point of view. Altogether, the sibship consists of two sons and one daughter. At present, succession is not under discussion and accordingly, succession is discussed from a retrospective point of view.

Case 6:

This family firm operates a confectioner's shop and produces a variety of more than 100 gourmet chocolates. The company's product range includes the production of biscuits as well as chocolate bars and filled chocolates. The company is run by the 3rd generation and has a tradition of more than 70 years in business. Besides its main stores in Switzerland and stores in other European countries, the company operates stores in the United States of America, the Middle East, and Asia, where these stores

are operated by franchisees. At present, the family firm employs about 120 people. The business was founded in the 1930s and is currently run by the grandson of the founder who is the nephew of the previous CEO. In this context, this case represents a succession case in which the company management is not handed over from father to son, but from uncle to nephew. The interview partner is the second child of a pair of siblings and thus the lastborn, whereby both children work in the family firm. In addition, the interview partner is a member of the board of directors.

Case 7:

The company represented in this case is a Swiss coffee machine manufacturer for professional use. The company was founded in the 1930s and is currently run by the 3rd generation. In the 1990s the family firm became active in exporting their products and today, sells coffee machines all around the world. To respond to the changing consumer behaviour in coffee consumption, the product range was constantly enlarged and nowadays not only includes fully automatic traditional coffee machines, but also fully automatic machines that produce coffee specialities or for instance hot chocolate. At the time of the interview, the company had about 50 employees, and thereby just belonged to the category of medium-sized businesses. Two company representatives could be acquired as interview partners; the current CEO, and the founder's grandson, who is the technical director.

Case 8:

This partnering family firm is a construction company with a core competence in the field of structural engineering. In this respect, the company primarily focuses on industrial and commercial construction. The company was founded in the late 1930s as a partnership and was already shortly afterwards run by one controlling owner, who was the current CEO's grandfather. In the 1960s, the company's legal form was changed into a public limited company. The interview partner for this case is the current CEO, who took over the family firm in 1991. Under his direction, the company further expanded and as a consequence thereof, the number of employees grew from about 50 to 150 employees. As to the family structure, the interview partner is the secondborn child of a pair of siblings. In consequence, this case provides a valuable insight into the career path of a lastborn child. In particular with respect to the applicability of the Family Niche Model as this study's main research concept, it is essential to discuss careers of lastborn children.

Case 9:

In this case, the succession process of a Swiss soft cheese manufacturer is discussed. On a related note, it should be pointed out, that Switzerland is more known for hard cheese production than for soft cheese production. The family firm was founded in the 1920s and was most recently managed by the 3rd generation, namely a grandson of the founder. To react to changing market conditions, the company diversified its product range besides soft cheese as its core product and added soy products as well as convenience products. Compared to all other cases in this study, this case is an exceptional case, since the family firm was sold about 3 years prior to the interview. This circumstance enabled the interview partner, to reflect on succession as well as on the continuity of a business from a different angle than its colleagues in the other cases. In addition, this case provided the rare family constellation of four siblings as potential successors. The interview was conducted with the thirdborn son, who was as well the company's last CEO and by holding this position, he had to prepare and to conduct the sale of the family firm. Today, the interview partner holds positions as supervisory board member.

5.2 Recapitulation

In total, nine cases represent the body of this research project. A comprehensive overview as to the cases' specific family firm and entrepreneurial family background is provided in Table 5.1. The summary particularly goes into details regarding the categorisation of the participating family firms, the generation in charge, the current succession status, the sibship constellations, the number of siblings actively working in the family firms, the interview partner(s), and their birth order position(s). As summarised in Table 5.1, except one partnering family firm, the study solely studies 3rd generation family firms, which – as discussed – constitutes a valuable insight into succession management at a very critical stage in a company's life cycle.²⁰⁰ By adding new research findings specially tailored to this group of family firms, the study has potential to contribute valuable insights not only with regard to company-related outcomes but also with regard to the interplay between the business and the entrepreneurial family, and especially with regard to the sibship/sibling component. In addition, except two cases in which succession is currently under consideration, succession is discussed from a retrospective point of view.

²⁰⁰ See Chapter 1 and Subsection 4.2.5.3.

Table 5.1. Overview Research Sample

Case	Type of Family Firm	Generation in Charge	Succession Status	Sibship Constellation ²⁰¹	Sibling(s) active in the Family Firm ²⁰²	Interview Partner(s)	Birth Order Position(s)
Case 1	large	3rd	retrospective/ ongoing	5 (m/f/m/m/f)	1 (firstborn)	PBD ²⁰³ (retired CEO) and CEO	firstborn, firstborn
Case 2	large	3rd	retrospective/ ongoing	3 (m/f/f)	1 (firstborn)	CEO	firstborn
Case 3	medium	3rd	retrospective	3 (m/m/f)	2 (firstborn and secondborn)	CEO	middleborn
Case 4	medium	2nd	retrospective	3 (m/m/f)	2 (firstborn and secondborn)	CEO	firstborn
Case 5	medium	3rd	retrospective	3 (m/m/f)	1 (firstborn)	CEO and Non-successor	firstborn, middleborn
Case 6	medium	3rd	retrospective	2 (f/m)	2 (firstborn and secondborn)	CEO/Board member	lastborn
Case 7	medium	3rd	retrospective	2 (m/f)	1 (firstborn)	CEO and Technical director	non-family member, firstborn
Case 8	medium	3rd	retrospective	2 (m/m)	1 (secondborn)	CEO	lastborn
Case 9	medium	3rd	retrospective	4 (m/m/m/m)	0 (family firm sold)	retired CEO	thirdborn

²⁰¹ Abbreviations: m = male, f = female

²⁰² For this category, solely siblings that are actively working in the family firm or hold an appointment within the company (e.g., as president or member of the board of directors) are counted. Siblings that only work occasionally for the company stay hidden.

²⁰³ PBD = president of the board of directors

The overview also shows that in order to refer to the Family Niche Model as main theoretical basis, the objective of interviewing to a great extent lastborn children (see Section 4.2.5.2) could only be partly fulfilled, since only two interview partners are lastborn children. In this context it has also to be emphasised that it was abstained from interviewing solely lastborn children, as this approach would exclude insights originating from different perspectives based on different birth order positions within the research sample. It would further make the research of the presumed influence among siblings regarding career options and career choices impossible. Only by interviewing individuals of different birth order positions can the targeted research outcome of generating theory based on a comprehensive research model be reached. To conclude, it can be declared that the research sample suits the research topic. Since the research sample has been described in Subsection 4.2.5.3, it is not described in detail again.

6 Research Findings Qualitative Content Analysis

This chapter presents and discusses the research findings of the qualitative content analysis, subdivided into the sections *within-case analyses* and *cross-case analyses*. In this respect, within the within-case analyses each case is analysed as a standalone case first before these preliminary findings are summarised. Subsequently, within the context of the cross-case analyses, the general and specific research questions are answered and the findings are linked back to the literature. The cross-case analyses are completed by a summary of the findings as to the key concepts under study (i.e., the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification, parent identification and parent deidentification, and the Family Niche Model) and the theory generation and hypotheses development. Accordingly, the sections consecutively build upon each other whereby the generated theory and the developed hypotheses represent an overarching critical appraisal that conclusively summarises the research findings.

6.1 Within-Case Analyses

Since this study is based on qualitative interviews, the within-case analyses represent the data analysis of the interview transcripts. In this respect, the results are derived based on coding. As already introduced in Subsection 4.2.8, Gibbs (2007) defines coding as “[...] a way of indexing or categorizing the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas about it [...]” (p. 38). Therewith related, Miles et al. (2014) describe codes as “[...] labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 71). With regard to this study, a combination of Attribute Coding, Subcoding, Simultaneous Coding, In Vivo Coding, and Causation Coding, with an emphasis on In Vivo Coding and Causation Coding was applied. The within-case analyses are thereby built upon a combination of Grammatical Coding Methods, Elemental Coding Methods, and Procedural Coding Methods.²⁰⁴ In this context, the coding was carried out following the coding instructions by Saldaña (2013). With regard to the coding procedure, a self-developed coding scheme was used. In this context, the term coding scheme, which is also used by Saldaña is used instead of the term codebook²⁰⁵ since the definition for codebook lets expect a research manual more detailed than needed for this research. To ensure the most comprehensive data analysis, a combination of concept-driven coding and data-

²⁰⁴ See Table 4.3 on p. 108 for further information on the applied coding methods.

²⁰⁵ A codebook, (aka coding frame) is defined as “[a] list of the codes in use in a qualitative data analysis project, usually containing their definitions and a set of rules or guidelines for coding [...]” (Gibbs, 2007, p. 148).

driven coding was applied, so that the analysis is grounded in the respective sibling research concepts under study²⁰⁶ and the related general and specific research questions but also accounts for inputs derived from the data. Accordingly, some codes were predefined based on the sibling research studies under research and further codes were derived throughout the analyses. Furthermore, the transcripts were reanalysed by means of further iterations, which condensed the data with regard to the study's underlying sibling research concepts and regarding the general and specific research questions²⁰⁷. Subsequently, the case study reports – as reflection of the within-case analyses – explicitly refer to these sibling research concepts as the analyses' theoretical foundations. In this regard, the within-case analyses comprise First Cycle Coding and Second Cycle Coding, including Eclectic Coding, which is a First to Second Cycle coding method that enables the employment of a combination of multiple First Cycle coding methods²⁰⁸ and is one way to prepare the data for Second Cycle coding. Accordingly, the results are discussed per each case to provide the complete picture of each succession case before cross-case analyses are conducted.

Across all interview transcripts, 433 codes were developed. To provide examples, such codes are for instance *3rd generation family firm*, *two siblings*, *father as role model*, *studies in business administration*, *wandering and learning outside the family firm*, or *child interested in engineering*. With regard to categorising the data, the codes were re-arranged as introduced. Extracted categories are for instance the categories *family*, *family firm*, *sibship*, *successor*, *non-successor*, *succession*, *sibling identification*, *sibling deidentification*, *parent identification*, *parent deidentification*, and *niche selection*. In-between, subcategories as for example *successor preparation*, *successor selection*, *succession planning*, or *sibling partnership* were built as intermediate stages. In the following subsections, the within-case analyses in the form of individual case reports are presented. To convey each case's specific atmosphere, the reports are enriched with quotations from the transcripts.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ I.e., the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification, the concepts of parent identification and parent deidentification, and the Family Niche Model.

²⁰⁷ See Section 4.1.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Saldaña (2013, pp. 59, 188–193).

²⁰⁹ The transcripts were analysed following the guidelines by Hautz & Hartmann (2009). In consequence, accentuations by the interview partners are indicated by capitalised words or letters, pauses for reflection are indicated by *(time in seconds)*, unfinished sentences are indicated by //, and omissions are indicated by (...). The here presented quotations are linguistically modified in order to provide a higher level of readability.

6.1.1 Case 1

This case provides insights from two perspectives; namely from the family firm's president of the board of directors who is the retired CEO (henceforth referred to as PBD)²¹⁰, and his son who succeeded his father and became CEO. The company was founded by the current CEO's grandfather and is run in the 3rd generation by a cousin consortium (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 25, Case1IP2, 2011, para. 6). Both interview partners are firstborn children (Case1IP1, 2011, paras. 31, 105), whereby the sibship under consideration for succession consists of five children – simultaneously representing five potential successors (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 87).

The PBD entered the company at the age of 14, when an employee left the company and he – in parallel to his high school education – took over the secretarial work including bookkeeping (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 29). In the following years, the interview partner completed a toolmaker apprenticeship and upgraded his education with advanced vocational training courses, since he could not leave the company to begin his studies (Case1IP1, 2011, paras. 31, 63; Case1IP2, 2011, para. 77). Accordingly, a distinct decision towards an entrepreneurial career cannot be observed – at least not at the time of entering the family firm. In total, both sons of the founder entered the company, whereas the daughter did not (Case1IP1, 2011, paras. 29, 63). The interview partner recounts that he himself was responsible for the company's management whereas his brother was responsible for the manufacturing (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 91). Unlike his father, the current CEO pursued studies in economics (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 105). As to the successor's preparation, the PBD stated that he did not explicitly prepare his son for succession and that it was unclear if the firstborn would succeed him in the business (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 105)²¹¹. Likewise, the successor described his entrance into the family firm and referred thereto as a rather unplanned but interests-driven decision (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 8, 10)²¹². In this context, the succes-

²¹⁰ PBD = president of the board of directors

²¹¹ Quotation: „Ich habe ihn nicht vorbereitet. Er konnte die Schule machen die er wollte und er hat dann eben studiert. Aber er war sich absolut nicht sicher als er fertig war. (...) Er hat auch verschiedene Fähigkeiten. Er war nicht in die Firma hineingewachsen oder geboren wie ich seinerzeit. (...) Natürlich kannte er die Firma auch und war immer wieder dort, aber er war NIEMALS so hineingewachsen wie ich. Man wusste es bei ihm nicht. Von den anderen Kindern wusste man, dass wahrscheinlich KEINER kommt. (...) Schlussendlich hat er gesagt ‚Ja ich komme, ich probiere es!‘. (...) Und da sagte ich ‚Du bist jetzt fertig, aber Du kannst NICHT wie ich damals unten einsteigen, noch eine Lehre im Betrieb machen und alles lernen, sondern Du bist nun oben ausgebildet – eigentlich für eine Führungsposition einmal einzunehmen. Also wenn Du sagst ‚Ich komme, ich probier' mal!‘, dann mache ich den Vorschlag wir setzen in mein Büro noch ein Pult, Du setzt Dich hierher und dann fangen wir so an.“ (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 105)

²¹² Quotation: „Ich bin nicht irgendwie unter Druck gesetzt worden von meinen Eltern. Das ist nicht so. Aber ich habe in St. Gallen studiert und es hat mir gefallen – wobei ich Volkswirtschaft studiert habe, nicht

sor remarked that he could always deal with this task since he had worked in the family firm as an adolescent and student, and described his link to the company as having grown into the company and as being closely connected to the company (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 10, 47, 51, 55)²¹³. Related to this, the successor agreed that being in contact with the family firm is beneficial as it not only provides an insight for the offspring, but also offers the possibility to build a basis within the company, for instance getting in contact with the employees (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 12)²¹⁴. With regard to succession planning, it was unlikely that one of the younger siblings would succeed their father, since all of them pursued other career choices (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 105). Related to this, the successor emphasised that his entrance into the family firm simultaneously provided his younger siblings with more freedom to choose their profession, although the successor assures that their parents did not put any pressure on their children (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 85, 87)²¹⁵. This statement supports the assumption of a mutual influence of siblings as to their career choices, and indirectly their career options. Nevertheless, the non-successors are still emotionally bound with the company (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 85, 105, 107).

The PBD's intense involvement in the family firm, which influenced family life, did not negatively affect the successor's career choice (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 51, 53). With regard to his career decision, the successor named his father as being a role

Betriebswirtschaft. Und als ich in St. Gallen abgeschlossen habe, hat es mich interessiert. Es hat mich interessiert und ich bereue das nicht! Es ist die richtige Entscheidung gewesen nachher einzusteigen.“ (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 8); „Nein, es ist nicht so wahnsinnig geplant gewesen. Aber es ist natürlich immer eine gute Möglichkeit gewesen und ich konnte mich eigentlich schon immer mit der Aufgabe auseinandersetzen. Schon früher. Auch früher habe ich als Student oder als Jugendlicher schon in der Firma gearbeitet. Dadurch bin ich eigentlich dareingewachsen.“ (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 10)

²¹³ Quotation: „Er ist natürlich noch mehr reingewachsen. Aber das ist die alte Generation. Das ist heute vielleicht viel weniger der Fall. Wenn man eine Ausbildung machen kann wie ich, dann kommt man schon erst später in die Firma. Das ist so.“ (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 47)

²¹⁴ Quotation: „Das ist schon gut, wenn man Kontakt mit der Firma hat. Wenn man nicht irgendwie ankommt und man ist zwar irgendwie der Sohn vom Chef, aber man hat überhaupt keinen Kontakt zu den Leuten und keine Basis bei den Leuten. Auf der anderen Seite muss das ja auch nicht gerade nach dem Studium sein. Es kann auch drei oder vier Jahre später sein. Ich bin eigentlich zu schnell in die Firma eingestiegen. Wenn man jung ist sollte man erst noch ein bisschen etwas anderes machen. Aber ich konnte dann noch eineinhalb Jahre in Frankreich sein und das war natürlich auch eine sehr gute Möglichkeit noch einmal ein bisschen Abstand zu bekommen und noch etwas anderes zu machen.“ (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 12)

²¹⁵ Quotation: „Sie konnten alle das machen was sie wollten. Sie hätten alle nach St. Gallen gehen können oder Betriebswirtschaft an einem anderen Ort studieren können oder in die Firma kommen können und so weiter. Das hätten alle gekonnt, wenn sie es gewollt hätten. Aber das wollte niemand. Die haben alle einen anderen Weg eingeschlagen. Also eigentlich hätte niemand in die Firma gemusst. Wobei mein Vater natürlich traurig gewesen wäre, wenn niemand gekommen wäre. Aber wenn einmal einer dabei ist – und dadurch war das ein bisschen abgedeckt – dann konnten die anderen eigentlich umso mehr machen was sie wollten. Die interessieren sich aber alle für die Firma! Es ist nicht so, dass die sich völlig abgemeldet hätten. Die interessieren sich für die Firma, aber eine aktive Verbindung zu der Firma haben sie nicht.“ (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 85)

model for himself (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 73)²¹⁶. Accordingly, it can be stated that parent identification seems present (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 73, 77)²¹⁷. However, an effect of being the firstborn on the successor's career decision towards succession would be speculation, as the interview partner described his decision to enter the company as being driven by the interesting chance it offered him and not from any specific parental preparation as the family's son and heir (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 91, 93). However, the successor raised the aspect of expectations that accompanied his decision, but rated them as not being oppressive (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 97).

The successor entered the family firm almost immediately after finishing his studies, fulfilled different tasks, and became CEO about 15 years later (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 6). Retrospectively, he considered his entry as too early after his studies and in this context evaluated his one year and a half long visit abroad in a subsidiary firm as a very valuable experience (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 12, 14). At present, the interview partner manages the family firm together with his cousin, who is responsible for the product development and for a long time was responsible for sales and distribution in Switzerland (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 6). Unlike the interview partner, his cousin completed an apprenticeship inside the family firm and thenceforward stayed in the company (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 25, 27). Regarding the company management, the interview partner emphasised that although he is the company's CEO, he is not the sole manager in the cousin consortium and that within such a relationship trust is an important asset since not everything can be set out in writing (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 117, 119). Therewith related, the successor pointed at the importance of a balanced cooperation in that each contributes his part to the overall success and inequality should be avoided (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 125).

In the successor's case, the succession process spanned over a period of more than 15 years and was accordingly characterised by a long-term collaboration between the outgoing generation, represented by two brothers, and the succeeding generation,

²¹⁶ Quotation: „Irgendwo muss man ja arbeiten können, oder? Und Geld verdienen. Von daher ist es schön, wenn man einen solchen Arbeitsplatz hat. Es ist eine schöne Arbeit und ich habe sie immer gern gemacht. Das grosse berufliche Vorbild? Das ist schon mein Vater, das ist ganz klar. Er hat mich dadurch sehr stark geprägt – sehr stark. Auch seine Art und seine fachliche Kompetenz für die Produkte, das ist bewundernswert. Er ist eigentlich ein echter Pionier gewesen. Schon in der zweiten Generation, aber immer noch ein Pionier. Er hat ein sehr grosses Wissen und sehr grosses Können gehabt.“ (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 73)

²¹⁷ Quotation: „Das ist er auf jeden Fall gewesen. Jaja. (...) Als er sofort in die Firma einsteigen musste, hat er aber gar keine Chance gehabt irgendwie das Technikum zu machen oder ein Studium zu machen – obwohl er das gerne gemacht hätte. Er hat da überhaupt keine Möglichkeit gehabt. Darum ist er auch der Praktiker gewesen. Und man hat auch Leute gebraucht, die mehr Systematik reingebracht haben und mehr betriebswirtschaftliche Kenntnisse hatten und so weiter. Das brauchte man auch. Das war dann eine Ergänzung. Aber vom Fachlichen her und von den Produkten her ist er natürlich schon das grosse Vorbild, ja.“ (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 77)

represented by two cousins (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 18, 39). The CEO evaluated this long-term collaboration, the ipso facto stepwise takeover of responsibilities, the possibility to grow in their fathers' shadows, to learn the business, and the father's willingness to stay in the company beyond the retirement age as a very important aspect of their succession procedure (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 18)²¹⁸. Regarding succession to the next generation, the people in authority already set the course. However, the upcoming succession procedure is characterised by a bigger age gap between the generations. Since the offspring generation is not ready at this time to take over the business, an interim solution in the company management has been set up until the next successor(s) is/are ready (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 59)²¹⁹. In this context, the CEO pointed out the importance of also having young contact persons for the customers, since in today's fast changing business environment different requirements are necessary, and with which the young generation have grown up (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 65).

With regard to family culture, the PBD raised the topic concerning the interconnection between family and family firm and thereby emphasised that unsolved family matters might spread into the business environment and might negatively affect the company (Case1IP1, 2011, paras. 89–93)²²⁰. In this context, the interview partner pointed at the potential threat that may arise from incoming new in-laws, by which differing interests may cause interferences within the family firm (Case1IP1, 2011, paras. 91, 95, 97). Therewith related, the PBD emphasised his wife's role, who strongly supported him

²¹⁸ Quotation: „Ich habe ja dann noch lange Zeit mit meinem Vater und seinem Bruder zusammengearbeitet. Da konnte ich dann noch recht lange mitarbeiten ohne dass ich die ganze Verantwortung übernehmen musste. Und das ist eigentlich eine ganz gute und recht lange Einarbeitungs- und Einführungszeit gewesen. Wo wir eigentlich – die Jungen – Schritt für Schritt dann mehr Verantwortung übernehmen konnten. Also wir mussten nicht vom ersten Tag an die Geschäftsleitung machen. Wir konnten im Schatten von unseren Eltern heranwachsen und das Geschäft lernen. *2* Das war ganz wichtig. Und das hat mein Vater uns eigentlich ermöglicht, indem er sehr lange im Geschäft geblieben ist. Er hat auch lange nach der Pensionierung noch weitergearbeitet und hat sehr viel noch mitgetragen. Weil wir gut miteinander arbeiten konnten ist das gegangen und das war eine sehr sehr gute Unterstützung. Und die zweite gute Unterstützung kommt von meinem Cousin. Wir arbeiten auch gut zusammen und das ist auch ganz ideal. Und es ist auch etwas anderes als wie wenn man mit einem Management zusammenarbeitet das nicht aus der Familie ist. Das braucht sehr lange, bis man das Gefühl bekommt ‚Das sind Leute die eigentlich auch 150 Prozent da sind‘ – sich also sehr stark mit der Firma identifizieren.“ (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 18)

²¹⁹ Quotation: „Das bedeutet aber, dass wir eine Zwischenlösung im Management haben müssen. Ich will keinem von denen zumuten, dass sie direkt die Führung übernehmen müssen. Die brauchen ihre Zeit und müssen ihren Platz ausfüllen wo sie jetzt sind und müssen organisch irgendwie mit hineinwachsen. Das braucht vielleicht noch zwei Jahre beim einen und braucht vielleicht sogar 20 Jahre beim anderen. Und darum brauchen wir eine Übergangslösung. Wir haben daher auch die Weichen so gestellt, dass wir jetzt im Management eine Übergangslösung haben die in unseren Augen gut die Zeit abdecken kann bis dann die junge Generation parat ist und da wieder weitermacht.“ (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 59)

²²⁰ Quotation: „Das ist die Familie im Grunde genommen – die Familienkultur. Wenn Sie denken die Kultur wie ich sie HEUTE in meiner Familie habe sagt eigentlich schon alles von der Kultur her – das sagt aber noch nichts zu der Familienkultur von den Eltern. Aber es ist doch ein Stück weit eine Fortsetzung.“ (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 87); „Jetzt können Sie sich vorstellen, wenn etwas so gut funktioniert in der Familie, dann kann's auch in der Firma funktionieren, denn es sind immer wieder Familiengeschichten, die eben nicht funktionieren und was sich dann auf die Firma auswirken kann (...).“ (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 89)

(Case1IP1, 2011, paras. 6, 53), and referred to the successor's family who carries on this tradition (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 109). The successor similarly pointed out the importance of good cooperation between the two generations and the other family members involved (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 16).

Throughout the interview, the PBD stressed the aspect of family culture as an important factor and a mainstay for the family firm (cf. e.g., Case1IP1, 2011, para. 109). A second factor that can be extracted from the PBD-interview is the importance of keeping money within the company in order to expand the business and enabling it to grow further (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 113). The interviewee further emphasised that if money is taken away, it should be within reason and a benefit should be passed on to the employees – which the company does by means of a foundation (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 113). Both interviewees accentuated the role of a functioning family in the background as an important precondition, if not the most important one, without which a family firm cannot persist (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 135; Case1IP2, 2011, para. 123). Regarding further important issues in succession management, the successor emphasised the financial part and more importantly the management part as well as trust and support by the outgoing generation (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 111)²²¹. Related therewith, the successor remarked on (1) the possibility of a shareholder agreement to organise the financial aspect, and (2) the interplay between the generations in which not too much is/are demanded of the successor(s), but at the same time the possibility to develop is obtained (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 111).

It can be concluded, that succession in this case was characterised by a long-term cooperation between the generations, and that succession was accomplished very successfully. Both interview partners emphasised the importance of good interplay between the family side and the company side. In addition, these interviews revealed the importance of the financial management as being within the scope of sibling research in relation to succession. With regard to sibling identification, no clear statement can be made, however parent identification between father and son can be assumed, since the successor clearly described his father as a role model for himself.²²² Regarding the application of the Family Niche Model within the family firm, it seems

²²¹ Quotation: „Mit meinem Vater habe ich von Anfang an sehr gut zusammengearbeitet. Wir haben uns eigentlich immer gut verstanden. Das ist ganz wichtig gewesen. Und natürlich auch, dass er mir die Möglichkeit gegeben hat Verantwortung zu übernehmen, er mir eigentlich auch total vertraut hat und mir nicht in den Rücken gefallen ist. Das ist ganz wichtig gewesen.“ (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 113)

²²² As these interviews were the first ones, they also have an exploratory character for the upcoming interviews, meaning to identify potential problems and to obtain further input for the study, which is in line with the use of semi-structured interviews. Accordingly, the statements as to sibling and parent identification and deidentification respectively are only limited at this early point in the research work.

conceivable that due to the firstborn's decision to enter the company, the career option of succession as CEO for his younger siblings might have become more difficult since the niche of the successor was already occupied. Nonetheless, the fact that the family firm represents a large family firm counteracts this conjecture and the fact that two cousins entered the family firm supports the assumption that the bigger the family firm is, the more niches for family members are available. However, regarding niche allocation within the family firm, wittingly or unwittingly, competition among the siblings was avoided from the start, since all younger siblings chose career paths outside the family firm.

6.1.2 Case 2

Succession in this case started when the interview partner, who is the current CEO, entered the family firm at the age of 29 (Case2IP1, 2011, para. 39). At that time, the company was run by his father, who was 62 years old (para. 39). The successor then took the company over when he was at the age of 37. In sum, the succession process span over a period of three years, in which the successor took over a new area of responsibility every half a year (para. 39). The interview partner delightedly accentuated the transition period in which he occupied the position as CEO and his father as president of the board of directors as a very good relationship (para. 41). Regarding the succession procedure and accompanying successor preparation, the interviewee remarked that his father suggested him a two year trial period before deciding if he wanted to succeed in the family firm (para. 39). This approach served both sides in equal measure as it (1) provided the son the possibility to get to know the company more closely and to become aware of whether he could picture himself succeeding his father in the family firm, and (2) in case of rejection, the father would still have had enough time to find an alternative solution. As to the preparation itself, the interview partner pointed out that he did not feel very prepared for the CEO-job (paras. 39, 258)^{223, 224}. In hindsight, the successor would do his preparation with regard to educational decisions more systematically (para. 77). This remark is grounded in the comparison of past and current company characteristics, since – as the company strongly expanded – the successor requirements changed over time. In this context, the

²²³ Quotation: „Ich habe gesagt ‚Ja, da bin ich noch viel zu jung, ich habe noch keine grosse Erfahrung.‘ Und er hat gesagt ‚Ja, aber weisst Du, ich bin jetzt 62, ich sollte es doch dann eben wissen.‘ (para. 39)

²²⁴ Quotation: „Nicht so gross. Das ist ein sehr eigener Weg gewesen. Natürlich vielleicht, also psychologisch SICHER, oder? Aber ich habe eigentlich die wichtigen Schritte immer von mir aus machen müssen. Das ist so gewesen. Also da habe ich andere Freunde, denen hat einfach der Vater gesagt ‚Da hast Du den Schlüssel!‘. Aber bei uns ist das anders gewesen. Ich musste (...) sagen ‚Jetzt will ich wieder einen Schritt machen‘. Ich habe mir das holen müssen. Das ist AUCH nicht nur SCHLECHT, oder?‘“ (para. 258)

interviewee particularly mentioned considerations regarding shareholder interests, the firm's strategic focus, and leadership on the supervisory board level as well as on the operative management level. Based on his experience, the interview partner commented on a successor's skills and character needed, that the succeeding person has to have a very strong personality since he/she has to implement the family's idea as well as that he/she has to embody the CEO's role and the accompanying responsibilities within the company (para. 236). Furthermore, the interview partner added that he hopes his successor will get along well with the current management team (paras. 242, 244) and that this person represents a leader of men and a unifying figure at the same time (para. 246)²²⁵. As to the interview partner's educational career, the successor studied mechanical engineering and then worked in a production company to learn the industry from the ground up, before working for one year at Bangalore University and then entering the family firm (para. 23). After entering the company, the successor strongly focused on sustainability issues and in particular on the buildup of the solar energy division (para. 23).

Regarding the successor's career decision, the interview partner did not perceive succession as a foregone conclusion (para. 42). In addition, the interview partner addressed a certain ambivalent relationship with the family firm, as he on the one side felt strongly connected with the company, but on the other side sensed also sometimes the business' consuming effect on his father (para. 45)²²⁶. For the successor, one convincing issue concerning his career decision was his vision of making a difference, for instance in the areas of workers' participation and sustainability (para. 53). The successor placed a high value on the possibility of focusing on solar technology when deciding for succession (paras. 250, 252). In this context, the successor also mentioned the management's endeavours in supporting employee development and the possibility of securing their jobs (para. 250). In contrast, the branch of industry seems not to have influenced the successor's career choice of succession (paras. 59, 61, 250, 254, 256). Moreover, the fact that his father invested in the company also positively influenced the son's career decision towards succession (para. 65), whereas the company-specific categorising factors, such as the company size, did not evidently influence that deci-

²²⁵ Quotation: „Ich denke auch INHALTLICH. Also er muss natürlich immer die Firma erNEUERN und zugleich muss er die Werte die wir haben weiterziehen.“ (para. 244)

²²⁶ Quotation: „IMMER eine gewisse Ambivalenz, oder? Auf der einen Seite ist das intERESSANT, da gibt es viele interessante MENSCHEN (...). Ich habe mit der Firma Kontakt gehabt und konnte auch in der Firma arbeiten. Man hat einen engen Bezug gehabt. Und auf der anderen Seite hat man natürlich auch erlebt wie stark das meinen Vater belastet hat und ja, das ist // Mein Vater hat SEHR viel gearbeitet. Es war SICHER ein ambivalentes Verhältnis. Man hat das Positive gesehen und man hat das Negative gesehen und darum habe ich das auch nicht GEWUSST.“ (para. 45)

sion (para. 67). Regarding people that affected his career decision, the interview partner refers to his wife and close friends who had been in a comparable situation and were therefore trusted persons with whom he consulted (paras. 226, 228). The interview partner further added that for himself, the most important decision was to *join* the company in the first place (para. 228). Furthermore, he stated that this decision was a very personal decision and that he decided it together with his wife (para. 228). During the succession process, the family was consulted by a lawyer and discussed succession openly (paras. 230, 234).

As to generally describe the successor's role, the interview partner pointed out his dual role within family life and within the business environment, meaning on the one side being the son and on the other side being the employee (para. 41). Within the sibship, the interview partner perceived his role as being the older brother (para. 151). Within the company, the interview partner's role also included pushing through the company's reorganisation (para. 188). This step from a function-based organisation to a business unit-based organisation distinguishes the successor from his father. Based on his leadership style, the interview partner deliberately passes on responsibilities to his employees; however, this step has also been seen in comparison to the company size. Since the company expanded under the successor's management, it may also be argued that such a step would have been unavoidable up to a certain point. In addition, the interview partner emphasised his engagement concerning sustainability and his support of teamwork, which according to himself characterise his leadership (para. 190). In comparison, the interview partner described his father's leadership style as promotional as well as demanding, but recognised the same leadership style also in his own leadership (paras. 69, 198).

When describing his family, the interview partner mentioned that his mother occupied different part-time positions within the company, for instance as member of the board of directors, and that she was also strongly dedicated to the company's social commitments (para. 192). In addition, the interview partner described his father as being a very human and caring man as well as very open and innovative (para. 198). The successor also feels very committed to social activities and sustainability (para. 198) and accordingly follows his parents' example. In this regard, it can be said that the son identifies with his parents and perceived them as a role model. With regard to the father's role within the family in relation to his role within the family firm, the interviewee mentioned three stages in which he got to know his father, namely (1) as father within the family, (2) as CEO of the company and simultaneously as his employer, and later on (3) as grandfather to his own children (para. 202). In this regard, the interview

partner described his father as highly committed to the company, which in turn also affected the family life, for instance in the way that the father worked on Saturdays. In addition, the interview partner stated that he got to know a more open side of his father when he entered the family firm. In this respect, the interviewee did not identify different roles but stated that he perceived his father differently, depending on the phase in life they were into. To summarise, the interviewee reaffirmed that he adopted many qualities from both of his parents (paras. 206, 210). In addition, equality among the siblings was regarded as very important, so that the siblings did not feel like being treated unevenly.

With regard to birth order, the interview partner rated his firstborn position not as a decisive factor regarding successor selection (para. 129), whereas he adds that being male and having studied a related profession might have affected the outcome (para. 131). In this context it should be pointed out that according to the successor's perception, his two siblings never intended to enter the family firm, which is supported by their career decisions that were not towards an entrepreneurial career (paras. 119, 123, 139). Nonetheless, as the two sisters are younger, their career decisions were delayed in time compared to the firstborn's decision. However, since the siblings were not interviewed, it is unclear if the firstborn's choice affected the laterborns' decision regarding non-succession.

What can be said with regard to niche selection is, all three siblings chose unoccupied niches and in consequence sibling competition was avoided from the start. In this regard it has to be mentioned that the interview partner assumes that his siblings would not have been content to succeed their father in the family firm, since this would not have matched their personalities (paras. 182, 184). From this statement, as well as from the interviewee's earlier self-assessment as being the older brother can be concluded that sibling deidentification is found.

With respect to the next succession procedure, the interview partner pointed out his desire that the family firm as well as its company culture should be carried on – in particular the sustainability engagement (para. 73)²²⁷. The interview partner further emphasised the two sides of a succession process, which are factual as well as emotional (para. 3). Moreover, the interviewee accentuated that the parents should not put any pressure on the next generation and thereby force them to decide at a too early stage in their life (paras. 93, 103). With regard to his own children, he emphasised that

²²⁷ Quotation: „Also das Schlimmste was passieren könnte ist, dass meine Kinder sagen ‚Komm wir verkaufen das [Unternehmen] dem Meistbietenden‘. Und was dann mit den Arbeitsplätzen passieren würde, das wäre die schlimmste Geschichte. Ich möchte schon, dass das weitergeht.“ (para. 73)

to be a good successor, it is important to make this decision out of a strong conviction, since the occupation may otherwise become a burden.²²⁸ Since the interview partner's children are currently too young to take over the company and therefore to find an adequate temporary solution, the interview partner makes use of a consultant's assistance. This shows parallels to his own succession, in which a lawyer advised father and son. Unlike as in the previous succession, within the frame of a family meeting, the interview partner sought for an open discussion with his children regarding a potential succession and avoids discussing strategic decisions with his children at this early point of a potential succession (para. 91)²²⁹.

6.1.3 Case 3

This case distinguishes from the other cases due to the sibling constellation, which consists of three siblings of which the eldest is a stepbrother. Accordingly, the case occupies a special position since it is the only case in which a stepchild is present and has to be considered in the succession process. Due to the age gap of 15 years between the firstborn and the secondborn/middleborn, and five years between the secondborn and the thirdborn/lastborn, only the younger children actually grew up together and have the same parents (Case3IP1, 2011, paras. 30–34, 114). Accordingly, in this case the term *sibling* is applied in a wider context, since the stepbrother also works in the company and therefore has to be included in the analysis. As the secondborn became CEO of the studied family firm, the term *successor* henceforth refers to the secondborn, who is also the interview partner.

The family firm was first handed over from the founder to his three sons, having developed from an owner-managed company to a sibling partnership (Case3IP1, 2011, paras. 16, 18). Of these partners, only the children of one family line were interested in succeeding into the business and the successor's father took over his brothers' shares in 2003 (para. 18). After having finished the public academic high school by completing his matura, the interview partner worked in several departments of the family firm as well as in the purchase order processing of a world-wide operating Swiss company, and obtained his Bachelor degree in business studies (Case3IP1, 2011, para. 4). The successor entered the family firm in 2009 as commercial director by absorbing the accounting department, the IT department, and the human resources department

²²⁸ Quotation: „Sonst sind sie nicht glücklich. Und wenn sie nicht glücklich sind, machen sie es nicht gut, weil dann ist es eine RIESIGE Belastung. Auch eine RIESENchance, oder? Aber man muss es GERN machen.“ (para. 87)

²²⁹ Quotation: “(...) wenn ich den Kindern sage ‚Wir sind FREI bei der Entscheidung‘, dann muss ich ihnen diese Freiheit lassen und nicht mit ihnen strategische Entscheidungen besprechen.“ (para. 91)

(para. 4). Unlike his siblings, the successor had helped out in the company during his childhood (Case3IP1, 2011, paras. 36, 40). Regarding preparation for his future task, the interview partner states that he did not feel sufficiently prepared but simultaneously claims that sufficient preparation is hardly possible – and if possible at all, the successor would have had to occupy a similar position already prior to this appointment (paras. 190–194). In this context, the interview partner also admitted that he did not picture the pressure that is accompanied by the CEO-job the way it is (para. 174, cf. para. 198). The lastborn daughter completed her apprenticeship in the family firm and later started studies at a commercial school (paras. 40, 86). In this context, the successor did not preclude a return of his sister into the family firm (paras. 88, 90). In principle, the successor can imagine working together with his sister, since he already loosely works together with his stepbrother who is responsible for the holding (para. 100).

Growing up with a family firm, the successor conceived as being special – in a positive as well as in a negative sense (Case3IP1, 2011, para. 46). As he was known in the village, others' opinions were often tainted with prejudices (paras. 48–54). The father's constant involvement in the family firm, the interview partner perceived as normal and this circumstance did not act as a deterrent for his decision towards an entrepreneurial career (para. 58). What however affected the successor's career decision was that taking over the family firm represented a challenge from which he felt that he could learn very much and which was a rather rare opportunity for someone who was 28 years old (paras. 60, 62, cf. para. 138). The interview partner made the definite decision towards succession two years prior to succession, whereby the process started when he came into contact with the company management, all against the background of a friend's master thesis on succession management (paras. 64–68). The interview partner evaluated his decision towards succession as an emotional one (paras. 68, 74) and stated that nobody had put pressure on him (para. 78). In this context, the successor added that succession was an actual want on his part (para. 80). The interview partner further emphasised that to a great extent, idealism was part of this decision and that in those days, he arrogantly felt that he could do it better (paras. 162, 164)²³⁰. To decide for succession, a major aspect was the possibility of developing further, whereby the successor regards the CEO-position as an enormous school of character building that is paired with an enormous responsibility

²³⁰ Quotation: „Es gehört ein bisschen Idealismus dazu, oder? Das hat auch etwas dazugehört. Ziemlich viel sogar!“ (para. 162); „Und *2* ich habe auch lange sehr überheblich das Gefühl gehabt ‚Ich kann das besser!‘“ (para. 164)

(para. 174)²³¹. According to the successor, a good emotional relationship between the person who hands the business over and the person who takes the business over is a crucial success factor (paras. 176, 178)²³². As trusted person during the succession procedure, the interview partner names his girlfriend (para. 206).

According to the successor, succession has been explicitly addressed within the family, however rather spontaneously (Case3IP1, 2011, para. 156). The succession process was accompanied by some inner-family and family firm conflicts, since many changes in the management and the board of directors made succession more difficult (para. 152). In hindsight, the interview partner described this phase as important for himself to develop his character and that up to a certain extent he therefore had to break away from his family (para. 152). As a general rule, the interview partner stressed the importance of communication between the involved parties (para. 174). Based on the successor's experience, these discussions helped the outgoing generation to drift away from the business and helped the incoming generation to expand its knowledge (para. 174; cf. para. 198). In this context, the interview partner further stated that simply providing him freedom to decide after discussing different views, had oftentimes led to him doing what his mentors had told him they would do in his stead (para. 174). In consequence, the successor accepted the advice, instead of proving that another way would be just as good (para. 174)²³³. The interview partner

²³¹ Quotation: „Für mich persönlich ist es wichtig, dass ich eine Möglichkeit habe mich auf eine Art und Weise wie das sonst nicht möglich wäre weiterzuentwickeln. Ich denke es ist eine ENORME Charakterschule und eine ENORME Verantwortung, wo man zuerst einmal lernen muss damit umzugehen. Das ist ein Druck, den ich mir vorher SO NICHT vorgestellt habe. Und ich habe EXTREM daran arbeiten müssen zu LERNen LOSzulassen. Lernen, dass Sachen – auch wenn man Geschäftsführer ist – oftmals aufgrund von grösseren Situationen oder aus einem POLITISCHEN GRUND so und so entschieden werden müssen, auch wenn man es gerne anders hätte. Man hat zwar die ultimative Machtposition, ist aber doch von einer VIELzahl von Rädchen abhängig, die einfach nicht mitdrehen. Und da kann man nicht einfach sagen ‚Ich möchte das jetzt so haben!‘, und dann geht das so. (...) Das finde ich schon recht wichtig und dann muss man eben die nötige Einstellung haben das zu akzeptieren. Also mit der Verantwortung und der Macht UMGEHEN können. Sehr wichtig ist auch mit den Leuten umgehen zu können und sobald Konfliktsituationen entstehen, muss man teilweise auch schlichten können. Es ist sehr sehr wichtig, dass man eine gute Menschenkenntnis hat um Personal zu rekrutieren. (...) Und es ist auch wichtig, dass man ein bisschen MUT hat um Veränderungen zu MACHEN – vor allem auch in personeller Hinsicht. (...) Es ist auch in dem Sinne wichtig, dass die Person, die die Nachfolge antritt ein gutes UMFELD hat und Freunde ausserhalb der Firma hat. (...) Sonst ist es im Allgemeinen sehr wichtig, dass die Person, die die Firma überGIBT loslassen kann und sagen kann ‚Ok, ich überlasse das einem Jungen!‘, und dass die zwei aber dann miteinander reden können. (...)“ (para. 174)

²³² Quotation: „Ja, die emotionale Beziehung zwischen DEM der überGIBT und DEM der überNIMMT, das muss stimmen und das braucht eine gewisse Zeit um sich gegenseitig auf dieser Ebene kennenzulernen und Vertrauen zu schöpfen. Also das ist essenziell, wenn eine Nachfolge funktionieren soll.“ (para. 176)

²³³ Quotation: „(...) Das ist gegenseitig so ein bisschen ein Übergeben gewesen und das hat IHNEN sehr gut getan, dass sie gesehen haben ich nehme das was sie sagen ERNST und komme aber fragen. Und das hat dann mir Unterstützung geboten und ihnen das Gefühl gegeben, dass sie etwas übergeben was in guten Händen ist, wo sie auch immer noch daHINTER sind. Das hat ihnen schon geholfen loszulassen. (...) Was mich damals bei meinem Onkel beEINDRUCKT hat war, dass er gesagt hat ‚Du, ich würde es so und so machen. Aber das musst schlussendlich DU entscheiden‘. Und das hat für MICH manchmal noch dazu

further pointed at the financial aspect, which he assumes as very important in succession management (para. 180)²³⁴. He also added the advantage of personal coaching to the discussion, of which he made use, with an external coach for human resources management (paras. 184–188)²³⁵. The succession process in this case spanned over a time frame of about eight years, since the financial aspect was not completely set at the time of the interview (para. 198). However, the interview partner refused to recommend a timeframe for succession planning, as he judges the timeframe as being dependent on the company characteristics (para. 196).

As introduced, the firstborn is about 15 years older than the secondborn, who is for his part five years older than the thirdborn (paras. 30–34). In addition, the firstborn did not grow up with his stepsiblings (paras. 114, 116). As a consequence, the interview partner describes his relationship with his brother as different from the one with his sister (paras. 116, 124)²³⁶. Moreover, the successor states that former sometimes conflict-laden situations between the two stepbrothers are these days relaxed, since the stepsiblings learned to give the other space and thereby to avoid competition between them (paras. 120, 122)²³⁷. In relation to this, the interview partner uses the term *competition*, which, based on the Family Niche Model, should be avoided by choosing different niches within the family environment. Accordingly, it can be suspected behind this statement that – given the Family Niche Model is transferable into the family firm

geführt, dass ich es dann sowieso so gemacht habe wie er es empfohlen hat (Interviewpartner lacht), weil ich gedacht habe ‚Ich bin ja frei in der Entscheidung!‘ und das ist // Wenn er gesagt hätte ‚Ja also wenn Du das nicht so machst, dann ist das nicht gut!‘ und ‚Wehe...‘ und so, dann hätte ich wahrscheinlich genau das Gegenteil gemacht. Um zu zeigen, dass es auch anders geht.“ (para. 174)

²³⁴ The financial aspect was not further elaborated at that early stage in the research process, as the focus was primarily on obtaining information on niche allocation.

²³⁵ Quotation: „Was mir SEHR viel gebracht hat ist, dass ich in ein persönliches Coaching gegangen bin, wo ich die Sachen die mir WICHTIG gewesen sind mit einer anderen Person besprechen konnte. Das hat mir sehr viel geholfen.“ (para. 184); „Das ist ein Coach für HR-Fragen und die Person hat dann mit mir alle Sachen angeschaut und konnte HINweise geben wo ich dran arbeiten sollte. Und ja, es ist eben auch ein Prozess gewesen zum Feststellen, dass ist VIEL auch in MEINER Hand, dass ich Sachen anders steuern kann, wie zum Beispiel den gegenseitigen Umgang (...). Es geht SEHR VIEL darum, dass niemand das Gesicht verliert und alle können noch ein bisschen MITreden. Jeder möchte ERNST genommen werden und im Generellen gesehen ist die ganze Nachfolgegeschichte einfach eine TOTAL emotionale Sache. Wenn das finanZIELLE einmal einigermaßen steht – auch dort spielen die Emotionen eine Rolle – dann ist es nachher SEHR GUT, wenn die einzelnen Leute die da involviert sind irgendwo beGLEITET werden durch einen Coach. Aber REIN PERSÖNLICH – also face-to-face. Nicht unbedingt im Gruppencoaching, das ist nicht IMMER sinnvoll. Ich habe das Gefühl bei uns hätte das NICHT so gut funktioniert wenn ein Moderator gekommen wäre und vermittelt hätte. Wir haben das ANSATZweise verSUCHT mit einem Berater, dort ist es aber um die Organisationsstruktur gegangen und weniger um die emotionalen Sachen. Aber das muss eben jeder SELBER an sich *2* beARBEITEN können – die Emotionen. Und da hilft es mehr, wenn man mit einem neutralen Coach reden kann. Ich denke das ist auch noch wichtig.“ (para. 188)

²³⁶ Quotation: „Ich glaube von der Familie, von der Situation her, hat er einen völlig anderen Bezug zu mir als meine Schwester. Weil er ist der gewesen, der den Vater NICHT gehabt hat und ich habe ihn gehabt (...).“ (para. 116)

²³⁷ Quotation: „*2* Aber ich denke wir bringen es heute gut zusammen indem wir uns gegenseitig mehr Freiraum lassen. Es funktioniert DANN NICHT, wenn wir uns gegenseitig reinreden.“ (para. 120); „Das funktioniert dann nicht, weil es dann eine Art Konkurrenzkampf gibt.“ (para. 122)

context – the stepbrothers’ niches might still be close, even though the brothers work in different companies. Since the successor and his sister grew up together in the same environment, their relationship is quite unlike the relationship between the two stepbrothers (para. 124). According to the successor’s conjecture his very high expectations might partly account for some misunderstandings as well as their partly opposing views (para. 124). The interview partner described this work-related cooperation with family members as getting to know each other on a different level (para. 124)²³⁸. As to the related sibling identification, the successor describes all three siblings differently, which points at sibling deidentification (para. 128).

Regarding parent identification and deidentification respectively, the interview partner described his sister as much like their mother and himself as having character traits from both parents (paras. 128, 136, 138, 140). With respect to the transferability of character traits from the family into the family firm environment, the interview partner remarked that he experienced his father as being a bit more active in the family firm context than at home (para. 144) and therefore refrained from making a clear assignment hereof concerning himself. This might result from the role allocation inside the family with the mother being at home as housewife, and the father as being very involved in the family firm (paras. 128, 140).

With regard to niche allocation in the siblings’ professional life, it can be summarised that niche allocation was affected by three factors, namely (1) the big age gap between the firstborn and the secondborn, (2) the father by calling the firstborn into the holding and the secondborn choosing a position in the studied company, and (3) the sister by doing an apprenticeship within the family firm but then leaving the company. As to competition, the interview partner explicitly pointed at a competitive relationship between the two stepbrothers, which over time diminished. However, due to the age gap and the different family environments in which they grew up, it cannot be concluded that an inner-family competition between the stepbrothers has been transferred into the family firm. What is important in this case is that the fact that the family runs multiple businesses providing the succession-interested siblings the possibility to co-exist and find their very own niche in the business, which in turn might have contained their past competition. This conclusion supports the assumption that company characteristics

²³⁸ Quotation: „Mit der Schwester ist das wieder eine andere Situation (...), weil ich eine sehr sehr hohe Erwartungshaltung an meine Mitarbeiter habe und das hat sich dann schon auch ein bisschen auf die Familie übertragen. (...) Das ist ein KENNENLERNEN auf einer völlig anderen Ebene. Wenn man sich privat kennt und zusammen aufgewachsen ist, dann ist das etwas völlig anderes als professionell zusammenzuarbeiten. (...)“ (para. 124)

such as the company size might affect siblings' career options and therewith related career choices towards succession.

6.1.4 Case 4

This case is represented by the successor, who is 44 years old and whose education made him a skilled electrical engineer with specific family firm-related management training afterwards (Case4IP1, 2011, paras. 14, 16). Since the company was only founded when the interview partner was in his teens, his childhood was not characterised by the family firm; instead, the interviewee worked in the company after having finished his studies (paras. 236, 238, 240). At the time of the interview, the interviewee upgraded his education by lessons in commercial law (para. 18). As to the family behind the company, the entrepreneurial family has three children, from whom the interview partner is the firstborn son (para. 60). The group of siblings is completed by a second son who is three years younger and a daughter as lastborn child, who is eleven years younger than the firstborn (para. 58). None of the younger siblings permanently works within the family firm, although the brother is president of the board of directors (paras. 50, 52) and the sister only spontaneously works for the company (para. 78). The interview partner stated that his sister was never interested in technical products and therefore never intended to enter the family firm (para. 76). In contrast, the middleborn works independently as a consultant and, as mentioned, is the family firm's president of the board of directors (paras. 50, 52, 70).

The interview partner never intended to take over the family firm (Case4IP1, 2011, para. 26), which was founded by his father (para. 20). With regard to factors that were important for him in deciding for a career in the family firm, the successor names the interesting combination of a very technical and versatile product – printed circuit boards – and the commercial side in which he has to work with customers from very different branches of industry such as the automobile industry or medical companies (paras. 30, 32, 34). In this respect, the company's branch of industry was a decisive factor for the interview partner's decision for succession (paras. 46, 48). This is in line with the interview partner's self-description as already being interested in engineering during his childhood (para. 96). In this respect the interview partner fits into the common perception of sons as being interested in technical issues and accordingly occupied this niche within the family. The interview partner further described his younger brother as also having these skills, however not pursuing this path as he did (paras. 96, 98). In consequence, wittingly or unwittingly, the middleborn distinguished from his older brother by focusing on non-engineering-related skills and thereby

choosing an unoccupied niche.²³⁹ The younger brother thereby avoided competition with his older brother. On the other hand, the interview partner describes his eleven years younger sister as also being talented in doing handicrafts; however, in her case related to activities such as sewing (para. 98). As a consequence, sibling deidentification can be assumed rather than sibling identification. Regarding the actual career decision to succeed their father, the interview partner states that it was his very own decision and not influenced by his environment, as he is the person who has to carry the decision afterwards (para. 250). In this respect, the interview partner mentioned that his family's support was unquestioned. However, the interviewee pointed out that if he had not been *willing* to take over the company, he would not have been able to take it over, and his family would not have allowed him to take it over (para. 253).

The successor entered the company upon request by his father since he was interested in the branch of industry (Case4IP1, 2011, para. 26). About three years later, the interview partner took over the company, after his father had health problems (paras. 22, 24, 28). Regarding specific training and preparation for his future role, the interview partner stated that no preparation took place (para. 120). Furthermore, if his parents had tried to prepare him for succession, the interview partner stated that this would probably not have worked out (para. 122), since if he had been forced, he may have objected to succeeding as CEO (para. 126). In the event of him not taking over the company, the interview partner argued that his sister would probably not have taken over the company either (para. 138), whereas his brother might have preferred his present position as president of the board whereby the company would be managed by an external manager (paras. 140, 142, 144). Nevertheless, the interview partner pointed out that based on his opinion, the company's CEO should preferably be a family member (para. 146).

When it comes to succession, the interviewee mentioned mutual trust between the successor and his predecessor as a decisive factor (paras. 150, 152, 154, 156), as well as the ability to openly discuss matters (para. 162). In this context, the interviewee agreed that communication with family members might be even more open than with non-family members, due to having known each other for such a long time and

²³⁹ Quotation: „Sicher war es SO, dass ich schon immer der Bastler, Techniker und so weiter war. Mein BRUder hätte die Fähigkeiten eigentlich AUCH, aber die hat er NIE angewandt. (...) Ich habe ja ein TECHnisches Fach studiert und mein Bruder hat eben den anderen Weg eingeschlagen. Er hat an der (Name der Universität) studiert, weil er WOLLTE NIE so basteln. Er konnte das. Er hätte das auch gekONNT, aber hat das NIE gemacht, weil eben, der Teil war schon belegt.“ (para. 96)

consequently knowing each other so well (paras. 206, 218, 220)²⁴⁰. The interview partner further pointed out that at the beginning, his succession was not openly communicated among the employees, since the interview partner and his father had not regarded this step as necessary (paras. 156, 158, 160, 162). From the interview partner's point of view, it is of further importance to take positive intentions in all actions of the other protagonist for granted, as an underlying basic attitude, and not to ascribe any negative intentions, since this would rapidly ruin the basis of the cooperation (paras. 154, 165, 162, 164). Even today, the interview partner's father is available for his son to consult him, however not in the daily business (paras. 166, 178). As to the cooperation with family members as well as with employees, as a basic principle, the interview partner appreciates openness and honesty (paras. 182, 184, 190, 192, 194, 196, 198), which provides insights into his management style and personality. With regard to succession planning, if technically multiple successors are conceivable, meaning in this case a group of three siblings, the interview partner advised looking at the offspring's interests in the first place (paras. 222, 224, 230, 232) and then having an honest and open communication to exclude misunderstandings and misinterpretations (paras. 226, 228, 230). As a third factor, the interviewee noted to factor the individual's character into the successor selection process (para. 232).

As to the roles of the family members within the family, the interview partner explains that he had a very good relationship with their mother, whereas his brother had a very good relationship with their father (Case4IP1, 2011, para. 88). This aspect is important to be mentioned, since the age gap between the firstborn and the secondborn is only three years, which implies that when the second child was born, the place close to their mother was taken, namely this niche was already occupied. Interestingly with regard to niche allocation, the second son moved more towards their father and indirectly avoided competition with the older brother. However, as to parent identification and parent deidentification respectively, the interview partner states that character-wise, he and his father are much alike and describes them both as alpha leaders (paras. 90, 102). With regard to management style, the interview partner stated that he borrowed particular approaches from his father, but simultaneously implemented his own ideas (paras. 104, 106, 108). In this regard, the interview partner also mentioned that specific changes are inevitable over the course of time (para. 110).

²⁴⁰ Quotation: „Die WISSEN, dass man // Eben auch hier wieder Vertrauen. Die WISSEN, dass man nicht was SAGT, um sie zu beleidigen. Und man sagt etwas weil es einfach so IST. Oder? Weil man so FÜHLT oder wie auch immer. Und von demher KANN man mit der Familie eigentlich schon diREKTER sprechen, weil die einen eben auch KENNEN. Die haben eben das gewisse Vertrauen.“ (para. 206)

In conclusion, as most important factors in the succession process, the interview partner summarised trust and the necessity to openly and honestly discuss succession and in this context resolve the company's goals as well as each individual's personal goals in this matter (Case4IP1, 2011, para. 263). Moreover, the interview partner pointed at the father and son relationship (para. 265). If the father represents a role model for the son and he challenges the son's decisions, it might be more burdensome for the successor than if the challenge were made by an employee (para. 265). Additionally, the interview partner emphasised that he is convinced that taking up a post outside the family firm would have been easier (paras. 265, 267, 269). As the son of the company founder and owner, the successor was initially exposed to talk that it would be easy to enter the family firm (paras. 265, 269, 273). In this respect, the interview partner needed about two to three years to completely attain acknowledgement (paras. 277, 283).

6.1.5 Case 5

To analyse this case, two interviews were conducted – one with the firstborn successor and one with the secondborn non-successor. The family firm was founded by the siblings' grandmother and is therefore currently run by the 3rd generation (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 48). With regard to succession, it has to be added that the interview partners' grandparents founded a fashion retail company and a construction business, which were handed down to their children (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 6). As to the scope of this research, solely succession management in the fashion retail company is examined. However, since two family lines are involved in this company, succession has to be discussed against the background of a cousin consortium – although only interview partners of one family line were interviewed, due to the attempt to study siblings. The sibship of the researched family line consists of a group of three children, namely two sons and one daughter (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 6).

To help out in the family business was a natural occupation for the firstborn during his youth and within the semester breaks, whereas his siblings also helped in the business, but less than the firstborn (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 12). The firstborn's educational and professional achievements comprise studies in marketing, and subsequent employment as product manager in a multinational consumer goods company (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 2). Within less than one year and at short notice, the interview partner received the offer to take over the family firm and decided to take this opportunity (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 4). Interestingly, the firstborn at first wanted to pursue studies in the area of arts but decided to study an economic subject – then also with regard to succession

in the family-owned business (Case5IP1, 2011, paras. 12, 84). At the time of succession, the successor was about 25 years old (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 34). The successor was mainly supported by his wife and his parents (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 38). On the successor's side, the actual decision to enter the family firm was first and foremost a decision by the successor himself, however, of course in consultation with and supported by his wife (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 108). The firstborn's trusted person within this decision phase was his wife (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 4).

The secondborn/middleborn²⁴¹ likewise reports that growing up within the business context and being involved therein was a natural circumstance (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 10). On the non-successor's side, the decision against entering the family firm was twofold; first, technically based on his experience of working in a university environment that specifically focuses on succession management in family firms, and second, on not being interested enough in fashion (Case5IP2, 2011, paras. 22, 24). Consequently, the non-successor pursued an academic career and never seriously took entering the family firm into account (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 24). Asked regarding his career decision if his older brother had not entered the family firm, the secondborn could not answer if he would have entered the company since this decision would have also depended on their sister's and their cousins' career decisions (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 44). Nevertheless, the secondborn seems connected with the family firm since he would not have precluded entering the family firm were he an only child (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 52; cf. Case5IP2, 2011, para. 72)²⁴²; although both the firstborn and the secondborn himself describe the secondborn as not being interested in fashion (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 154; Case5IP2, 2011, para. 22, cf. para. 56)²⁴³. In this context, the non-successor clearly agreed about the influence that his older brother's career decision had over his own career choice (Case5IP2, 2011, paras. 62, 64, 66). The interview partner illustrated his reasoning by the fact that succession had already been approached with his brother's decision to enter the family firm (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 62). This fact in turn made the non-successor feel that he did not have to succeed in the family firm and resulting from that he felt he had the choice whether to enter or to refuse (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 62; cf. Case5IP2, 2011, para. 68)²⁴⁴. Therewith

²⁴¹ Henceforth also referred to as non-successor.

²⁴² Quotation: „Es wäre sicher anders gewesen, wenn ich der EINZIGE Sohn gewesen wäre. Dann hätte ich das wahrscheinlich *3* hätte ich an die Stelle meines Bruders treten können. Könnte ich mir vorstellen.“ (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 52).

²⁴³ Quotation: „Ich habe mich erkundigt und meinen Vater gefragt und er hat gesagt ‚Das kann man lernen so ein Unternehmen trotzdem gern zu haben.‘ Er hat das offenbar auch gekonnt.“ (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 56)

²⁴⁴ Quotation: „JA, das hat mich sicher beeinflusst weil da schon Fakten geschaffen worden sind durch das, dass mein Bruder aktiv im Geschäft ist. Dann hat man das Gefühl ‚Ja da macht es ja einer, da muss ich

related, the secondborn brings forward the argument that for him this option of choice arose since he had to make his career decision after his brother had already made his career decision towards succession (Case5IP2, 2011, paras. 62–66). These statements clearly show the influence of the firstborn's career choice on the secondborn's career choice. An influence on the secondborn's career option as the new CEO in the family firm cannot be ascertained beyond doubt, since the laterborn children were never excluded from succession. However, it can be assumed as difficult, since the firstborn virtually became CEO when he entered the company and therefore had a time-wise advantage due to being older, having finished his studies, and having gained professional experience at the time succession was discussed. As well as affected by his work, the secondborn named two aspects that influenced his attitude to equality among the siblings, namely (1) the acquired sense of family and therewith related the seeking for the whole family's benefit, and (2) that he and his younger sister put their own desires behind the family firm's benefit (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 38)²⁴⁵. Regarding the persons that shaped his attitude towards the company, the non-successor named his parents (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 40). As to the parents' decision criteria concerning succession, the non-successor summarised these as similar to his own, namely rational as well as emotional criteria (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 46). The same interview partner explained the rational aspect as putting one's own aspirations behind the company's benefit, and further explains the emotional aspect as a very important criterion from the parents' side since they were concerned about the equal treatment of their children (Case5IP2, 2011, paras. 46, 48). As to the lastborn's position within the succession management, the interview partners' sister did not professionally enter the family firm, although the firstborn described his sister as a very fashionable person (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 154). However, the lastborn did not enter the family firm, but also works in a creative environment and for a while was as well entrepreneurially active with an advertising company (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 100, Case5IP2, 2011, para. 76).

The succession procedure was carried out in consultation with a professional advisor specialising in the textile industry and fashion boutiques who coached the family (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 52). In this regard, the advisor firstly assisted in dividing the originally two businesses, and secondly assisted in the succession procedure and

nicht'. Oder? Dann habe ich die Alternative. Und für ihn ist es wahrscheinlich eher so gewesen, (...) dass er einfach das Gefühl hatte „Jetzt MUSS ich – gar keine Alternative.““ (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 62)

²⁴⁵ Quotation: „Da gibt es zwei Sachen. Das eine ist der auf- oder anerzogene Familiensinn, dass wir quasi *2* ja, immer zum Wohl der ganzen Familie schauen. Und das andere war die Überlegung, dass ich und meine Schwester hier persönliche Wünsche (...) hinter das Wohl des Unternehmens stellen. Das heisst es war uns wichtiger, dass dieses Unternehmen weiter bestehen kann und gut geführt ist, als dass wir da irgendwelche Aktiengewinne machen oder so.“ (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 38)

therefore encouraged the dialogue between the involved parties (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 52). One of the achievements that was much valued by the firstborn was the discussion of each person's outlook for the next ten years, which provided everybody with concrete future plans of each family member, for instance as to the parents' envisaged retirement age (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 52). In the end, the business was handed over to three cousins, which made it a cousin consortium. During the succession phase, the two non-successors were given the opportunity to enter the family firm if they were willing to do so (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 18). Regarding succession, the firstborn mentioned a conversation he had with another entrepreneur that made an impression on him (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 92). During this conversation, the colleague compared his work for the family firm to a relay race, in the way that he is currently in charge of the business and his task is to sustainably lead the business in order to hand it over to the next generation at the appropriate time (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 92)²⁴⁶. Likewise, the interview partner himself describes his position as having received a painting by Picasso, but not getting the real value of the heritage as in their case, he and his partners want to hand this heritage over to the next generation in good condition (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 92).

With regard to succession management, the successor recommended searching for a dialogue at a time when succession is not imminent, since according to the firstborn's perception, he would probably evaluate specific situations differently than as opposed to if he were close to retirement (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 132)²⁴⁷. In this case, the possibility of a sibling partnership was not really an option for the firstborn (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 98). In such situations, the successor would recommend concentrating on

²⁴⁶ Quotation: „Der Kollege hat gesagt, er fühle sich wie ein Staffelläufer der das Geschäft JETZT führt, es aber ganz klar weitergeben muss. Das hat mir sehr imponiert. Und eigentlich machen wir das so nachhaltig, dass wir das Geschäft irgendwann weitergeben könnten. (...) Wenn man natürlich annimmt ‚Ja ok, der übernimmt die Gesellschaft‘, motzt sie auf um sie dann fünf Jahre später zu verscherbeln, dann ist das etwas anderes. Ich empfinde das anders. Wie als wenn ich einen Picasso erbe, für den ich nur 1.000 Franken bezahlen muss, aber eigentlich nichts von dem Bild habe. Also ich kann den Picasso ansehen – schön! Ich kann mit ihm auch arbeiten – das machen wir jetzt. Aber irgendwann muss ich den weitergeben, weil es im Moment nicht so aussieht, dass wir das *2* verkaufen wollen. *2* Und darum hat man von dem Picasso eigentlich auch nicht mehr, als ihn momentan anzuschauen. Das sind diese Überlegungen, die vor allem in Bezug auf Preis/Leistung von der Erberei für mich eine Rolle gespielt haben.“ (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 92)

²⁴⁷ Quotation: „Sehr wichtig ist, dass man das FRÜH angeht, dass man das quasi in GUTEN Zeiten angeht. Ich würde heute zum Beispiel sehr locker über meine Pensionierung sprechen und auch Dinge sagen die man vielleicht zwei, drei Jahre vor der Pensionierung ANDERS sieht. (...) Aber das einfach einmal angehen und da auch jemanden zuziehen, zu dem man von allen Seiten Vertrauen hat und dann diese Geschichte einfach mal fixIERE, die Gespräche SUCHT, Möglichkeiten ortet, und verschiedene Möglichkeiten ausleuchtet. Da braucht es auch vielleicht einmal einen Entscheid des Vererbenden, der dann vielleicht auch einmal einen NICHT populären Entscheid treffen muss. Und das ist natürlich eine GROSSE Schwierigkeit, dass man da in der Familie weiterhin den Frieden untereinander hat und dass das nicht so ausartet wie ‚Ja Du erbst jetzt!‘ Oder ‚Du erbst jetzt einen Picasso!‘ Da wird natürlich dann der Wert aufgeschrieben, den die Sache hat und auf der anderen Seite sieht dann der Nichterbende vielleicht nicht, dass man das nur kurze Zeit zur Verfügung hat.“ (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 132)

as few siblings as possible and identifying the offspring with the necessary characteristics (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 102). However, if a sibling partnership is under consideration, the firstborn would suggest clear rules and distinct areas of responsibilities in which each sibling can realise his/her full potential (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 142). In addition, the successor agreed that a sibling partnership might be easier to realise the bigger the company is, and in fact only feasible from a certain company size onwards (Case5IP1, 2011, paras. 146, 154). On the same topic, the non-successor assumes prudence as being the most important aspect and as a consequence thereof not being argumentative and putting rationality above personal feelings (Case5IP2, 2011, paras. 155, 159).

Regarding family structure, succession was influenced by the age spacing between the successor and his parents. Since the parents were only about 24 years old when the first child was born, they were not at the age of retirement when the firstborn entered the company (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 148, Case5IP2, 2011, para. 130). As a consequence, the parents and the firstborn worked alongside each other, whereby the firstborn took over more and more responsibility (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 52). The second age-related issue that affected succession was that in particular the successor's mother only retired when she was almost 70 years old, which was not as envisaged within the discussions led by the business advisor (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 148). Since the firstborn had already decided for succession, the age gap between the siblings did influence succession management for the laterborns. Especially for the lastborn, succession would have been difficult to accomplish, since the firstborn is about seven years older and would therefore have had like a competitive advantage due to his position as a firstborn (cf. Case5IP2, 2011, paras. 114, 116, 118). In this context, the secondborn clearly agreed that the fact that the firstborn had already decided for succession provided more freedom of choice for himself (Case5IP2, 2011, paras. 120, 122). Again, it should be emphasised that the parents did not put pressure on their offspring as to their career choices. In this case, the role of the successor seems partly to have been predefined for the firstborn, since according to his own words he was perceived as the next CEO – inside and outside the family (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 12). However, the firstborn also stated that he is unsure, if he was explicitly chosen as successor (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 90)²⁴⁸. Within the sibship, the successor described his position as being influenced by his birth order position. (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 88)²⁴⁹.

²⁴⁸ Quotation: „Aber ob ich da schon immer irgendwie *2* für diese Position vorgesehen – ich weiss es nicht. Ich denke mal schon, dass das natürlich der Wunsch war. Wir haben jetzt auch einen Jungen – also unseren

With regard to family characters, the firstborn described his mother as a strong-willed person and his father as a very prudent person (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 48). As to parent identification, the successor classified himself as being like his mother, whereas he classified his siblings as being rather similar to his father (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 110). This comparison is interesting, as the successor remarked on his mother's strong position within the company earlier in the interview (Case5IP1, 2011, paras. 52, 118). Furthermore, the successor classified himself as an optimistic person that likes to give a push to new business undertakings (Case5IP1, 2011, paras. 110, 122). The secondborn indirectly confirmed the firstborn's self-assessment by describing him as the manager type within the family (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 74). In respect of the parents' inner-family roles and the parents' professional roles, the firstborn did not observe any difference (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 122).

With regard to sibling identification, the firstborn said that in general, all three siblings are alike as to their ways of thinking and their humour, which the firstborn partly reasoned on the same nurture they received from their parents (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 110). Nevertheless, the successor described himself as being more sociable than his siblings (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 110). In addition, the firstborn described both siblings as being very intelligent and well-educated (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 110). Furthermore, the successor portrayed his brother as being more serious as well as mathematical and scientific (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 110), whereas the secondborn describes himself as being more intellectual and to some degree more artistic than his brother (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 76). Moreover, the secondborn dedicated the same attributes as his for their sister's personality description and described her as being potentially more like himself (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 76). According to the successor, and owing to his firstborn status, he played a leading role amongst the siblings during childhood in which he was from time to time in charge of his siblings, for instance if the parents were away on business, which later turned into the role of a contact person for all types of family matters (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 122). As a consequence, sibling identification is found for the secondborn regarding the thirdborn, meaning among the non-successors and sibling deidentification as to the firstborn and his younger siblings. As to the transferability of roles from the family environment into the business environment, supposing all siblings had entered the family firm, the secondborn could

Sohn und unsere Tochter. Und da projiziert man natürlich auch mal hinein. (...) Das ist natürlich UNser Wunsch.“ (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 90)

²⁴⁹ Quotation: „Es ist ein bisschen so der Druck. Der Druck des Erstgeborenen denke ich einmal. (...) Und weil ich dann oft HÜTEN musste, war es auch immer die Situation, dass ich dann immer diese Erziehungs-person war und den Stil dieser Erziehungsfrauen habe ich dann natürlich übernommen. (...)“ (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 88)

imagine that the roles within the sibship might have been transferred into the business context, with the firstborn having a leading role (Case5IP2, 2011, paras. 106, 108)²⁵⁰. Therewith related, the secondborn described himself as not being interested enough in the leadership role (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 110).

In conclusion, the firstborn emphasised that succession within an entrepreneurial family with more than one child requires a very generous mindset on the side of the siblings that do not take over the family firm (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 150). In this respect, the successor pointed out that he hopes to be able to show that he and his wife, in association with his cousins, sustainably run the company (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 50). Furthermore, the successor highlighted their parents' generosity, since they made it possible for him to take over the company without enriching themselves (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 50). Additionally, the firstborn sees a main task of his role as being a mediator between the two family lines involved in the business (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 50). In addition, the successor strongly recommended consulting a family lawyer in whom all family members trust and who sets up contracts of inheritance as well as a shareholders' agreement to organise the financial part (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 154).

6.1.6 Case 6

Within the family firm presented in this case, both siblings currently work in the company – the secondborn son as CEO (para. 66), and the firstborn daughter occupies several administrative tasks (paras. 34, 38, 40). In addition, the siblings' mother works in the company's showrooms and all key positions are occupied by family members or close relatives (paras. 34, 44, 48, 50). The previous CEO is still involved in the business as president of the board of directors and as person responsible for the international business (paras. 48, 50, 62). Characteristic features of this case are (1) the family firm was not handed over from father to son, but from uncle to nephew, and (2) both siblings work in the company, but on different management levels, and (3) as the sibship consists of two siblings and the secondborn became CEO, this case provides insight into a lastborn's career path, which is of particular interest as to niche selection in the Family Niche Model.

²⁵⁰ Quotation: „Doch, also ich könnte mir vorstellen, dass wenn jetzt meine Schwester und ich auch in dem Unternehmen arbeiten würden *5* oder zumindest bei MIR wäre es so, dann würde ich ihm wahrscheinlich sagen ‚Spiel Du den Chef.‘, quasi. (Interviewpartner und Interviewerin lachen) Ja wirklich, das könnte ich mir so vorstellen. Aber ich meine, natürlich jetzt hypothetisch.“ (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 106)

The interview partner, who is the current CEO, was first trained in a commercial apprenticeship outside the family firm and then studied economics in an extra occupational activity (para. 104). After having finished his education, the interview partner stayed in that company and gained his first work experience in different areas of responsibility (para. 104). When the interview partner entered the family firm upon request of his uncle, he worked in all departments of the company to get to comprehensively know the workflows and each related process from production, to accounting, to marketing, to sales and so forth (paras. 14, 106). In retrospect, the interview partner stated that he felt well-prepared for his new task, however still regrets that he did not do further studies, such as an MBA (paras. 318, 320). Regarding the trusted persons the interview partner consulted when thinking about succession, the interviewee named a superior colleague and close friends instead of family members since the family wanted him to take over the company (para. 232). At the time of the interview, the interview partner had managed the company already for about four years as CEO (para. 106).

The succession process spanned a period of about six years (paras. 108, 113, 116). According to the interview partner, succession is always difficult, especially if the predecessor is a patron who had things firmly under control – as in this case (para. 112). Although the interview partner stated that he and the previous CEO got on very well together and agreed on central business aspects, he further outlined that the succession process was partly accompanied by power struggles in which he had to prove his abilities (para. 112)²⁵¹. Following this approach, the interview partner was able to gradually take over most of his uncle's responsibilities (para. 112). A transition period, within which uncle and nephew managed the family firm together, virtually did not exist (paras. 120, 122). At this point, the successor insisted on only one of them leading the company, whereas otherwise he would have searched for another professional challenge (para. 122).

A discussion as to which of the siblings would succeed their uncle as CEO never occurred and in this respect the interview partner speculated that his sister was never interested in taking over that much responsibility, which the CEO-job would entail (paras. 124, 138)²⁵². In accordance therewith, a sibling management team was never under consideration either (paras. 128, 130). Nevertheless, the interview partner stated

²⁵¹ Quotation: „Da gibt es auch gewisse MACHTKämpfe, die man austragen MUSS (...). Wo man sich ein gewisses Know-how erkämpfen MUSS und dann auch einen gewissen ResPEKT erkämpfen muss, damit gewisse Aufgaben abgetreten WERDEN.“ (para. 112)

²⁵² Quotation: „Das war glaube ich schon von Anfang an so. Sie wollte da NICHT MEHR und ich SCHON. Dann hat sich das bei uns einfach so ergeben. Und das funktioniert eigentlich GUT.“ (para. 138)

that he feels supported by his sister and his family (para. 132). In addition, the interviewee refers to his sister as a reference person as well as a trusted person whom he often contacts for her opinion (paras. 134, 142–148)^{253, 254}. Furthermore, the interview partner acknowledges that other persons may also assume this role as for instance his wife (para. 150). As to a different handling of context-related roles of family members, the interview partner advocates for a distinct separation of roles and the avoidance of treating family members differently from non-family employees (para. 244)²⁵⁵. Herewith related, the interview partner stated that the biggest difference in leadership style to his uncle, is a more hierarchical one under his management, in which he delegates responsibilities to the heads of the single departments and they in turn communicate this information further (paras. 258, 322).

Regarding important factors concerning the interview partner's career decision, he states that when deciding upon succession, for him it was important to have the freedom to put his ideas into practice and that he can depart from existing customs (para. 118)²⁵⁶. However, from the interview partner's viewpoint, it was unclear whether he would take over the family firm, or if it was his dream job (paras. 200–204). The interview partner explained this statement by the fact that he had also liked working in the company in which he finished his apprenticeship and in which he occupied leading positions (para. 206). In this context, the interviewee remarked that according to him with regard to the family firm's continuity, it is of minor importance who keeps the business up, but that it is kept up, the jobs are maintained, and good quality is ensured (para. 210)²⁵⁷. Relating to this, the interview partner did not exclude

²⁵³ Quotation: „(...) Das sind natürlich alle gemeinsam. Und wenn wir etwas Neues probieren oder so, höre ich AUCH auf meine Schwester und mache nicht nur das was ich meine. Das ist für mich eigentlich GLEICHwertig.“ (para. 134)

²⁵⁴ Quotation: „Jaja sicher. Wir verstehen uns gut und da besprechen wir sicher Dinge ÖFTERS als ich es vielleicht mit anderen Leuten bespreche. Und manchmal ist es GUT mit jemandem etwas zu besprechen der NICHT von dieser Abteilung ist, sondern das von einem anderen Blickwinkel sieht. Und da kommt man dann manchmal auf ganz andere Lösungen.“ (para. 146)

²⁵⁵ Quotation: „Wichtig ist, dass man WEISS was ist Familie und was ist Betrieb – also obwohl es eigentlich übergreifend ist (...). Den Respekt vor der Person braucht es und DA ist meine Familie und DA ist für's Geschäft ‚Da bist Du nicht mein Onkel, da bist Du der Exportleiter‘. ‚Und wenn wir zu Mittag essen bist Du mein Onkel und wenn wir wieder arbeiten bist du wieder mein Exportleiter.‘ Also diese TRENNUNG möglichst SAUBER zu machen, das ist das Schwierigste. Und DAS finde ich ist aber WICHTIG, damit man auch gut arbeiten kann.“ (para. 244)

²⁵⁶ Quotation: „Ich sage mal die Freiheit. Also die Dinge so zu erledigen und zu machen wie ich es für richtig empfinde und nicht einfach die alten Schemen zu übernehmen. Dinge zu realisieren die zum Geschäft PASSEN und ich sage ‚MICH widerSPIEgeln‘. Und ja, diese Dinge umsetzen zu können und dadurch auch eine gewisse Persönlichkeit einzubringen. Das war mir schon wichtig.“ (para. 118)

²⁵⁷ Quotation: „Ich sage immer, dass das fortgeführt WIRD – JA. Von WEM, ob es ein Familienmitglied ist oder extern, das spielt eigentlich keine Rolle. Da bin ich auch heute noch dieser Meinung. Wichtig ist, dass es GUT weitergeführt wird und auch die nächsten Jahrzehnte überLEBT. Da sind Mitarbeiter die ihr Geld verdienen müssen und für die möchten wir attraktive Jobs anbieten. Und beim Kunden höchste Qualität schön verpackt. Das ist mir WICHTIG.“ (para. 210)

the possibility that he would otherwise have founded his own company or would have taken over another company (paras. 212–218). Moreover, the parents' heavy workload did not negatively affect the interview partner's stance on the family firm and therewith his career decision (paras. 86, 88)²⁵⁸. Nevertheless, the interview partner tries to take account of these experiences in the relationship with his own son, which however has to be aligned with the company's seasonal business (paras. 92, 94).

When describing his family, the interview partner, in reference to his parents' nationalities, stated that he is more the calm Swiss type of person, whereas he describes his sister as being a typical temperamental Spanish person (paras. 46, 160–166). Albeit, the interviewee stated that he became more extrovert when the siblings were in their teens (paras. 168–172). The interview partner concluded that their good relationship proceeds from these different characters (para. 46). From these statements can be concluded, that sibling deidentification is present. With regard to the transferability of these inner-family roles into the family firm context, the interview partner indirectly confirmed the transferability when reasoning that each person's temper accounts for these personal characteristics (para. 174). As to the interview partner's role within the company and among the employees, he stated that he did not have problems being accepted in his new role, since he worked for their respect by going through all departments when he entered the company (para. 266). Regarding the role allocation among the siblings, the interview partner outlined that everybody grows into a role, which in his case may have been influenced by their father's early death (paras. 180, 182). In addition, the successor agreed that these inner-family roles seem to be transferable into the business environment (paras. 182–188)²⁵⁹. Furthermore, the interviewee described his mother like himself as a calm person, which may indicate parent identification (para. 46). Since the interview partner's uncle is his predecessor in the company management, parent identification has to be discussed also with regard to him and not solely to the interview partner's parents. This approach is necessary, since the uncle ran the business and the interview partner succeeded him and not his parents. In this respect, the interview partner describes his uncle as a calm and prudent person (para. 48). Hence, both the interview partner and the previous CEO seem to have personality characteristics in common and parental identification can be assumed first with the interview partner's mother and second with

²⁵⁸ Quotation: „So ist man eigentlich im Geschäft gross geworden und das Geschäft geHÖRT einfach zum Leben daZU. Also das ist nicht ‚Hier ist Privatleben und hier Geschäft‘, sondern das vermischt sich einfach. Und es ist beides selbstverständlich.“ (para. 68)

²⁵⁹ Quotation: „(...) Diese Rolle gibt es immer und das überträgt sich vom Privaten. Wir können uns als Persönlichkeit nicht verstellen im Geschäftlichen. Wir sind so wie wir sind – privat oder geschäftlich.“ (para. 188)

his uncle (cf. para. 222). Regarding the interview partner's sister, the interviewee described her as being like their father (para. 220). With respect to the two siblings' role within the family, it is important to mention, that their father died early and thereby the son accepted responsibilities already at an early stage in life (para. 160). In this respect, the interview partner perceives his role as a single point of contact for family members – be it for family or business matters. In relation to the family structure, with an age gap of only one year between the siblings, the interview partner values personality as being more relevant than the age gap as to succession (paras. 190–198). Accordingly, in this case the family structure can be disregarded as to succession management.

To recap, the interview partner mentioned as most important aspects for him regarding his work (1) enjoyment of his work within the company (paras. 324–328), (2) the strict separation of authorities and responsibilities (para. 330), and (3) mutual courage for open discussions for instance with his predecessor (para. 332). In addition, the interview partner gives information on a competitor's case in which siblings argued with each other about shares, driven by the marriage partners (para. 386). This example, even if not related to this case, again emphasises the importance of the financial side as well in terms of equality among the siblings.

In conclusion, this case is one example in which two siblings as well as several family members and relatives are working together in the family firm, although the company is a medium-sized company and not a large company. It shows that co-existence of siblings within the same company is possible, if each sibling obtains its individual area of responsibility. Interestingly, the siblings show differing characters, meaning sibling deidentification, which might facilitate such co-existence. With regard to parent identification, or in this case in a transferred sense, uncle and nephew identification, character-wise identification seems to be present, which reasons that the previous CEO was replaced by a family member with a similar personality. In addition, the successor is a lastborn child, however only about one year younger than the firstborn daughter. This implies that a potential first-mover advantage of the firstborn might only have been less marked. Moreover, according to the successor, the firstborn was not interested in becoming CEO. Accordingly, the niche occupation within the family firm seems to be driven by the individual's personality traits. Nevertheless, the case clearly shows that the siblings occupy their own niche within the family and within the family firm. However, since the successor's uncle initialised the entrance of his nephew into the family firm, this niche has been to a greater or a lesser extent entrusted by the uncle. In turn, this “biased” allocation as well as the firstborn's missing interest in the

CEO-job but concurrent interest in other responsibilities within the family firm avoided potential competition between the siblings.

6.1.7 Case 7

To analyse succession management in this case, two interviews were conducted – one with the non-family CEO²⁶⁰ and one with the founder's grandson, who is the company's technical director (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 8, 40–44). One characteristic of this case is that the CEO was replaced by two successors which implied that the former dual responsibility of the outgoing CEO has been unbundled. Following the family perspective and to avoid misunderstandings, the previous CEO's son is named successor, since he followed his father as technical director but refused to follow as CEO. The interview partner succeeding as CEO is named CEO-successor. With regard to the family structure, the sibship consists of one son and one daughter, whereby the age span in-between is about one and a half years (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 16). The daughter who did not enter the company is referred to as non-successor. In this case, succession was completed about half a year prior to the interview (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 90, 92). The succession procedure was monitored by the second co-owner, who had, due to his main place of residence abroad, a certain distance from which to assist and to consult on the transition process from an external viewpoint (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 152, 154). Related to this, the successor talked about the importance of an external person who is related to the business, accepted from both sides, and discusses issues on a par with the outgoing leader (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 156, 158). In this case, the family firm's external co-owner fulfilled this coaching role and if needed mediated between the two generations on the same level and as the leaving CEO's counterpart (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 156).

After having completed his educational training, the successor²⁶¹ completed a tool construction apprenticeship and subsequently entered the family firm (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 10). During his stay in the company, he received further internal as well as external training, before he left the company for a period of two years to gain

²⁶⁰ At the time of the interview, the new CEO was not a family member, however belonged to the entrepreneurial family since he was engaged to the previous CEO's daughter. This circumstance made him the second interviewee's future brother-in-law. Due to this close relationship to the family, the CEO-successor can be regarded as a family member (cf. Case7IP1, 2011, para. 309).

²⁶¹ As no siblings are interviewed and to distinguish more clearly between the interview partners, primarily the terms successor, CEO-successor, and non-successor are used instead of the birth order-related notations. Regarding birth order positions, the secondborn/lastborn is named successor and the firstborn is named non-successor.

additional experience outside the family firm (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 10, 68, 70).²⁶² The successor acknowledged that he found it very interesting working in the family firm, tapping new markets, and seeing the company expand into foreign countries (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 94). Accordingly, the successor agreed about having been carefully trained (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 72, 74); albeit, he would have appreciated being trained more wittingly and more specifically (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 76–82). However, neither father nor son clearly raised that topic (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 223). The interview partner reentered the family firm on request of both his father and the board of directors, and succeeded his father in the technical department (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 58). The CEO-successor completed an apprenticeship as electrician, studied telecommunications and information technology, subsequently entered the company and built up a professional product management before becoming director of sales and finally CEO (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 78, 80, 84). In preparation for this current position, the interview partner accomplished an Executive MBA program (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 86, 88). In parallel, the CEO-successor prepared succession with his predecessor (Case7IP2, 2011, para. 90) and furthermore learned the craftsmanship of coffee making in order to be competent on the product side (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 94, 96).

As non-successor, the daughter studied law and works as an attorney (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 20). According to the successor, it was at first unsure whether his sister also intended to enter the family firm (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 26). Based on the successor's assessment and contrary to him, his sister did not spend as much time in the family firm as he did (Case7IP1, 2011, (para. 26)²⁶³. In succession-related conversations between the siblings, it turned out that the daughter did not intend to enter the family firm and accordingly she chose another career path (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 160). Nevertheless, the daughter is committed to the company and supports the company's management (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 160). In this respect, it cannot be concluded that the siblings influenced each other as to their career options and career choice. However, it can be summarised that the siblings strongly support each other and that besides other people involved, the sister was an important discussion partner for the

²⁶² During his youth, the successor spent much time in the family firm alongside his father and grandparents, due to an illness of his mother and her early death.

²⁶³ Quotation: „Es stand beiden offen. Wir hatten auch keinen Druck von meinem Vater her, ob wir das machen wollen oder nicht. Für mich persönlich war das immer eine Erfüllung, mir hat das immer schon SPASS gemacht. Auch als kleiner Knabe im Betrieb herumzulaufen und zu HELFEN. Meinem Grossvater, im Lager – wo auch immer. Und ich bin eigentlich so aufgewachsen. Das war für meine Schwester eher NICHT der Fall. Sie hatte eher etwas Distanz dazu. Und mit dem Eintreten von mir und nach der Lehre im Betrieb war das eigentlich von der TECHNISCHEM Basis her auch so gegeben.“ (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 26)

successor throughout the succession process (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 160, 162). Accordingly, since the sister/non-successor knows both successors – her brother as new technical director on the one side and her fiancé as new CEO on the other side – at the time of succession management she was able to consult both of them and if necessary to arbitrate between them (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 166, 168).

Regarding the successor's career decision, he did not feel any pressure to enter the company (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 26) and although he succeeded his father in the engineering department, he objected to succeeding his father as CEO (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 28, 183). The successor stated that his career decision was conducted by his personal interest in technical matters (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 30–34). Already during his childhood and youth, the successor spent much time in the family firm, which he experienced as very interesting but which, at the same time, unfolded to him his father's complex area of competence as well as his sometimes lonely leadership position in which he could not discuss issues for instance with co-leaders (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 401–411). This experience influenced the successor's career choice concerning the fact that he did not want to become the company's sole CEO (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 28, 429–435)²⁶⁴. As important people within this decision phase, the successor named his family, and in particular his wife since she has to back his decision (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 124, 126, 134). Central points of discussion regarding the co-succession were issues such as the division of responsibilities, the division of tasks, or the future outlook (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 134). In this context, the successor did not point out specific criteria that were important for him to be discussed; however he emphasised the importance of specific issues being talked over with each other (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 136).

In this case, succession was not very explicitly discussed (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 50, 52)²⁶⁵, and the successor described the transition as a rather hard change of leadership (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 138, 223–229). As a consequence, the successor described the procedure as being characterised by the recognition of becoming incrementally

²⁶⁴ Quotation: „Das wäre auch ein Thema, ja. Also ich habe BEWUSST eigentlich von mir aus // Ich wollte *1* NIE die Geschäftsführung in dem Sinn ALLEINE tragen. Ich habe zu oft erlebt, wie mein Vater geBISSEN hat, als er alleine an der Spitze war und NIEMANDEN hatte wo man ein Gespräch führen kann oder so. Und das wollte ich auch nicht. Ich bin ein TECHnischer Mensch und ich habe IMMER gesagt ich übernehme GERNE die TECHnische Verantwortung für den Betrieb, aber nicht die vollumfängliche Verantwortung.“ (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 28)

²⁶⁵ Quotation: „Eher nicht. Also das war, ja, eher ein schwieriger Start. Es war IMMER wieder das THEMA, dass man etwas machen MUSS, aber es wurde nicht AKTIV darauf hingearbeitet. Das hätte ich mir manchmal mehr gewünscht, dass man das ein bisschen offener diskutiert. Wo will man hin? Wo sind die Vorlieben? Wie und was für Ausbildungen soll man noch MACHEN? Was wäre ein guter Rucksack für diese Thematik? Das hätte ich mir mehr gewünscht in diesem Bezug.“ (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 52)

involved in all processes – either wittingly or unwittingly (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 54, 56)^{266, 267}. Instead, the successor would have preferred a predefined succession period in which each step of the takeover is clearly scheduled and that the succession process in turn becomes more concrete (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 138)^{268, 269}. According to the successor, succession was only clearly enunciated when his father explicitly offered him the position as technical director (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 58). Due to the lack of a predefined temporal horizon, the transition's overall time span is difficult to determine. However, the transition period mainly started with the successor's re-entrance into the family firm (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 64, 66). As to his father's selection criteria, the successor quotes that his father's only desire was that he and his future brother-in-law take over the company, it thereby remains in the family, and that the company culture survives (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 140–146). A distinct aspect which both interview partners emphasised was the handover of the CEO-office to the CEO-successor (Case 7IP1, 2011, paras. 339, 341; Case7IP2, 2011, para. 90)²⁷⁰, as this officially put the new management in charge.

The CEO-successor also grew up within an entrepreneurial family, but never intended to take over his parents' business, since his occupational interests were different (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 102, 106, 371–383)²⁷¹. As to his career decision, the branch of

²⁶⁶ Quotation: „Ja insofern hat man einfach gemerkt, dass man *1* UNbewusst oder BEWUSST – wie auch immer – in alle Prozesse mit integriert wurde. An jeder Maschine die neu beschafft wurde, wurde man ausgebildet. EGAL ob man in dieser Abteilung TÄTIG war oder nicht. (...)“ (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 54).

²⁶⁷ Quotation: „Man wurde eigentlich überall MITgenommen, MITgezogen und das hat sich dann natürlich auch *1* in MEINEN Gedanken manifestiert, dass es auf die *2* Ablösung ZUgeht.“ (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 56)

²⁶⁸ Quotation: „(...) Ich hätte mir gewünscht, dass man eigentlich ein, wie soll ich sagen, *2* dass man sich mit dem Vater einen Rahmen steckt, wo man sagt ‚Ja, in fünf Jahren wollen wir das machen, in einem Jahr übernehme ich diese Abteilung, im nächsten diese, im nächsten diese, im letzten Jahr ALLES. Oder im zweitletzten Jahr und im letzten Jahr bist Du mein Berater‘, oder? Irgendwie eine STRUKTUR. Mehr im Bereich Coaching. Bei uns war es jetzt eher ein harter Wechsel. Von heute auf morgen. Schalter rum und jetzt ist (Name) am Ruder. KLAR hat man auf unserer Ebene im HINTERgrund darauf hingearbeitet. Ich meine die letzten Geschäftsleitungssitzungen waren schon von (Name) geleitet. Das war kein Thema mehr. Aber das war ein HALBES JAHR. Und das finde ich relativ kurz. Ich hätte mir das vielleicht *1* ein BISschen ausgedehnter gewünscht. Muss nicht fünf JAHRE sein, aber ich sage jetzt mal zwei Jahre wäre sinnvoll gewesen. Dass man sagt wann welche Abteilungen übergeben werden. *1* Ich habe es durchlebt, aber viel unbewusster.“ (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 138)

²⁶⁹ At the time of the interview, the successor's father was still available as a consultant and coach (Case7IP1, 2011, paras 148, 343; Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 278–282).

²⁷⁰ Quotation: „DAS finde ich extrem wichtig, dass es diesen Schritt gibt. (...) Aber IRGENDWANN fällt die Guillotine und dann MUSS dieser SCHNITT kommen. Und dann kann nicht der PATRON, weil er das schönste Büro hat einfach sagen ‚Ja, ich behalte jetzt noch mein Büro!‘, oder? ‚Weil ich das WILL!‘ Das funktioniert nicht. Also das finde ich sehr sehr wichtig. Und eben eine abgesprochene VORbereitung. Das ist ein PROJEKT! Das ist nicht ein – ja wie soll ich sagen – das ist nicht ein ZUSTAND. Sondern das ist ein ProJEKT. Und ein Projekt vereint man in einem Projektmanagement. Bei mir jetzt eher UNBEWUSST, aber es kann auch beWUSST erfolgen. Es muss eine STRUKTUR haben.“ (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 355–375)

²⁷¹ Quotation: „Freude muss es machen. Das denke ich ist das Wichtigste. Und eben, man soll es nicht einfach übernehmen weil man denkt es ist das Familienunternehmen. Das ist wie bei MIR. Ich bin auch nicht zu meinem Vater ins Geschäft gegangen. Man soll dort hingehen, wo man wirklich denkt ‚Doch, da habe ich

industry as well as the company size of his parents' company were only of secondary importance whereas the company's missing international orientation influenced his career choice by far more (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 385–391). Nonetheless, the interview partner conceived the experience of growing up within an entrepreneurial environment throughout as a positive experience (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 180, 190)²⁷². In this context, the interview partner agreed that this experience definitely influenced his move towards taking over the family firm and in particular to taking over a company of this size (Case7IP2, 2011, para. 182). Therewith related, he stated that important aspects regarding his career decision-making towards succession, were (1) that the firm produces an exciting product, (2) the well-equipped production facility, and (3) the growth prospect and therewith the potential to expand the business abroad (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 160–164). To exchange ideas, the CEO-successor named his fiancée, his future brother-in-law as successor, the company owners, as well as colleagues²⁷³ with similar experiences, and classmates during his Executive MBA studies as discussion partners prior to succession (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 160, 174).

Contrary to the successor in the engineering department, the CEO-successor was gradually involved in his new range of duties (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 136–144). However, CEO-succession had virtually already started when the CEO-successor took over the sales department, which enabled him to establish customer relationships before being in office (Case7IP2, 2011, para. 132). This proceeding facilitated the interview partner's debut as CEO since these relationships were already built at the time of transition (Case7IP2, 2011, para. 136). Moreover, within the scope of his master thesis, the CEO-successor worked out a five-year growth strategy that familiarised him with management topics that he could discuss with the board of directors against the background of his studies (Case7IP2, 2011, para. 150). On the interview partner's own admission, these internal and external analyses were an important preparation for the CEO-job (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 150–154). Due to the

Freude!’, weil man arbeitet ja dann noch lange genug dort. Aber das ist auch nicht ganz EINFACH, oder? Also ich denke // *1* Ja, für meinen Vater wäre es vielleicht doch schön gewesen, wenn es in unserer Familie geBLIEBEN WÄRE. Aber ich denke da muss man dann auch ein bisschen Egoist sein und sagen ‚Ja gut...‘, weil wenn man dann jeden Morgen aufsteht und denkt ‚Ja, aber ich würde doch viel lieber *1* ein bisschen grösseres Unternehmen, internationaler‘. Ich denke es ist auch nicht hilfreich für das UnterNEHMEN. Denn wenn es JEMANDEN im UnterNEHMEN GIBT, der FEUER und FLAMME ist für das was er MACHT, dann soll man doch DEM die Chance geben es zu machen. Und da muss man aber auch verzichten können. (...)“ (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 371–383)

²⁷² Quotation: „Sehr schön eigentlich. Auch hier wieder, der Vater war natürlich nicht so oft zu Hause wie vielleicht jemand der geregelte Arbeitszeiten hat, aber // *1* Nein, ich denke das war ein Privileg so aufzuwachsen. Ich denke man ist schon ein anderer TYP auch wie man an Sachen RANGEHT oder wie man etwas UMsetzt und *1* das war eigentlich *1* positiv. Also ich habe da nichts Negatives mitgenommen.“ (Case7IP2, 2011, para. 180)

²⁷³ In Swiss common parlance, the term *colleague* is primarily used for friends and not for colleagues at work.

step-by-step handing over procedure, the interview partner got increasingly involved into decision-making by the outgoing CEO (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 168, 170)²⁷⁴. Unlike in the case of the technical director's succession proceeding, the CEO-succession seems to have been handled in a more structured way. According to the interview partner's perception, a first conversation regarding his attitude towards succession had already taken place at a relatively early point in time (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 248, 250), at which the interview partner did not feel ready for succession and subsequently rejected the offer (Case7IP2, 2011, para. 252). As a consequence, an external manager was hired, however, after approximately two years, the company separated from this manager (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 254–262). In sum, the CEO-successor would not change anything in the succession procedure (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 266–270).

With regard to equality among the siblings in relation to succession, it has to be mentioned, that the company discussed in this case is not the family's only entrepreneurial venture. Contrary to the son, the daughter is strongly involved in other business activities. Accordingly, each sibling could obtain its own range of duty pursuant to its individual character, abilities, strengths, and desires (cf. Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 171–205). A clear assertion as to the influence of the age gap between father and son cannot be made in this case (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 207, 209). However, it can be remarked that the son worked for about nine years alongside his father in the company, whereby during this period the father was always the company's CEO (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 211). Notwithstanding, due to being very much alike character-wise, without sounding negative, the successor would not have been strongly in favour of a joint company management (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 211–215). Contrariwise, the CEO-successor and his predecessor could coexist well with each other since they complemented each other due to their different characters (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 217). Regarding the CEO-succession, the age gap between the protagonists seems to figure into succession management, since at the beginning the CEO-successor felt not ready for succession when succession was approached for the first time (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 252, 258). However, following the CEO-successor's judgement, age spacing is not a central factor in succession management (Case7IP2, 2011, para. 276). In this context, the interviewee assumed that for the outgoing owner-

²⁷⁴ Quotation: „Für mich war und ist wichtig, dass WENN man den Schritt MACHT, dann kann er [der ehemalige CEO] nicht einfach jemandem sagen ‚Du, das musst Du so machen!‘. Das würde mich dann auch auf die Palme bringen. Das geht GAR nicht, weil ICH habe die Verantwortung und die Leute müssen auch wissen ‚Aha, jetzt ist Herr (Name) der neue Chef‘. Weil sonst heisst es ‚Ja aber Herr (Name) hat DAS gesagt‘. Das geht NICHT. Dann sage ich ‚Das interessiert mich nicht‘. Und das müssen auch die Leute respektieren. Aber das macht Herr (Name) wirklich sehr gut. (...)“ (Case7IP2, 2011, para. 170)

manager, succession is probably easier as well as makes more sense to have a rather younger successor, which he can accompany as consultant (Case7IP2, 2011, para. 276).

Regarding personality and the related parent identification, the successor assessed himself as being like his father and in particular both as being a bit impulsive and following a clear line, whereby this similarity sometimes caused conflicts between them (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 100, 110). Related to this, the successor emphasised his sister's ability to settle such differences immediately (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 100). Therewith related, the successor referred to the siblings' career choices and stated that everybody had chosen the right profession as to his character – his sister as an attorney, which sometimes includes a mediating role, and he and his father as technical directors that push new developments forward (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 100, 197). Moreover, the successor categorises his father as not being very strict with his children and in addition as a very pleasant boss (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 112). As a consequence, with regard to the father son character traits, parental identification can be taken as a basis for the analysis. By implication, sibling identification cannot be proven. This sibling deidentification might be interesting in view of the fact that the age spacing between the siblings is only one and a half years, and the siblings are not of the same gender.

Based on the similar characterisation of father and son, a similar management style would be easily conceivable. The successor described both of them as following a clear line in business (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 100); however described himself as looking even more for a dialogue with one another (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 116). In this context, the successor remarked that his leadership style is surely influenced by his long-term inner-company training and that he would presumably lead his field of responsibility differently if he had received his training completely outside the family firm (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 116). When comparing his own leadership style with that of his father, the successor stated that the father's leadership style very much depended on the particular situation and could therefore vary between being rather authoritarian, for instance when being under timely pressure, to being very cooperative when not under timely pressure (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 120). On a continuum of these extreme styles the successor would in general range both of them in the middle (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 120). Furthermore, the successor added that his father's sometimes rather authoritarian leadership originated from the circumstance that due to his dual function as CEO and technical director, the father could not react to each situation with the same dedication as his son can these days – thanks to the division of tasks in today's

management (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 120, 122). Today's management style is primarily set by the CEO-successor in consultation with the board of directors and clearly supported by the technical-successor (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 267, 269). The working relationship between the two successors, the technical successor described as characterised by trust, mutual respect, and joy of work (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 277, 285–291, 315, 317). The two successor's leadership styles can be regarded as being in conformity with each other, since the CEO-successor described his leadership style as team-oriented and that he aims at granting responsibility to his employees, since he is convinced this is one way to motivate the personnel (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 194–198). In addition, both successors described their partnership as being characterised by a regular exchange of ideas (Case7IP1, 2011, para. 435; Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 204–208, 216, 220, 222). As to the successors' relationship, the CEO-successor remarked that in their case, the business and the family environment are strictly separated (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 228–232; cf. Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 234–242)²⁷⁵.

To conclude, this case describes a succession event in which the outgoing CEO was replaced by two successors, his son as technical director and his future son-in-law as CEO. This solution provides both successors the possibility to concentrate on one field of responsibility and at the same time to complement each other based on their individual abilities and characters. Especially when taking into account the development the family firm ran through since the previous CEO took over the company, the current separation of responsibilities appears reasonable. This organisational unbundling of mixed responsibilities enables the discussion of issues from different perspectives whereby the CEO-successor still has the final say, but the successor can strongly contribute to and co-create the family firm's future (cf. Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 435–447; Case7IP2, 2011, para. 345). According to the CEO-successor, long-term succession planning is crucial (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 286, 296). In addition, he suggested contacting a potential successor preferably soon and to carry out successor selection based on an individual's abilities, skills, strengths, and the person's individual character and not pre-eminently based on descent (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 292–298, 321). Furthermore, the interview partner highlighted the benefit of ongoing talks, the willingness to strike compromises on both sides, bringing the tried and trusted into question, as well as not being impatient (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 300,

²⁷⁵ Quotation: „(...) Ich denke viel schwieriger ist es bei Vater und Sohn. Weil DA eine Grenze zu machen, das ist eine GROSSE HerAUSforderung. Also spreche ich jetzt zu meinem VATER oder spreche ich jetzt zu meinem CHEF? FRÜHER [vor der Nachfolge], war das denke ich für ihn eine viel grössere Herausforderung. Weil da kann man dann NICHT einfach so sagen ‚Jetzt stelle ich mal ab, das ist jetzt mein Chef von 07:00 Uhr morgens bis abends um 17:00 Uhr‘, oder? Und nachher ist er wieder mein Vater. Aber bei UNS ist das eigentlich // Ja, glaube ich nicht.“ (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 234–242)

304, 306). Moreover, the CEO-successor mentioned his MBA studies in conjunction with his master thesis as an ideal preparation for his CEO function and further regards his thesis as a scientifically approved basis for discussion (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 308–316). It can be summarised, that although both successors obtained their personal field of competence and area of responsibility, they agreed that the CEO-successor holds the overall leadership function (Case7IP2, 2011, paras. 349–359).

Regarding niche allocation among the siblings, it can be said that sibling identification was not proven, but sibling deidentification. In this context, the small age gap between the siblings of only about one and a half years does not seem to have influenced the siblings' career options and as a consequence thereof one sibling's career choice. Since according to the successor's statement, the sister never intended to enter the family firm, competition within the family firm was avoided from the very beginning. Instead, each sibling obtained the possibility to participate in the family's business activities based on their interests and strengths. In consequence, this case is an example of good co-existence of the siblings in association with the CEO-successor, in which all seem to complement each other due to their different characters.

6.1.8 Case 8

As introduced in the case study descriptions, this case is about a construction company and the related entrepreneurial family, whereby the family has two sons with an age difference of about four years (Case8IP1, 2011, para. 34). The interview partner is the secondborn and in consequence the lastborn child, who took the company management over more than 20 years ago. In this respect, this case provides valuable insights specifically into the application of the Family Niche Model from the viewpoint of a lastborn. In addition, succession is discussed from a retrospective point of view.

When the interview partner finished his studies in economics, it was foreseeable that he would take over the family firm; however, it was unclear in which way he would apply himself into the company (Case8IP1, 2011, para. 30). The interview partner entered the company immediately after having completed his studies, whereby this stage was initially intended as a stopover before working as a consultant and bringing the family firm with him as a new mandate for the business consultancy (para. 30). Nevertheless, after working in the company for one year, the interview partner and his father started to organise the succession procedure (para. 30). One precondition on the successor's side was that if he succeeded his father, he wanted to have full responsibility and wanted to have the division of the estate settled before he took over

the company (para. 30). This precondition had a financial bearing on all family members. As successor, the interview partner insisted on this precondition, since if the company were to develop negatively under his guidance, this would affect his family's financial situation (para. 30)²⁷⁶. The assets were divided into three parts respectively, namely one part that secures the parents' livelihood, one part that secures the firstborn's heritage, and the company as heritage for the secondborn as successor (para. 30).

Although the interview partner's decision to take over the company in some form was already set when he finished his studies, the interview partner linked his decision concerning succession to his parents' ideas about the company, in particular whether they preferred to sell the company to the highest bidder, or to hand it over to the next generation (Case8IP1, 2011, para. 36). In the instance that the parents wanted to hand the company over to their children, only the secondborn child would have been available for succession since the firstborn son studied medicine and would therefore not have been ready to follow his father into business (para. 34). The interview partner's second consideration whether or not to take over the family firm, was that inheriting the family firm meant inheriting capital at risk (para. 36). As economic development is difficult to predict, so is a company's development difficult to predict, which in turn makes the company evaluation even harder. Concerning the influence which his brother's refusal of the succession had on his own career, the interview partner remarks that this decision made succession for him even more attractive (para. 38)²⁷⁷. Since the firstborn had already decided against succeeding in the family firm, he preserved the possibility to become CEO for his younger brother and thereby avoided competition. The firstborn accordingly created his own niche outside the family firm. The interview partner further pointed out, that his father did not put any pressure on him regarding succession (para. 38). Apparently, the branch of industry did not influence the interview partner's career choice towards succession (paras. 91, 97).

²⁷⁶ Quotation: „Ich bin dann länger geblieben. Mein Vater hatte in der Zeit gesundheitliche Probleme und aus diesem Grund bin ich dann ein bisschen länger geblieben und habe dann nach einem Jahr MIT meinem Vater die Nachfolge in Angriff genommen, weil ich gesagt habe ‚Wenn ich bleibe, dann möchte ich das geregelt haben und dann möchte ich auch ALLEINE die Verfügungsmöglichkeit über die Firma haben‘. Wenn es gut läuft, dann möchte ich das für MICH machen und wenn es nicht gut läuft, dann soll das nicht zu Ungunsten meines Bruders sein.“ (para. 30)

²⁷⁷ Quotation: „Ich habe einfach gesagt ‚Wenn's ATTRAKTIV klingt, dann ist es für mich eine Option. Absolut!‘. Aber für MICH war eigentlich die Grundlage die, dass mein Bruder sich entschieden hat das NICHT zu machen. Das hiess für mich nicht AUTOMATISCH DASS ich es mache, aber es war für mich dann // Die CHANCE war VIEL grösser geworden dadurch. Natürlich.“ (para. 38)

The theoretical possibility of managing the company in a sibling partnership, the interview partner rejected out of hand for two reasons (Case8IP1, 2011, paras. 40, 42). First, the interview partner reasoned his decision by his attempt to avoid conflicts of interest between the brothers, which the interview partner thinks would have been inevitable sooner or later (para. 44). One example in this context would be if for instance one of them would have liked to keep money in the company whereas the other would have preferred to extract money out of the company. The second reason is related to a potential sudden separation of one partner (para. 44). In such cases, it might occur that heirs, which were originally not involved in the business, would enter the company and become business partners (para. 44). With regard to how growing up within an entrepreneurial family influenced the successor's career decision towards an entrepreneurial career, the interview partner clearly explicated that the family firm heavily shaped family life (para. 66). However, the interview partner did not perceive this influence as a negative aspect (paras. 68, 85)²⁷⁸. According to the interview partner's perception, his brother perceived the situation differently and was aiming at a more regular daily routine (paras. 68, 70). Nevertheless, even his older brother became an entrepreneur when opening his own doctor's office (paras. 72, 74).

To name trusted persons that assisted the interview partner when making the decision towards succession was difficult for the successor (Case8IP1, 2011, para. 93). However, the interviewee pointed at his father's role, as he unveiled both the positive and the negative side of the job (para. 93). In this respect, the interview partner accentuated that the main deciding reason for him was the possibility to rapidly take over responsibility, which his father provided him shortly after entering the family firm (para. 95). Upon request, the interview partner added that his brother regarding his decision to take over the family firm was not important for him, since he had already decided against succession before he did (paras. 105, 107). Indeed, the interview partner took succession into account, after his brother decided against succession on his part (para. 117)²⁷⁹. This chronology implies that the secondborn's career decision was affected by the firstborn's career decision.

²⁷⁸ Quotation: „Ich glaube schon, ja. Ich glaube schon, dass diese Möglichkeit Entscheidungen zu treffen, das hat man MITbekommen und mich hat das eigentlich immer fasziniert. Mich hat das gereizt und ich habe das auch immer interessant und spannend gefunden wenn ich mit meinem Vater mitkonnte wenn es darum ging irgendwelche Inventargegenstände einzukaufen – einen neuen Krahn oder sowas. Das hat mich fasziniert und das habe ich eigentlich gern gemacht. Und ich trage GERNE Verantwortung. Das heisst NICHT, dass ich alles ALLEIN entscheiden WILL, aber ich trage eigentlich SEHR GERN die Verantwortung und ich versuche auch in unserer Firma so VIEL wie möglich zu delegieren und die Möglichkeiten ENTSCHEIDUNGEN zu fällen weiterzugeben.“ (para. 85)

²⁷⁹ Quotation: „Für MICH hat es natürlich schon einen GROSSEN Zusammenhang, weil wie gesagt, wenn mein Bruder sich entschieden hätte die Firma zu übernehmen und sich auch von der Ausbildung her in

As to the succession procedure, after the interview partner entered the company, the father very quickly delegated responsibility to him and served as president of the board of directors (Case8IP1, 2011, para. 48). In addition, the predecessor was still available as consultant, door opener for new clients, and support for customer relationship management with existing clients (para. 48). However, succession planning had already been started about ten years before the interview partner actually entered the company (paras. 54, 56). From that time on, the father regularly asked his son as to his career plans towards succession in the family firm, which the later successor kept undecided until he had finished university (para. 56). As to the age gap between father and son, the interview partner regards the age difference as being suitable for succession, since (1) due to his educational attainment he felt ready to take over the company, and (2) the family firm would have been too small for two managers at the time of succession (para. 60). This assessment of the company characteristics' influence on succession implies that the interview partner also assessed the family firm as too small to establish a sibling partnership. Accordingly, if both brothers had liked to succeed their father in the family firm, competition might have occurred.

Regarding the family members' characters, the interview partner described his parents as having a very Swiss attitude, and as being very conservative as well as being very reserved (Case8IP1, 2011, para. 76). The interview partner described himself and his brother as being of very different characters – himself as being more active than his brother (para. 76), which represents sibling deidentification. The interview partner linked this character trait to their chosen career paths, with himself as being more entrepreneurial (para. 76)²⁸⁰. However, with regard to parent identification, the interview partner eluded an explicit classification for him and his brother to either one or both of their parents (para. 113). Nevertheless, the successor primarily classed himself as being very similar to his father and further classes his brother also as being more related to their father than their mother (para. 111). The interview partner hypothesised that this might originate from their parents' professional careers, with his father's career being more similar to the two brothers' careers (para. 113). In addition, the successor described both his and his father's management style as similar, however

irgendeiner Art und Weise in die Richtung entwickelt hätte, dann wäre es für mich wahrscheinlich keine Option mehr gewesen. Also von demher bestimmt ein Einfluss! Er hat sich dagegen entschieden und deshalb ist für mich eigentlich eine Option entstanden über die ich mir *1* eigentlich erst NACH dem Entscheid meines Bruders Gedanken gemacht habe. Weil er IST der ÄLTERE und ich hätte akzeptiert wenn er als Erstgeborener in der Linie zuerst drankommt. Das hätte ich akzeptieren können.“ (para. 117)

²⁸⁰ Quotation: „Bei meinem Bruder und bei mir sind die Charaktere vielleicht auch ein bisschen unterschiedlich. Ich glaube das zeigt auch wieso ich der Unternehmer bin und er eine ANDERE Richtung gewählt hat. (...)“ (para. 76)

his might be even more cooperative, which might straightforwardly be owing to the course of time (paras. 139, 141). As to the siblings' relationship, the interview partner mentioned that a slightly competitive thinking existed; however, the interview partner regards this as being normal among brothers (para. 119).

With respect to the inner-family roles, the interview partner reports that some relatives and friends accuse him having deranged the family hierarchy with the firstborn typically being the successor in the family firm (Case8IP1, 2011, para. 78). According to their opinion, the secondborn took over the firstborn's role (para. 78), at least within the business environment. However, as to this family's entrepreneurial history, no family tradition exists in which the firstborn is the predetermined successor (para. 80). In this context, and of his own accord, the interview partner appended that if his brother had studied a subject that would have left an entrepreneurial career more open, then for him, this career option would most probably have vanished (paras. 80, 81)²⁸¹. This goes in line with the interview partner's previous statement that he would not have been willing to enter a sibling partnership (cf. paras. 40, 42, 44, 81). Moreover, both of these statements underpin the presumed mutual influence as to career options and career choices among siblings. The interview partner defused this statement regarding not entering a sibling partnership by admitting that he would not have been willing to enter *any* business partnership (para. 81). In addition, the interviewee later states that he would avoid a sibling partnership whenever possible or, if wanted, only with one sibling as the distinct leader or with a clear separation of functions (para. 147). In addition, the interview partner would avoid siblings as inactive partners (para. 147)²⁸². Despite all that, in case of refusing succession, the interview partner can still imagine having pursued an entrepreneurial career, however then as a strategy or business consultant (para. 83).

To summarise and to conclude, based on the interview partner's experience, to successfully realise succession, it is important that the financial part is settled as well as the responsibilities that have to be handed over (Case8IP1, 2011, para. 50)²⁸³. In

²⁸¹ Quotation: „Nein. Aber ich denke wenn mein Bruder sich zum Zeitpunkt als es um die Entscheidung ging für ein Studium entschieden hätte welches das Unternehmensein vielleicht mehr offen gelassen hätte als ein medizinisches Studium, (...) dann wäre das wahrscheinlich für mich keine Option mehr gewesen.“ (para. 80)

²⁸² Quotation: „Also NICHTtätige Geschwister würde ich nach Möglichkeit vermeiden. Weil wenn es der Firma gut geht, dann haben die, die das erwirtschaftet haben das Gefühl sie müssten etwas teilen was SIE eigentlich erARBEITET haben. Und wenn es der Firma nicht gut gehen sollte, dann haben Sie den Druck, dass sie das Erbe ihrer Geschwister aufs Spiel gesetzt haben. Und das finde ich keine schöne Option.“ (para. 147)

²⁸³ Quotation: „Das WICHTIGSTE ist, dass man KLAR SCHIFF macht. Dass man im Prinzip die Spielregeln festlegt auf einen Zeitpunkt beVOR die Übergabe eigentlich stattfindet und dass DANN auch wirklich die

hindsight, the interview partner would not change anything in the succession procedure in the way it was brought off (para. 52). However, the interview partner noted that the smaller the family firm is, the more challenging the succession procedures may be (para. 52). This statement supports the assumed linkage between family firm characteristics, succession, and niche selection. The successor bases his assumption on the fact that with regard to families having a small or medium-sized company, a major part of the family's fortune may be bound to the company (para. 52). In this respect, it is important that the essential operating assets remain in the business and other assets may be detached from the company. This approach is also pursued with regard to the successor's financial obligations towards his parents and sibling(s) after succession has been completed (para. 52). With regard to the successor selection among siblings, the interview partner strongly favours a selection clearly based on skills and abilities and therewith choosing the child with the highest potential, which in turn might be dependent on the company characteristics (para. 145).

With regard to identification and deidentification, sibling deidentification was found, whereas no clear proposition as to parent identification or deidentification can be made. Niche occupation in this case was influenced by the firstborn's career choice towards a career outside the family firm, which cleared the way for the secondborn's career choice. The presumed mutual influence among siblings as to career options and therewith related the career choice is supported by the analysis. As a consequence of the firstborn's career choice, the partly existing competitive relationship between the brothers in the family environment was avoided in the brothers' professional environment.

6.1.9 Case 9

This case has an exceptional standing within this study, since it is partnered by a successor who sold the family firm about three and a half years before the interview was conducted (Case9IP1, 2012, para. 109). In this respect, the case discusses the latest succession event from the 2nd to the 3rd generation and simultaneously represents a company that did not survive beyond the 3rd generation. In this context, it has to be pointed out that the company was not sold due to succession problems but

Modalitäten (...) definiert werden. Das muss ALLES wirklich ganz klar sein. Und dass die vererbende Generation WIRKLICH auch beREIT ist die Verantwortung abzugeben und zu akzeptieren, dass es anders laufen kann als es die letzten 20, 25, 30 Jahre gelaufen ist. Ich denke, dass die finanZIELLE Ebene und die Verantwortungsebene, das muss im gleichen Zug stattfinden oder übergeben werden. Und DAS denke ich möglichst früh.“ (para. 50)

due to market-related considerations (paras. 8, 101, 103). The text also provides an insight into the related emotional side of finding one's position within the family firm and then selling one's own and the previous' generations lifework. The interview partner is the founder's grandson and the family firm's last CEO (para. 8).

The interview partner took over the family firm in 1983 (Case9IP1, 2012, para. 8), which grounds this case discussion on experiences of more than 25 years' activity as CEO. Before entering the family firm, the interview partner completed studies in business administration and then worked in a business consultancy for two years, since he was unsure whether he wanted to enter the family firm (para. 12). However, since the interview partner grew up with the business, he described thinking about succession as obvious (para. 14). Within the entrepreneurial family, succession was not openly discussed as such; however, the father's vision of succession was openly communicated (para. 79)²⁸⁴. Accordingly, the interview partner had a clear conception of his professional career at a very young age (para. 79). Although the interview partner was about 12 years old at that time, he explained that this conception of his future and the trust his father confided in him furthermore provided him security and made him proud (paras. 81, 83)²⁸⁵.

As to the interview partner's career decision, he pointed out that the main motivation for him to enter the family firm was that by entering the company, he had the opportunity to change something, which must be seen against the background of the 1968 movements (para. 14). Although the interview partner was aware of his father's social engagement, he wanted to contribute to society by himself, which provided the career path as successor to him (para. 14). When taking this decision, the interview partner remarked that he discussed this issue with friends who had the same mindset and also an entrepreneurial background, and of which some had already entered the family firm (paras. 16, 18, 20). For the interview partner, the branch of industry was not a decision criterion when he made his career decision; however, he remarked that he found the family firm's field of operations as very likeable (paras. 40, 42). The aspect that the interview partner as well as his siblings worked in the company from

²⁸⁴ Quotation: „Ja das wurde nicht diskuTIERT, aber von meinem Vater als VISION dann schon auch explizit ausgesprochen. Das hat er dann schon. Ich weiss noch, ich war etwa 12, da hat er gesagt ‚Ja, DU solltest eigentlich WIRTSCHAFT studieren!‘, und das fand ich eigentlich top! Und von da an war es eigentlich für mich klar, dass ich mal Wirtschaft studieren werde (Interviewpartner lacht).“ (para. 79)

²⁸⁵ Quotation: „(...) [A]ber es hat mir auch HALT gegeben. (...) Ich habe das NIE als Einschränkung empfunden, ich fand das eigentlich GUT. ‚Ja, der SIEHT das für mich und ich sehe mich AUCH so! Und ich bin eigentlich stolz, dass ich schon WEISS was ich dann mal mache.‘ Meine meisten Freunde und Kollegen die wussten das ja noch nicht so konKRET. (...) Und ja, das hat mich auch ein bisschen stolz gemacht. Ich dachte ‚Ja, ich weiss was ich will!‘.“ (para. 81)

time to time (paras. 73, 75), the interview partner perceived this experience without exception as a positive experience that also positively influenced his identification with the company, however not his succession decision as such (para. 77).

As to successor selection, the father had to choose his successor among his four sons. In this case, the father set great value upon his sons' academic performances (para. 26). Since the secondborn and the thirdborn already showed strong results throughout their education, it was taken into consideration to build up a sibling partnership with one son being responsible for the technical side and the other son for the commercial side (para. 26). As a consequence, the lastborn was not as much in the focus for succession planning (para. 26). Unfortunately, this plan could not be realised, since the secondborn son died before succession was implemented, so that the thirdborn became the father's sole successor (para. 26). The lastborn did not show any interest in entering the family firm but became an inactive partner (para. 64). The firstborn son did not enter the family firm either. Interestingly, with reference to Sulloway's Family Niche Model, the lastborn has an artistic disposition and therefore pursued a career as an artist (para. 62). This is in line with Sulloway's claim for lastborns of being more creative than earlierborns; although Sulloway links this claim to being more creative in finding an own niche instead of per se being more creative than older siblings (cf. Sulloway, 1996). However, this move lets again assume that laterborns might feel more free to choose their career path, even if no pressure is put on them by the parents. By deciding not to enter the family firm, an offspring a priori – wittingly or unwittingly – also decides not to compete with its sibling(s) in the family firm. On the other hand, the chance of succession seems to be more difficult the more siblings already entered the family firm. These considerations once again support the presumed mutual influence of siblings regarding their career options and career choices. In this context, the interview partner rates the lastborn's situation as being more open, since succession was already arranged (paras. 66, 68)²⁸⁶.

With regard to successor selection, the interview partner pointed out that according to his perception, the most important aspect is that a successor is suited character-wise,

²⁸⁶ Quotation: „(...) Es hat wie alles so seine VOR- und NACHteile. Eben dieser Auswahlprozess ist bei uns eigentlich schon SEHR FRÜH *1* nicht SO EXPLIZIT, aber IMPLIZIT eigentlich schon sehr FRÜH erfolgt und das hat sicher meinem jüngsten Bruder – meinem ältesten und jüngsten Bruder – Möglichkeiten weggenommen. Vielleicht haben Sie es auch ein bisschen als geringere Wertschätzung erlebt. Es hat ihnen aber auch mehr Freiheit gegeben. Eben sich ganz DAhin zu entwickeln, wo es ihnen am ehesten entspricht und ICH habe diese Vorselektion immer eigentlich als WERTSCHÄTZEND empfunden. Natürlich, ist doch klar, wenn der Vater einen für diese Rolle sieht! Aber mit der Zeit auch als eine gewisse *1* BelAs-tung würde ich nicht sagen – das hat mich nie gedrückt. Aber natürlich schon sehr gefORDert. Vor allem eben dann in meiner Auflehnungsphase.“ (para. 68)

has the necessary intellectual abilities, and the social competence needed as it would be searched for in any external applicant (para. 30). In addition, the interview partner rated it as an advantage if the age gap between the predecessor and the successor is not too big, as this facilitates a smooth transition (para. 34). In case of a rather big age gap between father and son, the internal succession might be postponed and an external successor would have to be employed as an interim solution (para. 34). Since the age gap in this case did not allow the successor to have more than two years of wandering and learning, the successor felt not appropriately prepared for the CEO-job (para. 36). According to the interview partner, a potential successor should be acquainted with the family firm based on closeness to the company even within the offspring's childhood and youth – also emotionally but with the necessary distance when needed (para. 38)²⁸⁷. As to the successor selection, if more than one child turns out to be professionally qualified, for fairness reasons the interview partner recommended setting the course for succession relatively early (para. 137). Nevertheless, although if more than one child might be able to succeed their parent(s) and the family firm provides the required characteristics that several children can be placed in the company, the areas should be clearly separated and probably one CEO has to be appointed (para. 137). In case not all offspring that are capable of and interested in succession can be offered a position in the family firm, the interview partner recommended discussing the whole situation early enough in advance to avoid emotional injuries, disappointments, and infighting (para. 137). By implication, the non-successor(s) would regain the freedom to build up a career, instead of holding to the desire to succeed and in case of non-selection, would have wasted energy (para. 137). However, the interview partner pointed out that although he currently serves as a board member in several companies and in this function was already often confronted with succession management, his answer is his spontaneous reaction to this question and not based on experience (para. 137). In case of an internal succession, the interview partner recommended thematising the topic very early with the children as potential successors, but in parallel building up and supporting employees that might be able to manage the firm, if an inter-family succession cannot be realised (para. 133). If a manager from inside

²⁸⁷ Quotation: „Sicher durch die NÄHE zum UnterNEHMEN. Indem er schon in allen Altersstufen eigentlich informiert wird, involviert wird – auch emotioNAL. Dann aber natürlich auch genügend ABstand entwickeln kann. Ich denke das Studium ist da auch eine gute Phase um Abstand zu entwickeln und in der man dann seine ersten Fehler in anderen Firmen machen darf. Aber auch das Handwerk. Eben NICHT NUR das fachliche Handwerk von, ich sage jetzt mal vom Fachwissen und ManagementSKILLS was man lernen kann, sondern er sollte eigentlich auch FÜHRUNGserfahrung mitbringen. Und FÜHRUNG, das KANN man NICHT in der Schule lernen. NATÜRLICH AUCH, bis zu einem gewissen Grad. (...) [A]ber das wirkliche Führen in einem Unternehmen, das ist schon nochmal was anderes und das ist ein grosser Vorteil, wenn man da schon eine gewisse Erfahrung mitbringt.“ (para. 38)

the company cannot be found, the interview partner advocated a preferably quick transition with an external manager (para. 133).

With respect to the different roles within the family's kinship system, the interview partner recounted that relatives assessed him as the typical family representative (para. 48). As a consequence, the interview partner inferred that to a certain degree, these family members linked him more to his father and grandfather than to his mother (para. 48). The interview partner admitted that this perception might tendentially be right, however, added that he has very much in common with his mother's side as well and that therefore an unambiguous assignment to one parent is difficult (para. 48). Approached upon the family members' inner-family roles, the interview partner emphasised that he never defined himself as the second-youngest child, but instead as the third-oldest, and conformingly, within specific situations, felt as being in competition with his oldest brother (paras. 54, 60)²⁸⁸. However, due to differing fields of interest (para. 54), both of the siblings could occupy their own niche within the family system, distinguish from each other, and thereby avoid further competition. As to the successor's role within the company, the interview partner felt like having found his position within the company about three years after having entered the company – more precisely, when a first crisis occurred (para. 174). The successor then felt needed in these particular circumstances and that he could contribute his part. Regarding the role finding process inside and outside the family firm, the interview partner clearly accounted that finding his role within the company setting was more difficult (paras. 176, 178, 180). Interestingly, the interview partner added that according to his own perception, he believes that he was accepted inside as well as outside the family firm quicker than he accepted himself in the CEO role (para. 180). With regard to family culture, the interview partner highlighted the importance of discussing and figuring out the relationship between the family and the family firm as to what the family wants and about what role the company plays in the family's life as well as in each family member's life (para. 143). The interview partner further recommended discussing how family values may be transferred to the business context, and explicitly

²⁸⁸ Quotation: „Es gab eine Rolle in der ich mich SEHEN wollte. Ob ich die dann auch tatsächlich // Ob die mir dann auch zugestanden wurde ist eine andere Frage. Ich habe mich NIE als Zweitjüngsten, sondern immer als Drittaltesten definiert und habe mich auch wirklich in Konkurrenz zu meinem ältesten Bruder ab und zu gesehen. Aber das war nur in bestimmten Situationen so, weil seine Interessen waren eigentlich auch wieder SEHR eigenständig. Er hat sich VIEL MEHR für technische Sachen interessiert. Er hat Radios auseinandergenommen und wieder zusammengesetzt. Das hätte ich, wäre mir NIE in den Sinn gekommen je sowas zu versuchen (Interviewpartner lacht). Also von daher hatte doch jeder eigentlich seine eigenen Interessen sodass jeder dem anderen auch Platz gelassen hat. Aber ich hatte schon irgendwie immer den Ehrgeiz zu den Älteren zu gehören. Ich habe mich SEHR stark natürlich nach oben orientiert. Obwohl die FAMILIE eigentlich so gesagt hat wie ‚Die beiden GROSSEN und die beiden KLEINEN‘. Das hat mir gar nicht behagt.“ (para. 54)

the discussion of critical issues to avoid conflicts that might otherwise be brought into the business setting (para. 143).

The case discussed represents an example in which neither clear parent identification nor clear parent deidentification in terms of the successor's character traits can be clearly assigned. With regard to sibling deidentification, it can be said that the four siblings seem to be different in personality, which means they occupy different niches within the family environment. In this respect it has to be mentioned, that the interview partner obtained his professional role suggested by his father, which he accepted without hesitation. In addition, the interview partner's role as successor seems to be further supported by his relatives. The case is accordingly one example, in which the father's decision regarding succession a priori avoided potential sibling competition.

6.1.10 Summary Within-Case Analyses

In this subsection, the insights from the single within-case analyses are summarised to present a comprehensive overview on the obtained insights. In this respect, the focus is on summarising the findings as to the witting or unwitting application of the Family Niche Model as well as the application of the concepts of sibling identification, sibling deidentification, parent identification, and parent deidentification. In order not to anticipate the conclusions within the answers to the research questions²⁸⁹, in this subsection, the findings are not discussed in detail. Since the findings regarding the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing are interrelated with these findings and are discussed in Specific Research Question 2.1²⁹⁰, they are not discussed individually within this summary either. Accordingly, in the following paragraphs (1) the findings as to the presumed transferability of the siblings' niches from the family context into the family firm context, (2) the findings as to the concept of sibling identification and sibling deidentification, and (3) the findings as to parent identification and parent deidentification are summarised.

With regard to the insights as to the Family Niche Model, meaning insights as to how the concept of family niches was identified within the family and the family firm, it has to be pointed out, that the presented insights are always only based on one or two interview partners per each case. In this respect, the findings might be biased to some degree, however, it was not possible to interview all family members. Nevertheless, whenever possible, more than one interview partner was interviewed to minimise such

²⁸⁹ See Subsection 6.2.1.

²⁹⁰ See Subsection 6.2.1.6.

bias. Table 6.1 summarisingly presents the findings for each case. In this respect it has to be pointed out that the table only represents the sibling(s) that entered the family firm, since in case of not entering the family firm, the transferability of an offspring's family niche into the family firm context is not existent.

Table 6.1. *Insights Analyses Family Niches*

Case	1 ²⁹¹	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Transferability of family niches	not defined	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(✓)	✓

It can be summarised, that evidence for the assumed transferability of the inner-family niche(s) into the family firm was found in almost all cases. In this respect has to be pointed out that the transferability may refer to different aspects, such as character traits within the family and the possible transfer of these character traits into the management style within the family firm. Furthermore, transferability might mean that an offspring that is very interested in technical topics and thereby occupies this niche within the sibship and/or the family context, may pursue a profession within the family firm that is technically oriented. Moreover, an offspring that represents a leading figure within a sibship might become CEO in the family firm, which also represents a leading task. All these examples, describe transferability of an inner-family niche into the family firm context. Further information as to the case-specific transferability of family niches is provided within the answer of Specific Research Question 1.3.

Regarding the findings as to the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification, evidence was found that the concepts are transferrable in terms of the personalities as well as to the siblings' career choices towards succession in the family firm. Table 6.2 presents the findings regarding sibling identification and sibling deidentification.

Table 6.2. *Insights Analyses Sibling Identification and Sibling Deidentification*

Case	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Sibling identification					✓				
Sibling deidentification	assumed	✓	✓	assumed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

²⁹¹ For Case 1, no clear statement as to the successor's family niche can be made and accordingly the transferability cannot be assessed. This missing information is owed to the early stage within the research process at which the interview was conducted. Since this case represents the pilot case, the interview guide was still under development, wherefore this information was not asked detailed enough.

Table 6.2 shows that both phenomena, sibling identification and sibling deidentification, were found. With regard to the sibship size, it is assumed that the more siblings are present within one sibship, the more probable it is that siblings show the same character traits or that their characters to some extent might overlap. This assumption is based on the fact that the more siblings there are already within one family, the fewer unoccupied niches are available for laterborn siblings. In fact, the analyses revealed that sibling deidentification within the family context was reported for almost all sibships, which means that the siblings mostly developed individual personalities and thereby in consequence avoided competition within the family. Accordingly, the concept of family niches seems to be valid for the sibships represented in this study. The detailed analyses are presented within Subsection 6.2.1.1.

Regarding the findings as to parent identification and parent deidentification, the analyses revealed the findings as presented in Table 6.3. Since this study focuses on succession in the family firm, Table 6.3 only displays parent identification of the successors, meaning if an offspring identifies with the parent(s) that is/are actively involved in the family firm and potentially as a consequence thereof chooses the career path of succeeding his parent(s) in the family firm.

Table 6.3. *Insights Analyses Parent Identification of Successors*

Case	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Parent identification	✓	✓	(✓)	✓	✓	✓	✓	(✓)	unclear

From Table 6.3 follows, that in almost all cases, evidence for the successors' parent identification as to succession was found. In this context it has to be pointed out that the overview only displays the findings regarding parent identification within the context of succession, since by applying this argumentation, parent deidentification refers to pursuing a career path different from the parent(s) and in consequence represents non-succession. With regard to the research findings, in particular Case 1 and Case 4 can be highlighted as in these cases, the successors explicitly named their fathers as role models, which points at parent identification. However, it has to be emphasised, that an offspring might identify with one parent or both parents within the family context, but may nevertheless refuse succession in the family firm context, meaning parent deidentification regarding his/her own career choice. The detailed analyses and conclusions are presented within the answer of Specific Research Question 6.2.1.2.

6.2 Cross-Case Analyses

As introduced in Subsection 4.2.8, a combination of Saldaña's (2013) Second Cycle coding²⁹² technique *Pattern Coding* and Yin's (2014) analytic technique *Cross-Case Synthesis*²⁹³ are applied for the cross-case analyses. In line with the explanatory research approach, both techniques build on the results of the within-case analyses and aim at identifying similarities and differences across the individual cases and in turn between the presumed dependent and independent variables of the theoretical framework (see Section 3.4). Quantitative techniques of analysis are not applied, since the use of semi-structured interviews might falsify the results, as it allows the modification of the questionnaire guide during the research. Accordingly, the cross-case conclusions are drawn based on a qualitative analysis of the codes from First Cycle coding. There-with related, the focus is on probing whether the single cases can be considered replications of one typical case or have to be considered as contrasting cases (cf. Yin, 2014, pp. 166–167). In line with the study's research aim, the code list resulting from First Cycle coding is further condensed first in respect of answering the research questions, and second in respect of the theoretical propositions regarding theory building and hypotheses development. As discussed, the applied coding scheme was self-developed by the author, whereby a combination of concept-driven coding and data-driven coding was applied and in consequence the analysis is grounded in the respective sibling research concepts²⁹⁴ as well as in the inputs derived directly from the data.

6.2.1 Answers to the Research Questions and Link back to Literature

In this section, the General Research Questions and the Specific Research Questions are answered. Both General Research Questions consist of at least two Specific Research Questions, which have to be answered first to answer the General Research Questions. The Specific Research Questions are answered based on the results of the within-case analyses (see Section 6.1). To minimise repetition, the focus is on summarising already discussed information as to the respective research question. Detailed information is available in the within-case analyses, which provides a comprehensive analysis for each succession event. In this context, the results of the within-case

²⁹² Second Cycle coding reorganises and reanalyses data by means of First Cycle coding methods and results in a coherent metasynthesis (Saldaña, 2013, p. 207).

²⁹³ To reveal case study evidence, Yin (2014, pp. 142–168) discusses five analytic techniques that are (1) *Pattern Matching*, (2) *Explanation Building*, (3) *Time-Series Analysis*, (4) *Logic Models*, and (5) *Cross-Case Synthesis*.

²⁹⁴ I.e., the Family Niche Model, the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification, and the concepts of parent identification and parent deidentification.

analyses are rearranged in respect of the research questions, of which the specific topics represent predefined categories. Accordingly, the extracted categories are (1) sibling identification, (2) sibling deidentification, (3) parent identification, (4) parent deidentification, and (5) niche selection. Beyond answering the research questions, the answers are linked back to previous research, which specifically applies to the Specific Research Questions 1.1 to 1.4, as they relate to sibling research concepts.

6.2.1.1 Specific Research Question 1.1

How are the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification in entrepreneurial families transferable into the family firm succession context?

In the most general sense, sibling identification refers to the judgment of siblings being alike, whereas sibling deidentification refers to the judgment of siblings being different from oneself (cf. Schachter et al., 1976, p. 418).²⁹⁵ The analysis of the interview transcripts pertaining to sibling identification and sibling deidentification revealed that only in Case 5 sibling identification could be found.²⁹⁶ With regard to the group of three siblings of Case 5, sibling identification was found for the secondborn son and the thirdborn daughter. In this case the firstborn, who became the successor, obtained the role of the “older brother”, who as well from time to time obtained the minder’s role for his siblings and then embodied a leading role within the sibship. In consequence, this points to sibling deidentification between the firstborn and the laterborns, which implies that both phenomena are found. In Case 5, only the firstborn entered the family firm, whereas the two laterborns refused to enter the family firm.

Sibling deidentification was identified in seven cases, namely Case 2, Case 3, Case 5 to Case 9, and is furthermore assumed for Case 1 and Case 4.²⁹⁷ For the group of

²⁹⁵ Other than in Schachter et al.’s (1976) study, who directly asked their subjects to judge for their sibling(s) “Are you alike or different from your sibling?” (p. 420), the author of this study asked the interview partners to describe themselves and their siblings as well as their parents. Based on these descriptions, inferences were drawn as to sibling identification or deidentification. However, in many cases the interview partners referred to the terms *different* or *alike* by themselves. Likewise, the 7-point bipolar semantic differential items developed by Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum (1957), Snider & Osgood (1969), and Lazowick (1955), which were considered as bipolar items characterising differentness in Schachter et al.’s study were not applied either, due to this study’s qualitative nature. This procedure provided a more nuanced insight into the family members’ personalities and roles, enabled child-parent comparisons, shed light on the inner-family roles, and at the same time gave information on niche occupation within the sibship. Contrary to Schachter et al.’s study, if possible, more than one sibling from the same sibship was interviewed to obtain different perspectives as well as to crosscheck the information and thereby not solely relying on one interview partner’s judgment (cf. Schachter et al., 1976, p. 419).

²⁹⁶ In this respect it has to be mentioned that especially in Case 1, which served as a type of pilot case, sibling identification and deidentification were not explicitly researched.

²⁹⁷ Although sibling identification and sibling deidentification was not explicitly discussed with the interview partner, sibling deidentification can be assumed. This assumption is based on the fact that (1) a sibship with

siblings in Case 5, sibling deidentification as to the firstborn to the laterborns could be confirmed. Likewise, Case 2 revealed different siblings' personalities and in consequence the siblings chose different career paths, meaning that only one sibling entered the family firm. Sibling deidentification is even more obvious in sibships consisting of pairs of siblings, which is present in Case 6, Case 7, and Case 8. In addition, in Case 6 both siblings entered the family firm, but, sibling deidentification was transferred into the business context. The interview partner clearly described the siblings' different personalities – himself as being the Swiss-influenced calm type of personality and his sister the Spanish-influenced temperamental person (Case6IP1, 2012, paras. 46, 160–166). Moreover, the successor indirectly confirmed the transfer of these characters into the business context when describing the siblings' cooperation within the company (Case6IP1, 2012, para. 174).

In conclusion, it can be said that predominantly sibling deidentification was found. Sibling identification was only found in Case 5. More precisely, sibling identification was only found between opposite-sex siblings in a second pair of siblings.²⁹⁸ By way of comparison, Schachter et al.'s (1976, p. 418) research identified significantly higher levels of deidentification for first pairs than for jump pairs, whereas intermediate levels of deidentification were found for second pairs. Due to the suitable number of cases for qualitative research (N = 9), but insufficient sample size for quantitative research, no profound conclusions can be drawn regarding similarities or differences between the two studies. With regard to succession, it was found that the siblings of Case 5 that showed sibling identification both rejected succession. This result shows that siblings representing sibling identification pursued the same career intentions towards succession in the family firm. On the contrary, sibling deidentification can be taken as a basis in all cases. Regarding the cases' sibship sizes, in six out of nine cases, the sibship consists of at least three children, with a maximum of five children. Based on research by Bossard and Boll (1956), it should be assumed that the larger the sibship, the more probable is sibling deidentification.²⁹⁹ With regard to succession, this study showed that siblings of sibships characterised by sibling deidentification chose

five identical siblings is hardly imaginable, which also makes sibling identification easily conceivable, and (2) the siblings' different career choices lead one to assume they have different personalities.

²⁹⁸ The term *first pair* refers to three-child sibships and stands for firstborns judging secondborns or secondborns judging firstborns. Likewise, the term *second pair* refers to secondborns judging thirdborns or thirdborns judging secondborns. On the contrary, the term *jump pair* refers to firstborns judging thirdborns or thirdborns judging firstborns and in consequence bypassed middleborn children. (Schachter et al., 1976, p. 419)

²⁹⁹ Schachter (1982, p. 131) discusses the work by Bossard & Boll (1956) in relation to sibling deidentification and emphasises that according to Bossard & Boll, all children within a family would be different from another in equal measure, which is not in accordance with Schachter's findings (see Subsection 3.3.2), as it ignores the component of family structure (cf. Schachter, 1982, p. 131).

different working environments, different professions, or if more than one offspring entered the family firm, different areas of responsibility within the family firm. This may be an indicator that sibling partnerships of siblings that differ from each other might have higher prospects of success, as this constellation would minimise competition. For example, in Case 6, a pair of siblings works together in the family firm, with their areas of responsibility matching their individual personalities and are thereby indirectly based on sibling deidentification. Similarly, Case 9 provides an example in which two out of four sons were chosen as successors based on sibling deidentification, meaning their differing talents and fields of interest. With the exception of Case 3, in which two of the three siblings pursue a comparable profession, no two siblings of the same sibship chose the same profession. Accordingly, sibling deidentification was transferred into the professional context in almost all families.

Conclusively evaluated, it can be said that the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification in entrepreneurial families are transferable into the family firm succession context. The research findings are threefold. First, evidence was found that the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification are transferable in terms of the siblings' career choice towards succession in the family firm. In this respect, both concepts revealed the same effect on succession as the siblings' career choice – either acceptance or rejection. Second, sibling deidentification was transferred into the siblings' professional context and if transferred into the family firm, sibling deidentification was rediscovered in the siblings' differing areas of responsibility. Third, siblings of a sibling pair characterised by sibling identification showed the same aspirations towards succession in the family firm, namely both rejecting succession as a career option. Drawing further conclusions from this questions' research findings to previous research would be inappropriate, due to the limited generalisability of the research findings (see Subsection 4.2.10). Nevertheless, this study provides evidence for the underlying assumption *that* both concepts are transferrable and moreover unfolds *how* these concepts were transferred within the analysed succession events. As a result, the presumed relationship of sibling identification and sibling deidentification regarding succession in family firms is therefore supported.

6.2.1.2 Specific Research Question 1.2

How are the concepts of parent identification and parent deidentification transferable into the family firm succession context?

As reasoned in the literature review, this specific research question focuses on parent identification and parent deidentification, whereby the latter replaces the concept of split-parent identification. Regarding this study's research sample, it should be mentioned, that the outgoing CEO in Case 6 was not the successor's parent but his uncle. Accordingly, in Case 6 the son-parent relationship was replaced by the nephew-uncle relationship. Therefrom follows, that in most of the cases, parent identification is limited to identification and/or deidentification with the father within the family environment and/or within the family firm environment. In principle, this implies same-sex identification for sons and opposite-sex identification for daughters. However, as solely male successors took part in the study, the results mostly relate to the son-father identification. To answer the research question, the results of the within-case analyses (see Section 6.1) are discussed in terms of each successor's parent identification and/or parent deidentification. In a similar way to the research on sibling identification and sibling deidentification, child-parent identification was also researched by means of alike-different character traits of the protagonists. The judgment(s) was/were made as self-identity assessments by the interview partners themselves and/or as assessments by family members and in Case 7 in addition by a non-family member.

Case 1 provided rudiments regarding the presumed relationship between parent identification and career choice, although personality traits were not explicitly researched at that early stage in the research. Succession in this event was unclear when the firstborn entered the family firm by way of a trial but then decided to stay. Today, the company is ruled by the interview partner and one of his cousins. The interview partner clearly stated his father as being a role model for himself (Case1IP2, 2011, paras. 73, 77), which can be assumed as a kind of parental identification and a foundation for succeeding his father. However, before the family firm was taken over by the cousins, their fathers ran the company together, with the interview partner's³⁰⁰ father as CEO and his uncle as being responsible for manufacturing. Today's segmentation of responsibilities among the cousins is similar. However, the interview partner pointed out that this replication was not intended but resulted from the cousins' educational backgrounds and talents (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 31). Accordingly, the presumed parental identification between the interview partners could not be undoubtedly proven, although the son's perception of his father as a role model for himself lets assume parental identification.

³⁰⁰ The interview partners in this case were the CEO-successor and his father, who is the president of the board of directors.

In Case 4, the interview partner described himself and his father both as alpha leaders and much alike (Case4IP1, 2011, paras. 90, 102). Nonetheless, the interview partner and current CEO also mentioned being close to his mother (Case4IP1, 2011, para. 88). In principal, parent identification and the career choice as successor were identified. Notably, the interview partner referred to his father as a role model for himself (Case4IP1, 2011, para. 265), which by definition implies a tendency to emulate the father. Other than in Case 1, this result does not per se assume a direct relationship between parental identification and the offspring's career choice, as succession was initially accelerated due to health problems of the father. The result therefrom is that, for Case 4, the presumed relationship can only with reservations be regarded as confirmed. Clear parental identification with subsequent succession was also found for the firstborn son and his father in Case 7 (Case7IP1, 2011, paras. 100, 110). However, it has to be mentioned, that the firstborn followed his father as technical director but refused to become CEO. A clear link between parent identification and career choice could not be ascertained in this case either.

Regarding Case 2, the interview partner described both his parents as very caring persons (Case2IP1, 2011, para. 198). The successor himself continued the parents' social engagement, especially by focusing on sustainability. However, a clear identification to only one parent cannot be confirmed. What can be said instead is that the offspring did identify with his parents and succeeded his father as CEO. Based on the found evidence, the presumed relationship is not supported as to one parent, but can nonetheless be seen as supported, since the interview partner reported identification with both of his parents (Case2IP1, 2011, paras. 206, 210). Likewise in Case 3, Case 8, and Case 9, no clear identification as to one parent could be revealed (Case 3IP1, 2012, paras. 128, 136, 138, 140; Case8IP1, 2011, paras. 111, 113; Case9IP1, 2011, para. 48). However, according to the successor in Case 9 himself, family members and relatives described him as a typical family representative and therewith associated the interview partner more with the father's side (Case9IP1, 2011, para. 48).

In Case 5, in which both parents were actively working in the family firm, the successor's character traits were found more in line with his mother's character traits, although all three siblings seem to have much in common (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 110). With regard to parent identification, this case occupies an exceptional position. As both parents worked in the family firm, a clear identification with only one parent was not needed. It was more relevant if the successor identifies and/or deidentifies with either one or both of his parent(s). Based on the successor's and his mother's similar character traits, parent identification was identified. However, a clear relationship with

respect to succession could not be confirmed. Furthermore, the non-successors also showed character traits similar to their parents' characters. Relatedly, the secondborn referred to the family culture, which might have influenced succession. In this context, the non-successor would prefer to classify himself and his family as *family* instead of identifying each sibling to only one parent (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 92).

Parent identification in Case 6 is characterised by the parents' origins, with the mother coming from Switzerland and the father coming from Spain. The successor assessed his personality as being like his mother's personality (Case6IP1, 2012, para. 46). As already mentioned, the company was run by the successor's uncle and not his father or parents. Thus, with regard to succession, the nephew-uncle identification is more relevant than the child-parent identification. In this respect, the interview partner provided evidence that he and his uncle have personality traits in common (Case6IP1, 2012, para. 48). Identification can therefore be confirmed in two directions, first for the successor and his mother, and second for the successor and his uncle. However, a clear link regarding the interview partner's career choice towards succession could not be observed and would therefore be speculation.

Deriving from these analyses, parent identification and parent deidentification were found in the successor-predecessor relationships. Explicitly Case 1 and Case 4 were of particular interest since in both cases, the successors described their father as role models for themselves. This classification can be regarded as an indicator for a tendency to emulate the father. In summary, parent identification occurred more often than parent deidentification. Owing to the case-specific backgrounds and the partly missing clear identification with only one parent, no distinct cross-case evidence regarding a causal relationship between parent identification and the career choice of succession could be confirmed. Nonetheless, parental identification does not only seem to be transferable into the family firm succession context by replacing the CEO with an offspring that identifies with his/her mother or father as predecessor. When asked as to leadership and management styles, the vast majority reported similarities between the two generations' approaches – however of course with adaptations. This might result from the CEOs' similar character traits. To summarise, a distinct causal relationship regarding an offspring's career choice of succession could not be confirmed for neither one of the concepts. Nevertheless, evidence was found that the presumed relationship is worth being researched further, for instance by a follow-up quantitative study.

6.2.1.3 Specific Research Question 1.3

Are the siblings' family niches transferable into the family firm succession context?

In the course of the within-case analyses, evidence for the transferability of the family niches into the family firm succession context was found for the Cases 2–7 and Case 9. This result strongly supports the assumption of the transferability of siblings' inner-family niches into the family firm succession context. Case 8 does not show the same degree of transferability as the aforementioned cases. However, even this case shows indications that let assume that transferability holds true for this case as well, but to a lesser extent. Regarding Case 1, since no clear sibling identification or deidentification could be defined, a clear transferability of family niches cannot be defined either. In general, as not all siblings enter the family firm, this section presents successor-related information as well as non-successor-related information. To avoid repeating already discussed results, only Case 4, Case 5, and Case 6 are discussed. Detailed information as to each case is available in the within-case analyses (see Section 6.1).

The interview partner and successor in Case 6 explicitly supports the assumption that family niches are transferred into the family firm succession context (Case6IP1, 2012, paras. 182–188). The interview partner accentuated that every family member grows into a specific role – translated into the family niche terminology, every family member occupies its own niche, on condition that the person wants to avoid competition within the family. Due to the father's early death, the successor in Case 6 obtained a leading role within the family already at a young age (Case6IP1, 2012, para. 160). As the interview partner became the successor, the leading role from the family context was transferred into the family firm succession context. Interestingly, the role allocation within the family firm was influenced by the interview partner's uncle, since he was the previous CEO and selected him as successor and thereby acted in accordance with the other family members. In addition, the interview partner agreed that the offsprings' personalities in the family and in the family firm context are alike. With regard to birth order and in respect of two siblings entering the family firm, it is furthermore interesting, that the secondborn son became CEO, but the firstborn daughter also works in the company.

A clear transferability was also found in Case 4. In this succession event, the firstborn out of a group of three siblings occupied the niche of the technophile son. The secondborn, who was, according to his older brother, also technically gifted (Case4IP1, 2011, paras. 96, 98), did not pursue this direction and thereby wittingly or unwittingly also avoided competition among the siblings. Fitting exactly to this niche occupation, the

firstborn took over the family firm, which operates in a technical branch of industry. The secondborn became a self-employed consultant and contributes to the family firm as president of the board of directors. Hence, the secondborn chose unoccupied niches within the family and within the family firm. Interestingly, by being self-employed, the non-successor also pursues an entrepreneurial career, but outside the family firm.

Case 5 provided interesting insights, although only the firstborn son entered the family firm. With regard to the parents' inner-family roles and the parents' professional roles, no difference was found (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 122). With regard to the firstborn successor, he occupied a leading role within the group of siblings and – as the CEO – also occupies the leading role within the family firm. A transferability of the inner-family niche as to the succession context can therefore be confirmed. Regarding the transferability of the siblings' niches, in a hypothesised scenario in which all siblings would have entered the family firm, the secondborn assumed that the inner-family niches within the sibship might have been transferred to the business context, with the firstborn having a leading position (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 110). The secondborn reasons this assumption based on the siblings' personalities, which might have been transferred into the family firm context (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 110).

In a final analysis, these results demonstrate that with reference to the Family Niche Model, inner-family niches transfer into the family firm succession context. Evidence for this conclusion was found in successors' and non-successors' inner-family niches that were comparable to their niches in the family firm succession context. It can be stated that the transferability of inner-family niches into the family firm succession context may occur in several ways, for instance in terms of the offspring's area of responsibility and/or the offspring's personality within the working context. Accordingly, niche selection is assumed to be based on an offspring's personality traits and/or on an offspring's specific interests that are transferred into the entrepreneurial context.

6.2.1.4 Specific Research Question 1.4

How should succession be handled within the family firm, if several children as potential successors within the entrepreneurial family are available?

Unlike the previous research questions, this one is answered more freely, since it summarises the interview partners' general comments and supplements on the topic. Accordingly, Table 6.4 summarises these general and supplementary recommendations which according to interview partners' perception are fundamental for family firm succession if more than one offspring were available as successor. The variety of

this information contributes to the overall solution of the research problem, since this is essential in terms of providing a holistic way of looking at the research problem. The recommendations (i.e., the codes) were retrieved from the within-case analysis for First Cycle coding. Thereupon, the following categories were developed: Successor Preparation, Successor Selection, Succession Planning, Succession Processing, Sibling Partnership, and Finance.³⁰¹ As the codes and categories are self-explanatory and to avoid repetition, in the following discussion only selected aspects are highlighted. The interview partners concludingly reemphasised the following recommendations to be considered in respect of succession with multiple potential successors.

Table 6.4. Recommendations by the Interview Partners

Recommendation	Context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company analysis (e.g., within the scope of a thesis as in Case 7) • Parents should not put any pressure on the next generation and not hustle offspring into a decision 	Successor Preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting for the offspring's interests and character • Successor selection based on abilities, skills, strengths, and character and not pre-eminently based on descent, and in turn choosing the one with the highest potential • Choosing a successor in respect of the company-specific characteristics • Concentrating on as few siblings as possible 	Successor Selection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term planning and contacting a potential successor preferably soon • Dialogue with potential successors at a time when succession is not imminent • Non-successor assumes prudence as being the most important aspect and as a consequence thereof not being argumentative and putting rationality above personal feelings • Generous mindset on the side of the non-successor(s) is essential • Contract of inheritance and shareholders' agreement to organise financials • Open discussion with the parties involved • External consultant 	Succession Planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honest and open communication to exclude misunderstandings and misinterpretations • Good interplay between family and family firm: Family culture • Good interplay between the generations in which not too much is demanded of the successor(s), but at the same time the possibility to develop is obtained • External consultant • Company should not be split as to financial and ownership aspects 	Succession Processing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate areas of responsibility • Clear hierarchy among the siblings • Clear rules 	Sibling Partnership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial part has to be settled as well • Contract of inheritance as one tool to organise succession • Shareholders' agreement to rule the financial aspect • Equal treatment of the siblings is important 	Finance

³⁰¹ Table 6.3 raises no claim to completeness since the interview partners were specifically asked to name the most important considerations throughout the succession. The list is furthermore incomplete, since case-specific considerations are excluded as the answer aims at providing universally applicable insights.

The overall tenor regarding succession with multiple successors is synthesisable as follows: If more than one offspring intends entering the family firm, a clear separation of responsibilities should be arranged. Such boundaries might be defined for instance based on the offsprings' talents. By this recommendation, the interview partners unconsciously proposed niche allocation if siblings intend entering the family firm and in particular at different hierarchical levels. In this context, niche occupation should minimise competition among the siblings. However, equal authority to exert power may lead to difficulties in case of disagreements. In consequence, even if niches are occupied based on sibling deidentification and therewith related individual sector-related responsibilities and individual power decisions for single departments are assigned, in case of a two-sibling partnership, an overall responsible CEO seems to be reasonable to avoid coming to a standstill. Otherwise, in a three-sibling partnership with equal distribution of power, if two siblings agree, a majority is guaranteed. The power structure is thereby affected by the sibship size and the number of siblings entering the family firm. With regard to siblings as inactive business partners, the interview partners' opinions diverge although only unproblematic inactive partnerships were found. In this context, it is important to ensure that the CEO has the necessary decisive power as he is responsible for the family firm and in general decides on a more informed basis than an external partner is commonly in a position to do.

Regarding the extracted categories, the financial aspect especially was brought into the discussion by the interview partners. As financial considerations were not explicitly researched – by reason of the emphasis on sibling research concepts – the topic was added to the research agenda based on the interview partners' annotations. Financial considerations were remarked on by the interview partners regarding equal distribution of family assets among the siblings and thereby equal treatment of the children by the parents, if only one child took over the family firm. With regard to sibling research, equal treatment can be discussed in terms of parental resources distribution, which is linked to sibling conflict and thereby refers to Darwinian theory (cf. Sulloway 1996, p. 60). As discussed, sibling competition and thus conflict can be avoided by sibling deidentification (Schachter et al., 1976; 1978), which completes the circle to family niches and in consequence the Family Niche Model. As central issue in Sulloway's work, the researcher discusses parental investment in terms of sibling competition for parental resources and the therefrom resulting sibling differences.³⁰² Furthermore, Hertwig, Davis, and Sulloway (2002) studied parental investment as an equity motive that can produce inequality. In this context, Hertwig et al. (2002) discuss parental

³⁰² E.g., Sulloway (1996, 2001b, 2007a, 2010) and Sulloway & Zweigenhaft (2010).

investment in terms of a decision rule which they call the *equity heuristic*³⁰³. According to this rule, parents attempt to distribute their resources in an equitable manner among their children (Hertwig et al., 2002, p. 730).³⁰⁴

Opposed to the discussion of equal parental treatment within the above mentioned research, the discussion on equality during the interviews referred to equal treatment regarding family property related to inheritance. The result therefrom is that the parental treatment has to be discussed within the context of adulthood. Earlier research by Sulloway (1996, pp. 65–67) discusses inheritance practices as a form of parental investment, whereby the researcher refers to Darwinian principles, saying inheritance systems are context dependent. In this context, Sulloway discusses several historical culture-dependent inheritance strategies. Therewith related, Sulloway (2001b, p. 14059) discusses primogeniture, which was then in force the most employed inheritance policy by which the firstborn or son automatically inherits the family property or a political authority. Contrary to a common misassumption, primogeniture does not always coincidentally mean disinheritance for the remaining sibling(s), as even in societies employing primogeniture, parents were bent on paying compensation to each younger child (Sulloway, 2001b, p. 14059). Nonetheless, primogeniture at that time made the laterborn(s) face difficult economic as well as social prospects (Sulloway, 2001b, p. 14059). With regard to the family firm context, and to ensure the successor's and the family firm's ability to act, such compensation can be arranged based on contracts of inheritance, which was addressed by one interview partner. A further instrument for specifying the components of the succession arrangement, the innerfamilial agreements, and also to ensure equality among the siblings in writing, several interview partners referred to the shareholders' agreement, which organises rights and obligations among the contract parties (cf. Müller, n.d., p. 5). Hitherto, Swiss legislation does not provide a statutory basis for shareholders' agreements (Müller, n.d., pp. 2–3). This missing legal basis leaves the contract partners the freedom to set out an agreement that accounts for their individual family and family firm characteristics. Therewith related, it is noticeable that in seven out of the nine cases, succession was accompanied by a consultant. However, this function was not always fulfilled by professional consultants but also by attorneys, tax advisors, or

³⁰³ *Equity heuristic* is a variant of resource dilution theory (Sulloway, 2007a, p. 167). According to resource dilution theory (aka resource dilution hypothesis or resource dilution model), finite parental resources lead to the following tradeoff: The more children there are in one family, the smaller the part each child obtains from these resources – even economies of scale taken into account (Blake, 1981, p. 422; cf. Downey, 2001).

³⁰⁴ Cf. Sulloway (2007a, pp. 167; 2007b, pp. 300–301).

industry-specific advisors. In this context, the consensus is that if more than one child is involved in the family firm – either actively working or inactively involved as shareholder – the CEO’s and therewith the family firm’s ability to act has to be ensured, which can be secured contractually via a shareholders’ agreement.

6.2.1.5 General Research Question 1.0

How do sibships in entrepreneurial families, within the scope of sibling research, influence succession in family firms?

Based on these summarising remarks, it can be said that within the scope of sibling research, sibships in entrepreneurial families influence succession in family firms. More precisely, evidence was found that the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification are transferrable into the family firm succession context. With regard to parent identification and parent deidentification, evidence for both concepts was found, wherein parent identification clearly dominated. In six out of nine cases clear parent identification was found, in two cases parent identification can be assumed, and in one case, identification was unclear. However, a clear causal relationship between parent identification or parent deidentification and the career decision towards succession could not be confirmed.

In addition, the analyses strongly confirmed the assumption that the Family Niche Model is transferable into the family firm succession context. This finding is based on the succession-related hypotheses that were developed based on Sulloway’s (1996, pp. 105–108) four hypotheses.³⁰⁵ With regard to family niches, the results showed that in principle, the inner-family niches transferred into the family firm succession context, whereby niche selection is assumed to be based on an offspring’s personality traits and/or his/her specific interests. With respect to a sibling partnership, the interview partners recommended a strict separation of duties among the siblings and referred to the shareholders’ agreement as a means to contractually define the cooperation between the shareholders, for instance the cooperation with a non-successor as inactive business partner. If only one offspring enters the family firm, the interview partners emphasised the importance of equal treatment of the children. In this respect, it is important that the CEO has the necessary powers to make decisions and that his status is not put at risk in the course of distributing family assets.

³⁰⁵ See Subsection 6.2.3 for the transfer of Sulloway’s hypotheses from the family context into the family firm succession context.

6.2.1.6 Specific Research Question 2.1

How do siblings influence each other regarding career options – considering the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing?

Firstly, the career option for succession has to be offered by the people in charge, which posits that the potential successor(s) fulfill(s) certain requirements. These requirements may for instance be related to hard skills, soft skills, and/or company specific knowledge. The case analyses revealed that from the parents' side, each child obtained the option to enter the family firm. However, if not considering inactive partners, only in Case 4 and Case 6 did more than one sibling get involved in the family firm. It can therefore be concluded, that all family firms in the study were endowed with the necessary characteristics to accept more than one offspring in the company. In this respect, the company size turned out to be a decisive factor. It can therefore be assumed that companies, either medium-sized or large, can provide the necessary preconditions for the succession of more than one offspring. Nevertheless, it is beyond dispute that the larger the family firm, the better the responsibilities can be assigned. In extreme cases, a split of the company would be an additional option to provide each sibling comparable career prospects.

As a consequence of the minor importance of birth order in successor selection and the in principle equal opportunity to enter the family firm, age spacing becomes of minor importance as well. Nevertheless, the time-related advantage of first-movers should be taken into account. However, if siblings enter the family firm according to their birth order, it can be said that the bigger the age gap, the better the earlierborn(s) might make use of their time-related advantage of entering the company before the laterborns. Regarding age spacing and succession, not only the age spacing within the sibship is of importance, but also the age gap between the leaving CEO and the offspring. This component is of importance, since it also affects succession among the siblings. Accordingly, the age gap between the leaving CEO and the offspring may influence succession to the advantage of the laterborn offspring, since the time of succession might coincide with the time of retirement of the parent(s). A case reflecting this scenario was already discussed with one interview partner during the pre-study interviews. However, within the main study interviews, no further evidence for this proposition was found. This phenomenon may occur if the age spacing between the firstborn and the father is rather small, which has the consequence that the father might not be at the age of retirement when the offspring is ready for succession. Ergo, this constellation implies that either (1) the two generations work together for a rather long period, (2) the earlierborn searches for employment outside the family firm, or (3) the earlier-

born founds its own company. Within the case analyses, solutions were found in which a long collaboration between the predecessor and the successor was established, but also cases in which the successors objected to working together with the predecessor for a longer period, based on different reasoning. Whereas an earlierborn may object to working with his/her predecessor for a longer period, a laterborn might have finished his/her education and gained first work experience just at the right time to enter the family firm and subsequently to take it over. These basic scenarios show the potential impact the age gap between the generations may have. Accordingly, age spacing has not only to be considered regarding the age spacing between the siblings but also between the leaving CEO and the offspring. Therefrom can be concluded that both age gaps seem to be equally important regarding succession.

Similarly, the variable sibship turned out to influence succession. Albeit all offspring seem to have the same opportunity to enter the family firm, the more siblings that have already entered the company, the more difficult it becomes for the laterborn(s) to find a place within the company, meaning an unoccupied niche. Therefrom follows that the sibship size may minimise career options for laterborns, if older siblings have already decided for succession. Laterborns' career options within the family firm are therefore also dependent on the career decisions of the earlierborns. In this context, the company characteristics further limit the laterborns' options to enter the family firm. According to that, the laterborns' career options do not solely depend on the criteria of successor selection and the individual company characteristics, but also on the career decisions of the earlierborns. Regarding the type of influence by which the siblings influence each other in terms of career options, a one-way dependency of the laterborns on the earlierborns can be stated – given that the siblings enter the family firm according to their birth order positions. The reverse might be found if the laterborn enters the family firm before the earlierborn, or if the laterborn embodies specific abilities, skills, or knowledge. However, the latter seem to influence rather the career of the earlierborn after having entered the family firm and not his/her career decision or career option at the time of entering the family firm.

To conclude, evidence was found that for succession in the analysed cases, birth order was of less importance than the order of appearance in the family firm. In the main, the variables appeared to be closely related and to influence each other, wherefore further detailed variable-specific conclusions were not drawn. Instead, a comprehensive answer was aimed for, that reflects the complexity of the research topic. In addition, due to the limited number of cases and the therefrom resulting limited generalisability of the research findings, variable-specific conclusions would not reflect the interplay

of the variables. Accordingly, no claim for the completeness of the family structure variables regarding succession in family firms is made. The study also revealed the complexity of succession management, which underlines that the discussed variables do not represent the full range of variables influencing succession in family firms. However, regarding this study's focus on sibling research, the chosen variables *birth order*, *sibship size*, and *age spacing* proved to be reasonable. The study further showed that company-related variables (e.g., company size), have also to be considered.

6.2.1.7 Specific Research Question 2.2

How do siblings influence each other regarding career choices – considering the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing?

The concluding remarks for Specific Research Question 2.1 were strongly focused on illustrating the situation theoretically. As opposed to this, the following discussion presents actual experiences of the interview partners and draws conclusions therefrom. As discussed, the career option for succession has to be granted by the people in charge (i.e., mostly the parents as firm owners), which posits that the potential successor(s) fulfill(s) the requirements. The within-case analysis of Case 1 revealed that only the firstborn pursued an educational track that especially prepared him to take over the family firm, while the sibship consists of five siblings – meaning five potential successors (cf. Case1IP1, 2011, para. 105). Regarding the family firm, the company would have provided the necessary characteristics (e.g., company size) for more than one child entering the family firm. This conjecture is substantiated as the company is currently run as a cousin consortium (Case1IP1, 2011, para. 25). With regard to siblings influencing each other's career decision, no clear statement can be made. However, as succession was uncertain for a long time and the firstborn was the only child that followed an education that prepared him to take over the company, an influence among the siblings regarding career options and/or career choices can be neglected. In addition, the firstborn stated that a firstborn's career choice of succession simultaneously provides the laterborns with more freedom to choose a profession (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 85) – although the children were not in any way pushed towards succession.

Succession in Case 2 is comparable, as again only the firstborn followed an education that provided him with the necessary knowledge to take over the family firm. Although the laterborns' career decisions were delayed in time compared to the firstborn's career decision, the firstborn emphasised that a CEO-job would not have

matched his siblings' characters. With regard to age spacing, the secondborn is only two years younger than the firstborn, which lets assume that if the secondborn had also wanted to succeed in the family firm, the firstborn's first-mover advantage would not have been uncatchable. In addition, the firstborn did not enter the family firm right after finishing his studies and instead gained work experience abroad. Accordingly when entering the family firm after his matura, for instance to do an apprenticeship, the secondborn could have made use of the first-mover advantage in spite of the supposed disadvantage based on the birth order position.

In Case 3, the secondborn entered the family firm as successor, although his 15-years-older stepbrother was already involved in the family's business activities, but within the holding. Accordingly, the secondborn could take over the analysed business entity, as the first child. The thirdborn sister completed an apprenticeship within the family firm, but did not stay. Sibling competition in the business context could be avoided, thanks to several business activities of the family. Accordingly, Case 4 showed how company characteristics can facilitate succession and an originally in private sometimes conflictladen sibling relationship did not come up in the business. As a consequence, the special feature that the family is involved in multiple businesses avoided competition among the siblings and simultaneously allowed two offspring to work in the family environment but in independent entities. Furthermore, the presumed disadvantages resulting from the secondborn's birth order position and the age gap were both equalised. In this respect, the age gap of 15 years between the firstborn mitigated the competitive disadvantage of being the secondborn.

Case 4 represents a sibling constellation with the firstborn being the CEO and the secondborn being the president of the board of directors. Based on his education, the three years younger secondborn, would have also been able to take over the family firm by becoming CEO. Instead, he decided for the post as president of the board of directors. Accordingly, both brothers are involved in the business without competing with each other. The lastborn of the three child sibship works only spontaneously for the company. In this case, succession was not a foregone decision but resulted from a trial period after which the firstborn decided to stay in the company (Case4IP1, 2011, para. 26). However, it cannot be concluded that the firstborn's career decision influenced the secondborn's career decision for a career outside the family firm. Interestingly the firstborn reported that his younger brother was technically talented like himself, however the secondborn chose an unoccupied niche in the family. This behaviour can be transferred into the family firm context, in which the secondborn avoided competition with the firstborn for the CEO-job but is still involved as president of the

board of directors. Besides, by working as a self-employed consultant (Case4IP1, 2011, para. 50), the secondborn also pursues an entrepreneurial career, but outside the family firm.

These cases have in common that only the successors were interviewed and therefore no distinct assertion regarding the influence of the firstborn's career choice on the younger sibling's/siblings' career choice(s) can be made. However, it can be stated that in each case the laterborns wittingly or unwittingly avoided sibling competition in the family firm by choosing a career path outside the family firm. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the firstborn's career choice for succession might have influenced the younger siblings in their career choice. In this respect, one interview partner of Case 1 commented that his decision towards succession provided his siblings more freedom to choose their profession – although the interview partner emphasised that their parents never put pressure on their offspring regarding succession (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 85). The succession event discussed in Case 5, which is presented in the following paragraph, supports this assumption.

Also in Case 5, the firstborn son took over the family firm. However, the secondborn son, who pursues an academic career, stated that he could imagine becoming the successor if the firstborn had objected to succession – although the decision would also depend on his younger sister's and his cousins' decision (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 44). If he had been an only child, the secondborn would not have precluded succession per se (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 52; cf. Case5IP2, 2011, para. 72), despite a lack of interest in fashion which is the family firm's branch of industry (Case5IP1, 2011, para. 154; Case5IP2, 2011, para. 22, cf. Case5IP2, 2011, para. 56). The non-successor clearly agreed regarding the influence that his older brother's career decision had on his own career (Case5IP2, 2011, paras. 62, 64, 66). The secondborn further justifies his argument by the fact that succession was already approached with his brother's decision to enter the family firm (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 62). In turn, this circumstance made the secondborn feel like not having to succeed in the family firm and instead having the choice – although the parents did not put pressure on their children (Case5IP2, 2011, para. 62, cf. para. 68).³⁰⁶ The non-successor further argued that the option of choice arose from the fact that he could decide after his brother had decided (Case5IP2, 2011, paras. 62–66). In this respect it should also be considered that the age gap between the firstborn and the secondborn is only three years. If the secondborn had been willing to enter the family firm as well, the rather small age gap of three years between the two

³⁰⁶ This remark confirms the successor's assumption in Case 1, that his decision to succeed in the family firm simultaneously provided more freedom for his younger siblings (Case1IP2, 2011, para. 85).

brothers should not have been a major disadvantage for the secondborn. Consequently, the assumption that siblings influence each other's career choice was confirmed in the strongest way by the statements of the non-successor in Case 5.

With regard to Case 6 and Case 7, no influence from the firstborn's career decision on the secondborn's career decision could be confirmed. In Case 6, both siblings work in the family firm, however the secondborn became the successor. The firstborn daughter was not interested in the CEO-job but still holds a leading position within the company. In addition, the succession event reflects the inner-family roles with the secondborn son having a leading position. In Case 7, the secondborn daughter objected to entering the family firm but is nevertheless engaged in the family's business activities. Accordingly, both siblings followed their personal interests when deciding for their career. It can therefore be said that the siblings in both cases chose unoccupied niches in the family environment and in the professional environment.

The reverse was found for Case 8, which showed the siblings' influence on each other differently than discussed before. As found in one pre-study interview, the successor in Case 8 would not have agreed to a sibling partnership (Case8IP1, 2011, paras. 40, 42). The successor reasoned this decision by (1) the attempt to avoid conflicts of interests between the brothers, and (2) the undesired possibility that the business partner might suddenly change, for instance in case of death of a sibling (Case8IP1, 2011, para. 44). The interview partner pointed out that if his older brother had been willing to take over the family firm, he would have refrained from succession. Since the interview partner's older brother decided to study medicine, his education was not aimed at taking over the family firm. Accordingly, the option of a sibling partnership was only discussed theoretically. Situations in which more than one offspring intends to enter the family firm and at the same time one or even all siblings decide against a sibling partnership, would have the consequence that the people in charge would have to select one successor. Alternatively, if the family firm had the capacity that both offspring would have been able to enter the family firm, the company might be divided into two companies that are independent from each other. It can be concluded that if only one offspring refuses a sibling partnership, this offspring would strongly influence its sibling's career option and thereby career choice as to succession in the family firm.

As outlined in the within-case analysis of Case 9, succession was set up by the father according to his sons' skills and competences. Accordingly, niche allocation within the family firm was more or less set up by the outgoing CEO. Therefrom follows that the siblings among themselves did not influence each other primarily based on their own

decision – as the siblings positively accepted the father’s proposition. In this case, the father concentrated on the offspring’s character traits and thereby inner-family niches to set up succession. By following this strategy, the father guided his sons towards their later careers and as a consequence avoided competition among the siblings. However, since the secondborn son died at an early age, the succession plan could not be carried out as planned, so that in the end, the thirdborn became the only successor. The case illustrates how parents can actively avoid competition among the siblings by providing each child its own niche. This possibility was also discussed with one expert during the pre-study interviews. By assisting the children to follow their individual ambitions, sibling competition was not only avoided within the family but also within the family firm. Furthermore, this case showed that by selecting the thirdborn as successor, birth order was bypassed. With regard to the small age gaps between the siblings, the laterborns’ chances to redeem a potential first-mover advantage can be rated as rather good. In addition, the fact that the lastborn pursues a career in arts lets assume an underlying confirmation that laterborns are more free to choose their career path (cf. Case 5). This assumption is further supported by the interview partner himself (Case9IP1, 2011, paras. 66, 68). In an analogous manner, these considerations support the presumed influence of siblings regarding career choices.

Based on this argumentation, it can be concluded that succession in family firms is influenced by all three family structure variables. More precisely, the succession planning and management is influenced by a combination of the variables *birth order*, *sibship size* and *age spacing*, which on their part influence how siblings influence each other regarding their career choices following the siblings’ career options.³⁰⁷ Similar to the discussion regarding career options, also this analysis attests that if more than one child intends to enter the family firm, the first one entering, has a first-mover advantage in comparison to its sibling(s). As a subsequent step of career options, this analysis attests that if one child enters the family firm this offspring’s career choice influences its siblings’ career choice. The influence can occur in three ways, which are (1) by providing more freedom to choose a career for the laterborns, even if parents do not put any pressure on their offspring, (2) by potentially making a career inside the family firm harder for laterborns, due to the first-mover advantage, and (3) by avoiding developing the siblings’ career inside the family firm, in case one sibling disagrees to a sibling partnership. Regarding the third type of influence, if one child objects to

³⁰⁷ In this context should be pointed out that the influence might either be one-sided or two-sided, meaning one sibling influences another sibling or siblings mutually influencing each other. However, this aspect seems to be strongly related to the age gap between the siblings and in consequence by question if the siblings have to decide for their career at about the same time, which brings in the time component

entering the family firm, it simultaneously clears the way for the others. Nevertheless, a sibling partnership in which each sibling obtains its own sphere of responsibility, sibling competition can be avoided. As with career options, birth order as such is of minor influence compared to the order of appearance within the family firm. With regard to age spacing, the effect resulting from the order of appearance is assumed to consolidate or even increase the first-mover's advantage. Regarding the sibship size, it can be said that the more children are within the sibship, the more difficult it is to find equal positions within the family firm. Therefrom follows, that also with regard to the sibship size, birth order is of minor importance compared to the order of appearance. However, due to the changing interplay of the variables, no distinct conclusion regarding each variable's influence in terms of the siblings' influence on each other can be made. Nevertheless, the assumed influence of siblings regarding career choices as such is confirmed.

6.2.1.8 General Research Question 2.0

How do siblings in entrepreneurial families influence each other regarding succession in family firms – considering the family structure variables birth order, sibship size, and age spacing?

With regard to the variable *birth order*, it became apparent that for both the siblings' career options and career choices the effect of birth order can be equalled by the siblings' order of appearance in the family firm. In addition, the variable *age spacing* seems to either strengthen or mitigate the effect of birth order. On condition that birth order is equal to the order of appearance in the family firm and the siblings are comparably prepared for and capable of succession, the following scenarios illustrate the interplay of birth order and age spacing. First, if two siblings intend to enter the family firm and the age gap between them is rather big, birth order seems to favour the first-born, since the first one entering the family firm has a first-mover advantage. Accordingly, it can be assumed that the longer the first sibling entering the family firm works as the only offspring in the company, the more he/she might increase his/her advantage in relation to the sibling(s) that enter(s) the family firm later. Second, a rather small age gap might still favour the firstborn or the first one entering the family firm – due to the first-mover advantage – but nonetheless provide a very promising starting position for the sibling(s) entering the family firm later. Under these circumstances, the influence can be seen as a one-way influence from the firstborn's career decision on the laterborn's career option and/or career choice within the family firm. Given the similarity of the potential successors, the influence of birth order and age spacing could be

leveraged if both siblings entered the family firm at the same time. However, regardless of whether entering the family firm first or second, each successor has to prove himself/herself within the family firm context. Therewith related, the variable *sibship size* becomes more relevant – the bigger the sibship is, the more siblings might intend to enter the family firm. It can be said that the bigger the sibship, the more difficult it is to find comparable positions within the family firm. Therefrom follows, that also with regard to the sibship size, birth order is of minor importance compared to the siblings' order of appearance in the family firm.

With a particular focus on career choice, under the precondition that birth order equals order of appearance, three types of influence were identified, namely (1) by providing more freedom to choose a career for the laterborn(s) – even if parents do not put any pressure on their offspring, (2) by making a career inside the family firm harder for the laterborn(s), due to the first-mover advantage, and (3) by preventing a siblings' career inside the family firm, in case one sibling disagrees to a sibling partnership. The third influence can also be seen vice versa, since a sibling that objects to a sibling partnership and decides for a career outside the family firm leaves the family firm to its sibling(s). However, in both directions each offspring would occupy its own niche, which would avoid sibling competition within the family firm. To the contrary, also a sibling partnership in which each sibling obtains its sphere of responsibility is assumed to be suited to avoid sibling competition. The results derived from Specific Research Question 2.1 and Specific Research Question 2.2 show that siblings might influence each other regarding both career options and career choices. As assumed, both situations are determined by the interplay of the family structure variables *birth order*, *sibship size*, and *age spacing*. Owing to the variables' interplay, no variable-specific conclusions can be drawn.

6.2.2 Summary Cross-Case Analyses

Before generating theory and developing hypothesis, this chapter summarises the findings derived from the cross-case analyses as to the application of the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification, the concepts of parent identification and parent deidentification as well as to the Family Niche Model. In this respect, this subsection represents a supplement to the summary of the within-case analyses and thereby summarises the findings of the general and specific research questions regarding these key research subjects.

Regarding the findings as to the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification, this part not only summarises already discussed findings, but also provides an extension to the within-case summary³⁰⁸. In this context, the findings as to sibling identification and sibling deidentification regarding the siblings' personalities as well as regarding their career choices are individually presented in Table 6.5. In this respect, sibling identification was assumed when siblings chose the same profession and sibling deidentification when siblings chose different professions.

Table 6.5. Summary Sibling Identification and Sibling Deidentification

Case	Sibling Identification / Sibling Deidentification
Case 1 (5 siblings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibling deidentification as to career choices, since the siblings chose different professions • With regard to family niche-related sibling identification or sibling deidentification, no clear statement can be made
Case 2 (3 siblings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibling deidentification regarding the siblings' personalities • Sibling deidentification as to career choices, since the siblings chose different professions
Case 3 (3 siblings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibling identification regarding the career choice of the firstborn and the secondborn since both sons pursue an entrepreneurial career • Sibling deidentification as to the career choices of the firstborn and the secondborn in relation to the lastborn, since the firstborn and the secondborn both pursue an entrepreneurial career • Sibling deidentification regarding the siblings' personalities
Case 4 (3 siblings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regarding family niches, sibling deidentification is assumed rather than sibling identification • Sibling deidentification as to career choices, since the siblings chose different professions
Case 5 (3 siblings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibling identification is found for the secondborn regarding the thirdborn, meaning among the non-successors and sibling deidentification as to the firstborn and his younger siblings • Sibling deidentification as to career choices, since the siblings chose different professions
Case 6 (2 siblings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibling deidentification regarding the siblings' personalities • Both siblings entered the family firm, whereby the secondborn/lastborn son became the successor in the family firm. However, sibling deidentification as to career choices was found, since the siblings chose different professions within the family firm.
Case 7 (2 siblings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibling deidentification regarding the siblings' personalities • Sibling deidentification as to career choices, since the siblings chose different professions
Case 8 (2 siblings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibling deidentification regarding the siblings' personalities • Sibling deidentification as to career choices, since the siblings chose different professions. However, the firstborn also pursued an entrepreneurial activity by running his own medical practice.
Case 9 (4 siblings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibling deidentification regarding the siblings' personalities • Sibling deidentification as to career choices, since the siblings chose different professions

However, this detailed record has to be seen with reservations, since two siblings may choose different professions but nevertheless may both pursue an entrepreneurial

³⁰⁸ See Subsection 6.1.10.

activity at the same time³⁰⁹, which makes clear distinctions not always possible. Nonetheless, sibling deidentification with regard to the career choices was found in all cases since all siblings chose different professions. In this context can be emphasised that across all sibship sizes, the siblings chose different career paths and thereby wittingly or unwittingly avoided competition. It can be summarised that the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification are transferable into the family firm succession context. In this respect, (1) evidence was found that the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification are transferable regarding the siblings' career choices, (2) sibling deidentification was transferred into the family firm context, and (3) siblings whose relationship is characterised by sibling identification showed the same intentions towards succession. Further conclusions are not made, due to the limited generalisability of the research findings. Nevertheless, the research provided supportive results that both concepts are transferrable into the family firm succession context. However, due to the fact that sibling deidentification in relation to differing career choices was found more often, the results as to the transfer of sibling identification are less significant – again, with regard to the already limited overall generalisability. Nonetheless, the cases explicitly revealed the assumed transferability of both concepts. In addition, the study not only revealed *that* the concepts were transferred into the family firm context, but also *how* they are transferred in the respective succession events. As a result, the presumed relationship of sibling identification and sibling deidentification regarding family firm succession is therefore supported.

With respect to the concepts of parent identification and parent deidentification, it can be summarised that both concepts were found in the successor-predecessor relationships. In this context, Case 1 and Case 4 are of specific interest, since in both cases, the successor described his father as a role model, which implies a tendency to emulate the father. To summarise, parent identification was found more often than parent deidentification. However, due to the case-specific family and family firm backgrounds and the sometimes missing clear identification with only one parent, no clear cross-case evidence as to a causal relationship between parent identification and the career choice of succession in the family firm could be confirmed. Nevertheless, the analysed cases not only showed evidence for the transferability of the concepts by

³⁰⁹ E.g., in Case 8, the firstborn son chose the career path to become a doctor and the secondborn son became the successor in the family firm. However, since the firstborn runs his own medical office, he also follows an entrepreneurial activity. In this context, the brothers chose different career paths, which in this context represents sibling deidentification, but simultaneously as well chose to pursue an entrepreneurial career, which represents sibling identification within their individual professions.

replacing the CEO, the interview partners oftentimes also reported similarities between the leadership and management styles of themselves with their predecessors, which might result from similar character traits. As a consequence, a distinct causal relationship as to an offspring's career choice regarding succession in the family firm could not be confirmed for neither one of the concepts. However, it has to be pointed out that evidence was found that the presumed relationship exists.

With regard to the Family Niche Model, the results show that, inner-family niches were transferred into the family firm context. This phenomenon might occur in several ways, for instance if a successor's niche as a leader within the sibship is transferred into the family firm by becoming the CEO and thereby the leading person in the family firm. Relatedly, transferability of family niches might occur in terms of an offspring's personality, for instance expressed through the offspring's leadership style and/or in terms of an offspring's area of responsibility which might be similar within the family context and within the family firm context. To summarise, evidence for the transferability of family niches was found, however in different ways. In this context, niche selection is assumed to be based on an offspring's personality traits and/or on an offspring's specific interests that is/are transferred from the family environment into the business environment. Such a transfer of a personal interest might be an offspring's interest in technology that might be transferred into the family firm by pursuing a career as technical director within the family firm. Detailed analyses regarding the transferability of family niches are provided when answering Specific Research Question 1.1.³¹⁰

This summary showed that evidence for all the studied phenomena was found, but distinct causal relationships are difficult to confirm on the basis of the discussed cases, which is caused by the cases' heterogeneity and the fact that not all family members were studied. Therefrom also follows that the research findings are not generalisable. However, it has to be pointed out that since generalisability was not the overall goal, this result is feasible for the study. To obtain generalisable results, it is recommended to conduct a follow-up quantitative study that is built upon the insight provided by this study. Alternatively, an additional qualitative study in which all family members are interviewed would be conceivable. Nonetheless, it has to be re-emphasised that the study provided valuable insights for each of the concepts and thereby the results are in line with the expectations.

³¹⁰ See Subsection 6.2.1.1.

6.2.3 Theory Generation and Hypotheses Development

Eisenhardt (1989, p. 535) summarises three aims for whose achievement case study research can be applied, namely (1) to provide description, (2) to test theory, and (3) to generate theory.³¹¹ In the same tenor, Punch (2014, p. 21) states that explanatory research studies enable researchers either to verify theory (i.e., theory-first research) or to generate theory (i.e., theory-after research).³¹² Saldaña (2013, p. 13) remarks that a study's overall research outcome does not necessarily have to be an original theory and acknowledges that preexisting theory wittingly or unwittingly guides the research endeavour.³¹³ In keeping with the primarily inductive research approach and the study's main research purpose (see Section 1.2), the study aims at theory generation rounded up by an add-on hypotheses development. Since this study partly builds on existing research, the hypotheses development accounts for this issue by developing the hypotheses in close conjunction with Sulloway's (1996) Family Niche Model.

Gomm (2009) describes the term theory as “[o]ften used loosely to refer to any set of explanatory ideas [...]” and furthermore as “[...] a coherently related set of ideas offering explanations in terms more abstract and general than descriptions of the particular phenomena they purport to explain” (p. 361, emphasis removed; cf. Punch, 2014, pp. 20, 32–33). Gomm further notes the varying levels of development with regard to theory generation, such as grand theory and middle range theory. In conformance with this study's explanatory nature, it is aimed to generate explanatory theory, which relates to explanatory knowledge and substantive theory³¹⁴ (cf. Punch, 2014, pp. 18–20; Punch, 2009, pp. 20–21). In this context, the study attempts to generate theory for the family firm succession context, based on the results of the within-case analyses and the answers to the research questions. It is thus intended to progress from the particular to the general (cf. Saldaña, 2013, pp. 12–14). Although a generally applicable theory is intended, the theory's generalisability has to be seen in the awareness of the study's limitations (see Section 7.3). To generate theory, the streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry by Saldaña (2013, p. 13) is used as a starting point.

³¹¹ Eisenhardt (1989) developed an eight step process of generating theory from case study research, namely (1) *Getting Started*, (2) *Selecting Cases*, (3) *Crafting Instruments and Protocols*, (4) *Entering the Field*, (5) *Analysing Data*, (6) *Shaping Hypotheses*, (7) *Enfolding Literature*, and (8) *Reaching Closure*.

³¹² With regard to theory-first and theory-after research, Punch refers to Wolcott (1992).

³¹³ In this context, Saldaña refers to Mason (2002).

³¹⁴ Punch (2014, p. 18) relates to *substantive theory* as a theory concerning a phenomenon or substantive issue, which is content-based and not concerned with methods.

Before theory generation can be started, theoretical saturation should be reached in order to have an adequate basis to build a solid theory, which in turn accounts for generalisability. The foundations to achieve theoretical saturation as far as practicable were laid during sampling.³¹⁵ As discussed (see Subsection 4.2.5.2), it is important that the sample consists of research subjects (i.e., the succession events) that reflect the target population's diversity. Sekaran and Bougie (2013, p. 270) write that "[t]heoretical saturation is reached when no new information about the subject emerges in repeated cases" (p. 270, emphasis removed). Theoretical saturation thus partly depends on the heterogeneity of the research population. According to Bryman (2012), theoretical saturation is reached if "[...] successive interviews/observations have both formed the basis for the creation of a category and confirmed its importance [...]" (p. 420; cf. Gomm, 2009, p. 318), so that in consequence no need to continue with data collection with regard to the construction of this category exists.³¹⁶ As this study could not be built on existing knowledge in the field of family firm research, it was predominantly intended to obtain comprehensive information on the research topic. Nevertheless, up to a certain extent, the analyses provided theoretical saturation, which allowed making propositions regarding the effect of sibships/siblings on succession in family firms.³¹⁷ Since the point of theoretical saturation not only represents the finalisation of the data collection, but also the starting point and basis for theory generation and the subsequent hypotheses development, in terms of qualitative research conditions, the obtained data represents an adequate basis for theory generation. According to van Maanen, Sørensen, and Mitchell (2007, pp. 1145–1146), theory and method should be highly interrelated – on the theory side by incorporating methodological implications and on the methods side by accounting for theoretical substance within methods.³¹⁸ The theory generation in this study makes allowance for van Maanen et al.'s claim by generating theory in close relationship to

³¹⁵ Cf. Bryman (2012, pp. 420–421, 717) since he defines theoretical sampling as „[a] term used mainly in relation to grounded theory to refer to purposive sampling carried out so that emerging theoretical considerations guide the selection of cases and/or research participants. Theoretical sampling is supposed to continue until a point of theoretical saturation is reached.“ (p. 717, emphases removed).

³¹⁶ Within the scope of this study, nine cases based on 12 interviews were analysed. In this context, and against the general rule in qualitative research to continue sampling until no further new insights are gained (cf. Sekaran & Bougie, 2013, p. 270), sampling was guided by finding a homogeneous sample on the family firm side and a heterogeneous sample regarding sibling constellations. This aim was reached with 11 interview partners that chose the career path of succession (one successor as non-family member) and one interview partner that rejected entering the family firm. However, due to the limited number of cases, generalisable results are only expected after further research, for instance by conducting a subsequent quantitative study that focuses on obtaining replicable results (cf. Gomm, 2009, pp. 147–148).

³¹⁷ Since only one interview with a non-successor was conducted, propositions with regard to non-succession are not made.

³¹⁸ Since the research methods and their reasonings are discussed in Subsection 4.2.3, these aspects are not further elucidated.

the Family Niche Model. In consequence, the generated theory will generally focus on siblings and specifically on laterborn siblings.

Based on the specific research context, the preconditions for the theory development are (1) the theory has to describe family firm succession if multiple potential successors are available, and (2) the model has to be built upon the Family Niche Model. These preconditions imply that the Family Niche Model is applicable to solve or to contribute to the solution of the family firm succession problem. In addition, by being built on the Family Niche Model, the theory has to account specifically for laterborn siblings. In this respect, Sulloway's (1996) four hypotheses, which illustrate the Family Niche Model, are transferred into the family firm succession context.³¹⁹ This approach replaces and thereby disregards the traditional approach for hypotheses development proposed by Eisenhardt (1989). Eisenhardt proposes hypotheses development as a subsequent step to theory building. With regard to shaping hypotheses, Eisenhardt (p. 541) further proposes a two step approach, which is (1) the sharpening of constructs, and (2) the verification that the emerged relationships between the constructs are in accordance with each case's evidence. In respect thereof, it is important that hypotheses are examined separately as per each case and not for the overall aggregate case (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 542), which results in replication logic. The deviation from the traditional approach is attributable to the use of the Family Niche Model as underlying theory. Alternatively, thoroughly testing Sulloway's hypotheses for each case is not feasible within this study, as only Case 6 and Case 8 analyse the careers of lastborn children. Accordingly, the following steps are based on theoretical considerations.

To align the discussion with Sulloway's (1996) theory, it has to be presupposed that (1) more than one child intends to enter the family firm, and (2) their order of appearance in the family firm is according to their birth order. Transferred into the new field of application, the hypotheses are as follows³²⁰: (1) If you are laterborn, diversify. (2) If the family firm has limited resources, diversify. (3) Diversify in proportion to the number of your siblings. (4) Under certain circumstances, disregard the previous three hypotheses and specialise. Sulloway proposes that if total equality among the siblings

³¹⁹ Sulloway (1996, pp. 107–108) additionally provides the following rules as research findings: (1) *If laterborn, diversify.* (2) *When parental resources are scarce, diversify.* (3) *Diversify in large sibships.* (4) *Whenever expedient, disregard Rules 1–3 and specialise.* As it is intended to develop hypotheses for the family firm context, Sulloway's hypotheses are used as point of origin. Sulloway's research confirmed Rules 1–3. The contrarian Rule 4 represents a fallback procedure and in this respect was also found. Since it is not intended to test the developed hypotheses, Sulloway's rules as *research findings* are not taken into account for the further course of the research.

³²⁰ Sulloway's original rules/hypotheses are discussed in Subsection 3.3.4, see Table 3.4 on p. 71.

is present, laterborns would behave wisely by adopting multiple interests in order to differentiate from his/her sibling(s). The laterborn thereby deidentifies from its sibling(s) and occupies an until then unoccupied niche or even creates an until then non-existing niche. As Sulloway bases his model on Darwinian thinking, Sulloway emanates from the idea that the parents' investment into an offspring is higher, if a superior return can be expected. Based on this Darwinian approach and with regard to the family firm succession context, a laterborn may increase his/her chance of becoming the successor in the family firm, by differentiating from his/her sibling(s) if this approach results in the parents' expectations of a higher return. In this context, the offspring could for instance obtain knowledge in different areas and/or company- or product-specific knowledge, and could thus obtain a competitive advantage over his/her sibling(s) (see Hypothesis 1). Furthermore, in reference to Sulloway (pp. 105–108), especially if the family and/or family firm resources are scarce, parents might reward the offspring with the greatest talent or zeal. With regard to succession, this idea might be transferred in the form of a superior engagement, educational attainment, or commitment and dedication to the family firm (see Hypothesis 2). Based on Sulloway, the same logic can be applied as limited resources can produce sibling competition for parental investment (see Hypothesis 3). As the interviews indicated, such a company-related limitation might be the company size. With Hypothesis 4, Sulloway claims that under certain circumstances, Hypothesis 1–3 should be disregarded and the laterborn should specialise (Hypothesis 4). This might imply that the firstborn's strategy defines the remaining resources for the laterborn's/laterborns' and would thereby indirectly dictate the therefrom resulting strategies of the laterborn(s) (cf. Sulloway, 1996, p. 108). However, since this hypothesis leaves room for speculation, several ways of transferring the hypothesis are conceivable. This could mean that the offspring could obtain specific knowledge and/or specialise for instance in one of the family firm's core competence areas to obtain a competitive advantage over his/her sibling(s).

To summarise, each hypothesis has been transferred and analysed³²¹ based on deductive reasoning (cf. Creswell, 2002) regarding its significance for family firm succession. It can be anticipated that the within-case analyses and the cross-case analyses strongly confirm the presumed transferability of the Family Niche Model into the family firm succession context. The four deducted hypotheses (cf. Creswell, 2002) are

³²¹ The use of the term *tested* is explicitly avoided in this context, since no real hypothesis testing has been carried out. However, evidence was searched for that supports the model's adaptability within family firm succession research.

therefore an essential component of the final model – called the *Succession Niche Model*. The Succession Niche Model, which is presented in Figure 6.1, conclusively illustrates the generated theory and the developed hypotheses. Since theory generation and hypotheses development is based on the findings from the qualitative content analysis, the model represents the overall research outcome graphically.

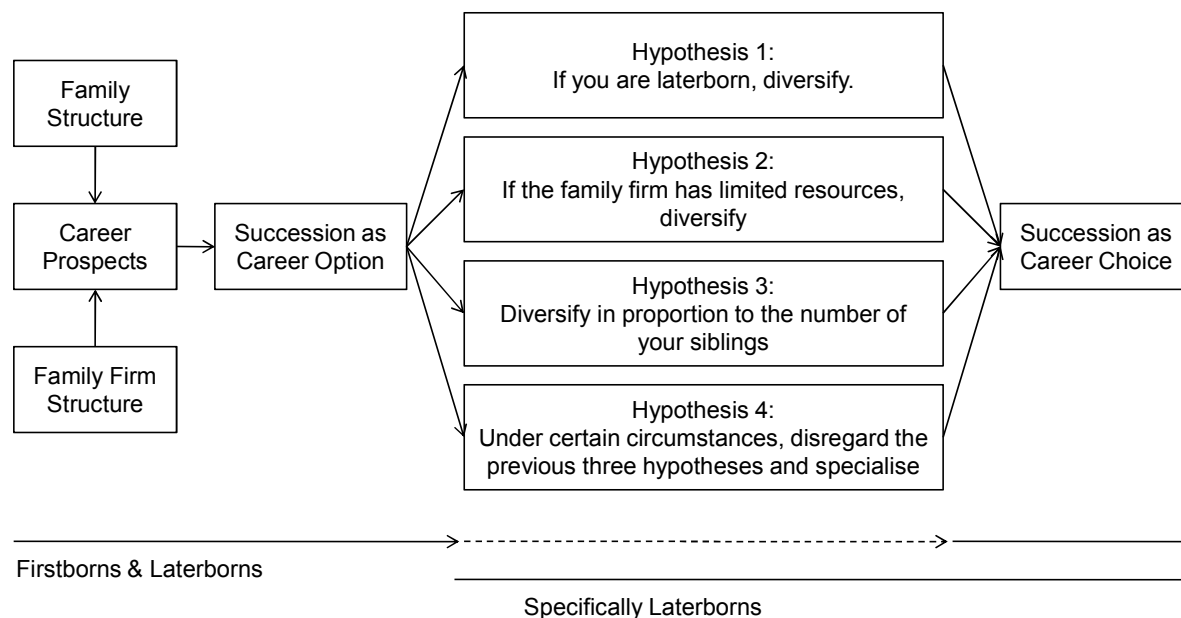


Figure 6.1. Succession Niche Model

Within the Succession Niche Model, the variable *Family Structure* acts like a proxy for the family structure variables *birth order*, *sibship size*, and *age spacing*. By implication, these variables – and in particular the variable *birth order* – include sibling research, namely sibling identification and sibling deidentification as well as to some extent parent identification and parent deidentification, since these concepts emerged from research focusing on these phenomena. As the model illustrates, evidence was found that the family structure variables influence the career prospects of siblings in entrepreneurial families. Likewise the variable *Family Firm Structure* does, for instance, based on the company size. The variables *Family Structure* and *Family Firm Structure* are therefore the incoming variables that influence each siblings' *Career Prospects*. In this context it has to be pointed out that within the scope of this study, *Succession as Career Option* solely focuses on succeeding as CEO, which in this thought structure means managerial and ownership succession in the final state. This precondition has to be set so that the model incorporates the underlying thought of competition among the siblings for the same job – meaning the same professional niche. As the model exclusively focuses on succession in family firms, other career options inside and outside the family firm were not considered.

As in the Family Niche Model, birth order is an essential component of the Succession Niche Model since according to Sulloway, birth order causes sibling competition and in turn the siblings' search for unoccupied niches. As for instance seen in Case 5, the firstborn's career decision, can influence the laterborn's/laterborns' career decision. If the firstborn decides for succession, he/she indirectly obtains a competitive advantage towards his/her younger sibling(s) – comparable to a first-mover advantage. In addition, it can be expected that the variable *age spacing* even reinforces this effect since the firstborn's competitive advantage is expected to increase the longer he/she is the only offspring in the family firm. As in the family context, the firstborn chooses his/her niche first and thereby obtains the full range of options since no niche is occupied. All subsequent siblings have to choose between competition with the older sibling for the same niche, to occupy an unoccupied niche, or to create a new niche. The need to create a new niche is assumed to increase the more older siblings are present, which accordingly occupy their niches. With regard to succession for the CEO-position if more than one sibling intends to enter the family firm, sibling competition is to some degree preprogrammed. One example of avoiding sibling competition from the beginning, is analysed in Case 9, in which the father already during their childhood defined the potential successors and also supported the remaining children to follow their talents. This approach provided a career perspective for all the children and at the same time presented a prospect of continuity for the family firm. In this context, the interview partners that are non-successors and laterborn siblings pointed out, that the career choice of their older sibling might have taken the career option of succession on the one side but also provided them with more freedom to choose a profession that exactly corresponds with their character. In addition to this, it has to be emphasised once more that none of the interview partners felt they were being pressured by their parents regarding succession.

The research revealed that in five out of nine cases, the firstborn took over the family firm and sibling competition was avoided from the start – primarily by the laterborns' decision to follow a career outside the family firm. In this respect, it should also be mentioned that although the non-successors rejected entering the family firm, four of them started an entrepreneurial career, but in industries different from the family firm's industry. Moreover, only one family firm was managed by a pair of siblings – with the younger brother having the leadership (see Case 6). Accordingly, sibling partnerships were not among the research participants, which is probably owing to the fact that eight out of the nine cases are 3rd generation family firms.

The aspect of decision making³²² when selecting a niche and the interrelatedness of the siblings' career decisions leads to the discussion of rational choice and thereby to the discussion of game theory. Concerning this study, decision making regarding who will succeed in the family firm not only depends on the outgoing leader's decision, but also on the offspring's decision – and as the study revealed, siblings might influence each other's decisions. In this respect, decisions may also involve making compromises to find a solution that satisfies all parties involved, which can be regarded as a boundary condition (cf. Drucker, 2001, pp. 11–13). To summarise, game theory is applicable when studying situations in which two or more protagonists are interacting with each other and everybody's payoff is depending on the decision(s) of the other player(s). Game theory has been widely applied in economics (cf. e.g., Holler & Illing, 2009; Jost, 2001; von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2004), however only very limited in the context of family firm succession (e.g., Blumentritt, Mathews, & Marchisio, 2013; Lee, Lim, & Lim, 2003; Michael-Tsabari & Weiss, 2013). By applying game theory to family firm succession with multiple siblings as potential successors, the siblings become players that play against each other in the succession *game*, meaning they are competing for the same niche – namely the CEO-position. The players then follow different strategies (cf. Dixit & Nalebuff, 2008) in order to obtain the CEO-position as outcome of the game. In this context, Blumentritt, Mathews, and Marchisio (2013) discuss the phenomenon theoretically, using the example of a pair of siblings. As different approaches in game theory exist, such as decision-making under certainty, decision-making under uncertainty, or group decision-making, the phenomenon is approachable from different angles. In this context, Mathews and Blumentritt (2013) provide a sequential choice model of family firm succession by looking at succession based on a game theoretic approach, namely by describing succession as a sequential game. Mathews and Blumentritt discuss the succession game from two perspectives, from the offsprings' perspective and the key decision maker's perspective, and thereby add the interpersonal dynamics component and apply game theory to existing succession models. As this brief overview shows, succession in family firms in relation to game theory is a complex research topic and a thorough discussion of this phenomenon would go beyond the scope of this research. However, the study provided practical evidence especially for the discussion initialised by Blumentritt, Mathews,

³²² To make effective decisions, Drucker (2001, pp. 2–3) proposes six sequential steps, which are (1) classifying the problem, (2) defining the problem, (3) specifying the answer to the problem, (4) deciding what is “right”, rather than what is acceptable, to meet the boundary conditions, (5) building into the decision the action to carry it out, and (6) testing the validity and effectiveness of the decision against the actual course of events.

and Marchisio, who discussed the phenomenon only theoretically. Accordingly, this study does not further discuss the game theoretic approach regarding family firm succession. However, as Figure 6.1 shows, the basic assumption of the revealed siblings' influence on each other regarding career options and in consequence regarding career choices is incorporated in the Succession Niche Model by means of the Family Structure Variable.

7 Conclusions

This chapter summarises the entire research work and interprets the research findings. To give a thorough overview of the study, the chapter is subdivided into (1) Summary and Discussion, (2) Contributions, Implications, and Recommendations, (3) Limitations, and (4) Suggestions for Further Research. By following this structure, the study and the research findings are summarised and discussed before the findings are linked back to the literature base in terms of theoretical contributions, followed by providing implications for the practice and giving recommendations for people concerned with succession management. The limitations section debates both theoretical and methodological limitations. As a last point, the suggestions for further research are presented.

7.1 Summary and Discussion

This dissertation empirically examines succession in family firms in entrepreneurial families with multiple offspring as potential successors. Following a bottom-up research procedure, prior to the main study, a pre-study consisting of 15 interviews with students, experts, successors, one non-successor, and an initial literature review was conducted. Therefrom, the guiding research questions were derived before the general and specific research questions were developed – based on a review of the relevant family firm succession and sibling research literature. In this context, it was decided to base the study on Sulloway's Family Niche Model. As a consequence thereof, this research accounts for and is also based on Schachter's research on sibling identification and sibling deidentification. In addition, the study further considered the concepts of parent identification and parent deidentification, which were also studied based on the research by Schachter. In this respect, the study is built on the basic assumption that laterborn siblings can choose between sibling competition (i.e., competing with other siblings for the same niche), or avoiding sibling competition (i.e., either choosing an unoccupied niche or creating a new niche). This basic assumption was transferred into the family firm succession context and the main study, based on a multiple-case design that researched nine cases consisting of twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews with successors and non-successors, was conducted. As the research population is defined as offspring from Swiss entrepreneurial families, the research area was Switzerland, and more precisely, the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Following the research aim of answering the general and specific research questions, generating theory, and developing hypotheses, the data were

analysed by means of a qualitative content analysis in which the interview transcripts were coded and therefrom categories were built. In this respect, the codes were further condensed in order to answer the research questions firstly by means of within-case analyses, and secondly, by means of cross-case analyses. In this respect, the balanced sample of earlierborn and laterborn offspring enabled comparisons between these central groups in reference to the Family Niche Model. Based on these findings and the study's theoretical foundation, hypotheses were developed and the Succession Niche Model as the concluding model was built to illustrate the generated theory. Accordingly, the research purpose of providing insights into the research phenomenon of family firm succession as a career option for siblings in Swiss entrepreneurial families, based on the Family Niche Model and further sibling research concepts, was accomplished. As these results were extensively discussed in the previous chapter, this discussion is not repeated. In this respect, it should be pointed out, that the research focused on sibling competition in a positive way, meaning how siblings from different birth order positions choose their careers as a niche either inside or outside the family firm. Accordingly, the study did not research sibling rivalry. In comparison, the term sibling rivalry is generally associated with a negative connotation, whereas sibling competition can occur in a positive and/or negative manner.

To conclude, an offspring generally has three career options – working as an employee, founding a new company, or taking over an existing company. An offspring from an entrepreneurial family differentiates from an offspring without an entrepreneurial background by means of having additionally – at least theoretically – the possibility to succeed in the family firm, which represents a fourth career option as a second version of taking over an existing company. The research revealed that within the research context of family firm succession, an offspring has in first place to decide whether to enter the family firm or not, and when entering, in which position. Comparably to the family environment, this decision can also be seen in the light of choosing competition or avoiding competition. In this respect it has to be strongly pointed out, that being present with more than one offspring in the family firm, does not necessarily mean sibling competition. However, if more than one child is interested in succeeding as the next CEO and equal positions for both siblings are not realisable, due to the double desire for succession, competition is likely and the people in charge have to choose one of them. In this context, the CEO-niche would be allocated for instance by the parents. Accordingly, sibling competition would be avoided from the start, if only one sibling were to enter the family firm, or if each sibling were to obtain its own sphere of responsibility within the firm. In case of a sibling partner-

ship, the interview partners strongly recommended the concept of specific areas of responsibility for each sibling.

In reference to Sulloway's research, laterborn siblings' and in particular the lastborn siblings' niche selection is of specific interest. With regard to sibling research, laterborns are assumed to have a competitive disadvantage in comparison to their older siblings during childhood and adolescence – due to their younger age and the therefrom resulting physical inferiority and minor experience. By implication, this difference may be bigger, the bigger the age gap is between the siblings. Transferred to the succession context, it can be assumed, that the sibling that enters the family firm earlier might have a competitive advantage in comparison to its sibling(s). In this context, birth order can be replaced by the *order of appearance* in the family firm. With regard to the sibship size – and given that family firm resources are limited – it can be assumed that it will become more difficult to enter the family firm the more siblings already entered the company and accordingly already occupy a niche. In this respect, Sulloway's hypotheses were adapted as follows: (1) If you are laterborn, diversify. (2) If the family firm has limited resources, diversify. (3) Diversify in proportion to the number of your siblings. (4) Under certain circumstances, disregard the previous three hypotheses and specialise.

In reality, within the nine family firms, the CEO-position was five times occupied by a firstborn, once by a middleborn³²³, once by a thirdborn, and twice by a lastborn. In this respect, it has to be pointed out that all interview partners were content with their career choice and that no evidence for a negative sibling competition for the CEO-position was found. In this respect, it was also found that one successor only thought about succession as a career option for himself after his older sibling had rejected succession as a career option. By following Sulloway's approach of niche selection, it can be concluded that in each case sibling competition was wittingly or unwittingly avoided by the interview partners as they chose unoccupied niches. With regard to the developed research hypotheses, the absence of a competitive situation for the CEO-position made a test of the developed hypotheses impossible.

Throughout the research process, the research design proved to be adequate for the research topic and the variety of cases. Especially the qualitative research approach in combination with semi-structured in-depth interviews provided valuable insights from various perspectives. In addition, by studying different birth order positions and there-

³²³ Due to the age gap of 15 years between the firstborn and the middleborn, the middleborn can also be regarded as a firstborn.

by not solely focusing on lastborn successors provided comprehensive insights into the studied phenomenon. Furthermore, as the to some extent ascertained theoretical saturation already gave reason to expect, the case studies contributed to achieve the research aim as anticipated. In this context, even fewer cases would have been conceivable, if the data collection process had been stopped as soon as theoretical saturation was achieved. In this context, a study with fewer cases and even more profound analyses would have been conceivable too, for instance by interviewing all family members. However, it was desisted from this alternative proceeding, due to the heterogeneity of the cases, which made predictions impossible. Relatedly, although to a certain extent theoretical saturation has been achieved, due to the appropriate but limited number of cases, the heterogeneous sibling constellations, and the not unanimous research findings, substantiated generalisations from the research findings onto the research population would have been speculation and were therefore forgone. In this regard it should be pointed out that generalisability was intended, however not a primary research aim. In summary, it can be concluded that the qualitative research design composed of case study research with semi-structured in-depth interviews suited the research problem. By following this approach, each case was studied first separately before the results were comprisingly discussed. Accordingly, the feasibility of the research design has been proven as anticipated. This retrospective reflection is further supported by the unproblematic and expedient course of the research as well as by the achievement of the predefined research aim. In this context, it is assumed that a subsequent quantitative study would provide valuable further insights.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions, Implications for Practice, and Recommendations

This chapter delineates the study's theoretical contributions, implications for practice, and recommendations for how to adapt the research findings. Regarding the latter, the answer to the Specific Research Question 1.4 (see Subsection 6.2.1.4) already covers this aspect to a great extent. Nevertheless, as Specific Research Question 1.4 reports the interviewers' responses, these are now supplemented with further results from the cross-case analyses.

With regard to the study's theoretical contributions, it can be stated that the study contributes new insights to both research fields – sibling research and family firm succession research. In particular, the Family Niche Model has been successfully transferred into the family firm succession context, whereby all four hypotheses could

be declared as being relevant for family firm succession. Each hypothesis has been described with respect to the new research context and in consequence, the role of the laterborn children was widely discussed. Although the research was based on sibling research concepts from mainstream sibling research, their relevance for family firm succession research was demonstrated. In addition, the research revealed the link between game theory and family firm succession and in this respect contributed to the theoretical work of Blumentritt, Mathews, and Marchisio (2013) and the work of Mathews and Blumentritt (2013) by providing empirical insights (cf. Subsection 7.4.1). It can thus be summarised, that the study contributes (1) to the adaptation of specific sibling research concepts (i.e., sibling identification and sibling deidentification, parent identification and parent deidentification, and for the main part the Family Niche Model) in the context of family firm succession research in general, (2) to the adaptation of the Family Niche Model in the context of family firm succession in particular, which is theorised by means of the Succession Niche Model, and to a minor degree (3) to the substantiation of the consideration of game theory for family firm succession research, which is currently not conclusively studied. In this context, the study contributed to the close of the existing research gap in family firm succession research in several directions.

The study's implications for practice are twofold. Firstly, the research revealed that succession can be studied in the context of sibling research, especially when adapting the Family Niche Model. As a consequence thereof, the laterborn's position became of particular interest throughout the analyses. By adapting Sulloway's four hypotheses in the new research context and demonstrating their relevance for family firm succession, by implication the phenomena of sibling identification and sibling deidentification in order to find an own niche come into effect. Accordingly, it is assumed that siblings can avoid competition for limited parental resources (i.e., in this context the family firm's resources) by differentiating from each other. In addition, similar as in the family environment, also in the family firm environment, parents can assist their offspring and help to create an environment in which the children can co-exist not only in the family but also in the family firm by developing each offspring's individual strengths and talents. The second implication for practice derived from the research is the assumed competitive advantage of the first offspring which enters the family firm. The first offspring entering the company – which does not necessarily have to be the firstborn – obtains a first-mover advantage compared to the siblings following later on. However, this competitive advantage might be restrained by providing each sibling its own sphere of responsibility. As described within the cross-case analyses, it is

assumed that a sibling that enters the family firm second, might also redeem the sibling's edge by contributing specific abilities of knowledge into the family firm, which in turn represents choosing an unoccupied niche.

As the interview partners' recommendations were introduced and discussed within the scope of answering Specific Research Question 1.4, this section comments on three recommendations in more detail. The interviews revealed that very often consultants from outside the family firm assisted during the succession process. Including external consultants into the succession procedure thereby represents the first recommendation. Halter, Kammerlander, and Kissling Streuli (2014, pp. 9–11) in this context differentiate between *expert consultancy* (e.g., management consulting, legal advice, tax advice, and trusteeship) and *process consultancy*³²⁴ (e.g., project management, coaching, mentoring, and mediation).³²⁵ The researchers thereby recommend to first identifying each stakeholder's specific needs and second, therefrom derive the requirements of the consultant(s). Furthermore, Halter et al. (2014, pp. 10–11) recommend bringing in consultants from both types to address succession at best. According to the interview partners' experience, this approach of bringing in external consultants provided valuable advice and new perspectives. The impact of this recommendation becomes clear, when considering that in seven out of nine cases, an external advisor was consulted. This approach is also recommended on behalf of the author, whereby the external might be either a specialist or a person who is accepted as well as held in high regard by all family members and stakeholders involved. The external might not only bring in expertise but may also arbitrate between parties with contrasting opinions. In this context, assistance by an external person as opposed to consultancy by a family member might provide a less emotional atmosphere. Furthermore, it is recommended to follow this approach based on a long-term basis and thereby incorporating the individuals' changing circumstances of life and changes regarding the family firm. However, it is important to provide freedom of choice to the offspring as to succession and not putting pressure upon the offspring. By following this strategy positive as well as negative aspects can be anticipated early in time.

The advantage of an external consultant should also be considered in relation to equal treatment of the siblings by the parents, which is the second recommendation that was frequently reported by the interview partners. In this respect, it is important to mention, that equal treatment by the parents, for instance by means of an equal

³²⁴ Translated from German. Original wording: *Fachberatung* (= *Expertenansatz*) for expert consultancy and process consultancy for *Prozessberatung* (= *Coachingansatz*).

³²⁵ Cf. Halter & Schröder (2012, pp. 150–160).

distribution of shares among the siblings whereby only one sibling is actively working in the family firm, might lead to an ownership constellation, in which the sibling(s) that succeeded as leader(s) might not have the necessary powers to lead the family firm. It can be concluded that equal treatment of the children by the parents is important to avoid inner-family discrepancies. However, equal treatment has to be in line with the seizure of the family firm's continuity. Accordingly, equal treatment might be realised by giving shares to these offspring actively involved in the business and paying off these offspring that are not actively involved in the family firm's management. By following this procedure, these offspring who are responsible for the family firm have the necessary legal capacity to manage the business whereby the non-involved offspring are equally treated like the successor(s), however, on a monetary basis. Alternatively, the offspring that refused management succession might pursue ownership succession and become inactive partners without a vote or with limited voting right.

As third recommendation, a shareholders' agreement is recommended since it may avoid discrepancies between the shareholders, whom might be the siblings as ownership successors. On this view, the shareholders' agreement for instance settles the partners' rights and obligations, the issuing of new shares, the share disposal, voting rights or the revenue allocations. By signing this agreement, the partners settle the family firm's basic conditions. In addition, the partners can set up the contract specifically tailored as to the family's and the family firm's needs. In this context, research showed that already 63% of those affected by succession management in the DACH-region³²⁶ and 49% worldwide use a shareholders' agreement to avoid family conflicts (PwC, 2012a; PwC, 2012b, p. 16). By following this advice, the management of the family firm can be secured while family conflicts are avoided. An extensive summary and discussion of all interview partners' recommendations is provided in Subsection 6.2.1.4.

7.3 Limitations

As in every study, this study incorporates theoretical and methodological limitations that limit its area of validity and application for further research. These shortcomings were encountered throughout the research and were minimised, however, not all of

³²⁶ DACH = Germany (D), Austria (A), and Switzerland (CH). The data reposes on a study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and polled almost 2,000 companies of which 250 companies were located in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland.

them could be avoided. In the following, the limitations, their control as well as how they have been anticipated and/or why they had to be accepted, are discussed.

7.3.1 Theoretical Limitations

The study is theoretically limited by the use of the Family Niche Model (FNM) as main research model as well as by the concepts of sibling identification, sibling deidentification, parent identification and parent deidentification³²⁷. In this respect should be pointed out, that the FNM especially incorporates the concepts of sibling identification and sibling deidentification, which is the reason why these concepts' limitations are not discussed in detail. As the FNM's weaknesses were already discussed in Subsection 3.3.4, only a brief summary is provided. Since the FNM was developed, it has been criticised in both ways – positively for its comprehensive analysis and negatively for its limitations.³²⁸ The model's widely discussed limitations are first, the use of ancient data and second, the approach of not studying pairs and/or groups of siblings. In this context it has to be pointed out that – as Sulloway's research refers to historical figures – similar information for each sibling would not have been available or subsequently collectable. However, this study accounted for both these constraints by collecting primary data by means of qualitative interviews and by studying siblings within the same family. Subsequent to these within-family analyses, cross-case analyses were conducted, but always in consideration of the respective family's specific environment. In addition, since this research does not concentrate on the effect of birth order on personality, other critique does not affect this study. As the research showed, the study only transferred the FNM's basic assumption and Sulloway's concluding hypotheses in the succession context and did not test the model. Resulting from this discussion, it can be summarised that the identified theoretical limitations of Sulloway's research were remedied throughout the research process. Moreover, the use of mainstream sibling research did not represent a limitation, since as the research proved, the concepts were transferrable into the context of entrepreneurial families. In addition, since only the basic assumptions of these concepts were transferred and the comparison of results was not intended, this potential limitation can be disregarded as well.

³²⁷ In this context, it has to be pointed out that the concept of parent deidentification has been self-developed by the author to build a counter model to parent identification. The concept of split-parent identification was not applicable for this research.

³²⁸ E.g., Freese & Powell (1998), Greene (1999), I. D. Harris (1998), J. R. Harris (2002b), Y. Marshall (1997), McDermott (1997), Mendelsohn (1996), Orzack (1998), Rowe (1997), Simonthon (1997), Sprey (1998), or Townsend (1996, 1997a, 1997b, 2000). Sulloway responded to several of these reviews, see Sulloway (1998, 2000a, 2000b).

7.3.2 Methodological Limitations

Beyond theoretical limitations, the study is affected by methodological limitations. In the first instance, these limitations arose in consequence of using a qualitative research approach and moreover on the grounds of conducting case study research. Case study research is often regarded as a research method that incorporates a lack of rigour, for instance due to unsystematic research quality practices or due to biased views that influence the research outcome (cf. Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2010; Yin, 2014, pp. 76–77). When discussing methodological limitations, research biases have to be addressed (cf. Hammersley & Gomm, 1997). Biases are errors linked to data, which are introduced for instance by the researcher, the research participants, the measuring instrument, or the research sample (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013, p. 391). Regarding this study, such limitations are related to the research sample, interviewing as research instrument, data analysis and generalisability, as well as to the geographical restriction.

7.3.2.1 Selection Bias

The first methodological limitation results from the applied sampling procedures (i.e., theoretical sampling and purposive sampling) and the rather small sample. As discussed, potential interview partners were contacted based on publicly available information, whereby no claim to completeness could be made. This limiting effect was narrowed down by using multiple sources to verify the data, to add missing data, and to avoid incompleteness. With regard to the sample size, a research sample consisting of five to eight cases was intended. In the end, nine cases composed of medium-sized and large family firms with diverse backgrounds and industries in conjunction with the related entrepreneurial families and their specific family constellations were studied. Considering the research outcome, it can be asserted that in hindsight, the sample suited the research questions, since as far as possible, theoretical saturation was achieved. It can therefore be concluded that the sample displays a realistic picture of the reality despite the relatively small sample size. However, the present family firm and family diversity withholds the possibility of drawing conclusions for a specific type of family firm or a specific family constellation. Nevertheless, since the goal of this research was to study the relationship between sibships and siblings in entrepreneurial families regarding family firm succession, deriving such research findings was beyond the scope of this study. Selection bias can therefore be disregarded.

7.3.2.2 Retrospective Bias and Response Bias

Since seven out of nine participating family firms are currently not affected by succession management, only two interview partners assessed succession from a present point of view. In addition, all interview partners assessed succession retrospectively. This reflection on past succession events might be described incorrectly and in consequence the retrospective ‘sensemaking’ might be incorrect as well (cf. Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Furthermore, a situation might be misrepresented, for instance resulting from different points of view or different judgments, misinterpretations, or different experiences. It would further be conceivable, that for whatever reason, interview partners answer wrongly on purpose, or even depict the reality purposefully sugarcoated or worse than occurred. Further falsification may arise from a low level of self disclosure during the interviews (cf. Cozby, 1973). These aspects can be summarised as retrospective bias³²⁹ and response bias. However, no evidence for such limiting effects was found. To minimise potential effects arising from the retrospective reflection, it was aimed at interviewing more than one person in each entrepreneurial family. In addition, although triangulation was not applied, the interview partners were asked for additional company-related information such as reports, brochures, or newsletters. Following this procedure, an all-encompassing picture of the research context was obtained, which in turn helped to interpret the data and furthermore strengthened the research results.

7.3.2.3 Subjective Bias

Subjective bias³³⁰ is defined as “[...] decision making or evaluation based on personal, poorly measurable, and unverifiable data or feelings that are improperly weighted against objective, unbiased data” (Harding & Epstein, 2004, p. 119). The influence of subjective bias has to be discussed in relation to data collection and data analysis. As the researcher’s influence in qualitative research can be regarded as higher than in quantitative research, it is important to minimise this influence and to ensure that the researcher is not prejudiced against the research participants. Since the herewith related aspects of quality management (i.e., intercoder reliability, intracoder reliability, objectivity, and subjectivity) are discussed in Subsection 4.2.9, no further discussion is carried out.

³²⁹ Aka recall bias.

³³⁰ Aka researcher bias, cf. measurement bias.

7.3.2.4 Geographical Limitation

Based on the selection criteria for the purposive sampling of the participating family firms, the author purposefully limited the research location to German-speaking Switzerland (see Subsection 4.2.5). Following this approach avoided potential effects resulting from translations. This implies that conclusions for and generalisations onto the Swiss entrepreneurial population cannot be drawn. Nevertheless, since generalisability is not a primary goal of this study, the geographical limitation facilitated conducting the project instead of being a constraint. Furthermore, the linguistic restriction resulting from the geographical limitation facilitated the data analysis, in particular during the comparative cross-case analyses (cf. Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 275).

7.4 Suggestions for Further Research

To apply and to develop this study further, several research directions are conceivable. Future research could for instance focus on further developing the Family Niche Model, on expanding the research to new research locations, or on transferring and thereby testing the research findings in new research contexts. In the following, three further research directions are presented and briefly discussed. At the beginning of this work, it was planned to incorporate parts of these further research directions already in this study. However, in order to focus more strongly on the development of the research model, it has been decided not to incorporate these ideas.

7.4.1 Game Theory and Family Firm Succession

As briefly discussed in Subsection 6.2.3, game theory can be associated with family firm succession research. Few researches addressed game theory in relation to family firm research (e.g., Blumentritt, Mathews, & Marchisio, 2013; Lee, Lim, & Lim, 2003; Mathews & Blumentritt, 2013; Michael-Tsabari & Weiss, 2013). In this respect, Blumentritt, Mathews, and Marchisio (2013) explicitly discuss game theory in relation to successor selection from a pair of siblings – however only theoretically. This study now contributes to Blumentritt et al.'s (2013) research by enriching it with empirical research findings. Blumentritt et al.'s research was published in parallel to the data analyses for this study. Hence, the article was only considered during the data analysis but was not applied as a basis for this work. This chronology shows that the theoretical work by Blumentritt et al. and the empirical results of this study both came to the same conclusion, which provides an evidenced starting point for further research. As game theory provides several approaches to study decision making (e.g., individual decision-

making under certainty, individual decision-making under uncertainty, or group decision-making), several approaches to studying family firm succession within the context of game theory are conceivable. Since Blumentritt et al.'s article is rather general and the study at hand provides empirical evidence for the relevance of this stream of succession research, subsequent studies are assumed to provide valuable insights. In this respect, specific game theory-related qualitative or quantitative studies should contribute to understanding this phenomenon. In fact, Mathews and Blumentritt (2013) published a working paper applying the game theoretic approach of sequential choice in the family firm succession context. Within the context of this study, the game theoretic approach arose during the interviews and is thereby a byproduct of the study but also part of the research findings.

7.4.2 Sibling Partnership and Personality Assessment

In general, sibling partnerships result from a family firm's transition from the 1st to the 2nd generation. To clarify, the term sibling partnership may not only refer to a pair or group of siblings that jointly manage the company, but also to a pair or group of siblings in which one or more siblings are solely involved as inactive partner(s). Research revealed that approximately half of all sibling partnerships split up, which may lead to inner-family and company-internal problems (cf. Ward & Aronoff, 1992).³³¹ According to Aronoff, Astrachan, Medoza, and Ward (2011, p. 85), three groups are essential to build a functioning management team, which are the parents, the spouses, and the siblings themselves. It can therefrom be concluded, that the grounds for a functioning sibling partnership can be found in the family system. In this respect, the pre-study interviews with persons concerned with succession management as well as with experts in both research fields, also highlighted the diversity of entrepreneurs in terms of personality, especially when discussing the option of a sibling partnership. By assessing the siblings' personalities, insights regarding the collaboration among the siblings in the family context as well as in the business context could be obtained. In turn, this knowledge might be applicable when building sibling partnerships. In this respect, a human resources expert was contacted in the pre-study interviews and based on these insights, it was intended to assess the family members' personalities by means of the *DISC® Personality Factor Profile*³³². However, this part of the study was rejected in favour of studying a larger number of and more diversified entrepreneurial families instead of studying fewer families but there

³³¹ See also Ward (1997).

³³² Aka *The persolog® Personality Factor Model*, see Gay (2009).

within all family members. Nevertheless, a personality assessment based on the *DISC® Personality Factor Profile* is still assumed to provide valuable insights for both sibling research and family firm research.

7.4.3 Expansion of the Research Location

A further research suggestion relates to the research location, which for this study was limited to German-speaking Switzerland. As discussed in Subsection 4.2.5.1, this limitation has been chosen due to translation and comparability issues. In future research, the same research project could be carried out for instance in the French-speaking or the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. Subsequently, based on the analysis for each linguistic area, a comparative analysis might provide insights regarding siblings' different career choice behaviour in Swiss entrepreneurial families across the country. In this context, influences from the families' different cultural backgrounds might also be found.

In addition, the same research could be carried out across Europe or also worldwide. In this respect, the research by Geert Hofstede³³³ regarding cultural dimensions could be incorporated in the research framework as well as in the data analysis. Implementing Hofstede's research could provide insights regarding similarities or differences in siblings' career choices first, across countries³³⁴ and second, in relation to the cultural dimensions *power distance*, *uncertainty avoidance*, *individualism and collectivism*, *masculinity and femininity*, and *long-term orientation*. The results could then be compared to Switzerland and cross-checked. By following this approach, potential cultural differences regarding siblings' career choice in terms of succession could be investigated dependent on the research location.

³³³ See e.g., Hofstede (2001), Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov (2010), or Minkov (2012).

³³⁴ For information on Hofstede's cultural dimensions for Switzerland, see Hofstede (n.d.).

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9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix A: Interview Guides Pre-Study

9.1.1 Student Interviews

Part 1: Introductory Questions

- Please introduce yourself and your family.
- Please describe the family firm you grew up with.
- How did you perceive the situation of growing up with a family firm as a child and/or a young adult?
- How were you affected by the family firm?
- Which of your family members worked in the family firm?
- Did your parents expect that you or your sibling(s) would take over the family firm?

Part 2: Influence of the family firm-related entrepreneurial background on the career decision as to an entrepreneurial career

- Did your family influence your career decision to take over / not to take over the family firm?
- Did your sibling(s) influence your career decision to take over / not to take over the family firm?
- Which criteria were important for you when deciding to take over / not to take over the family firm?
- In which way were your sibling(s) important for this decision?
- Could you have imagined taking over the family firm with one sibling or several of your siblings?

Part 3: Identification of additional factors which influence the succession decision

- Which factors are important in order to develop the desire to take over the family firm?
- Which factors are important for you regarding your career choice?
- Which traits / skills should an entrepreneur have?

9.1.2 Successors and Non-Successor Interviews

Part 1: Introductory Questions

- Please introduce yourself and your family.
- Please describe the family firm you grew up with.
- How did you perceive the situation of growing up with a family firm when being a child and/or a young adult?
- How were you affected by the family firm?
- Which of your family members worked in the family firm?
- Did your parents expect that you or your sibling(s) would take over the family firm?

Part 2: Influence of the family firm-related entrepreneurial background on the career decision as to an entrepreneurial career

- Did your family influence your career decision to take over / not to take over the family firm?
- Did your sibling(s) influence your career decision to take over / not to take over the family firm?
- Which criteria were important for you when deciding to take over / not to take over the family firm?
- In which way were your sibling(s) important for this decision?
- Could you have imagined taking over the family firm with one sibling or several of your siblings?

Part 3: Identification of additional factors which influence the succession decision

- Which factors are important in order to develop the desire to take over the family firm?
- Which factors were important for you regarding your career choice?
- Which traits / skills should an entrepreneur have?

Thank you very much.

9.1.3 Family Firm Succession Experts Interviews

Part 1: General Information

- Please introduce yourself and your family.
- Please provide an overview of the family firm.
- Please describe your position / work at (name of the family firm)?

Part 2: Succession and difficulties during the succession process

- Where do you see the biggest threats regarding succession?
- How do you think succession should be organised in the family firm? Which aspects are to be taken into account regarding succession?
- Which do you think are the biggest mistakes that are being made in succession management?
- Which factors or characteristics are minded the most by leaving owner-managers?
 - Family values?
 - Successor competences?
 - Successor personality?
- Which are the factors that should be considered regarding the current owner-manager and the successor?
- Which characteristics should a successor in a family firm bring with him/her?
- Do you think that the discussed problems are transferable to other family firms or do you think these problems explicitly occurred in your company and/or within the industry your company is operating?
- Which are the factors one should especially focus on regarding a successor? Which are the characteristics / traits a successor should bring in?

Part 3: Relevance and influence of siblings within the succession process

- Which role does the presence of multiple siblings as potential successors play regarding succession in the family firm?
- What are your experiences regarding succession in family firms relating to siblings as multiple potential successors?
- How do you think the company size, the family tradition and/or the family values influence an offspring's willingness to succeed in the family firm?

- Within your consulting services, did you experience cases in which the sibling relationship favoured or complicated succession?
- Do you think siblings could establish a better management team than a team composed of external managers? Where do you think are strengths and where do you think are weaknesses?
- Do you have experiences with siblings as a management team? If yes, which ones (positive or negative)?
- Within your consulting services, what are your experiences regarding sibling rivalries?
- How can retiring owner-managers influence succession within the sibship?
- How does the family's age structure influence succession in the family firm?
- What are the most important insights and takeaways you identified regarding succession in family firms and regarding succession in family firms with multiple potential successors?

Thank you very much.

9.1.4 Sibling Research Experts Interviews

*Succession in the family firm and problems within the succession process /
Potential relevance and potential impact of siblings regarding succession in the
family firm*

- Please introduce yourself as well as your work and research within the field of sibling research.
- Please describe the current state-of-the-art in sibling research as to birth order in relation to individual characteristics and traits of siblings.
- Do you think that the theories regarding birth order and personality, which are in parts contradictory, can be adapted to the study of succession in family firms?
 - Siblings grow up within the same family. Please describe the impact of the family environment on the children's development.
 - Does the perception of the family environment differ among the siblings?
 - Are the influences from the family environment on the individual child comparable among each other? (Situation within the family might change.)
- Do you think that due to an offspring's birth order position and the therefrom potentially resulting individual personalities, some offspring might be better suited to take over the family firm?
 - In this case, it would be conceivable that an offspring that strongly emulates the parents might be in a better position or even favoured for succession. This might be a more stable situation for the company since the company might be carried on in the way the parents run the firm.
 - It might be conceivable that due to their birth order position, specific offspring might master better qualifications regarding specific tasks within the family firm. Regarding the sibship, such differences in qualifications might favour forming a perfect management team.
- Do you think that the theoretical approach regarding childrens' search for an individual niche within the family environment can be transferred into the family firm environment?
 - It is conceivable that – as in the family environment – each child searches for his/her own niche in order not to compete with its sibling(s).
 - Is there a first-mover advantage?

- Are there specific theories or tests, which you recommend in relation to such research endeavours?
- Description of the research project by the author.
 - Where do you see difficulties and threats regarding the outlined research endeavour?
 - Where do you see threats and difficulties regarding the outlined research endeavour in relation to sibling research? Which additional literature would you recommend?
- What would you like to add to the discussed topics in general and to the topic of sibling research in relation to succession in family firms in particular?
- Do you think that the assumed traumatic experience for firstborn siblings, which was researched by Alfred Adler, is still applicable? Do you think that today such research findings can only be applied within a limited scope of application?
- Are there further considerations or topics that might be relevant for the outlined research project, which were not discussed within the preceding questions?

Thank you very much.

9.2 Appendix B: Flowchart Research Partner Acquisition

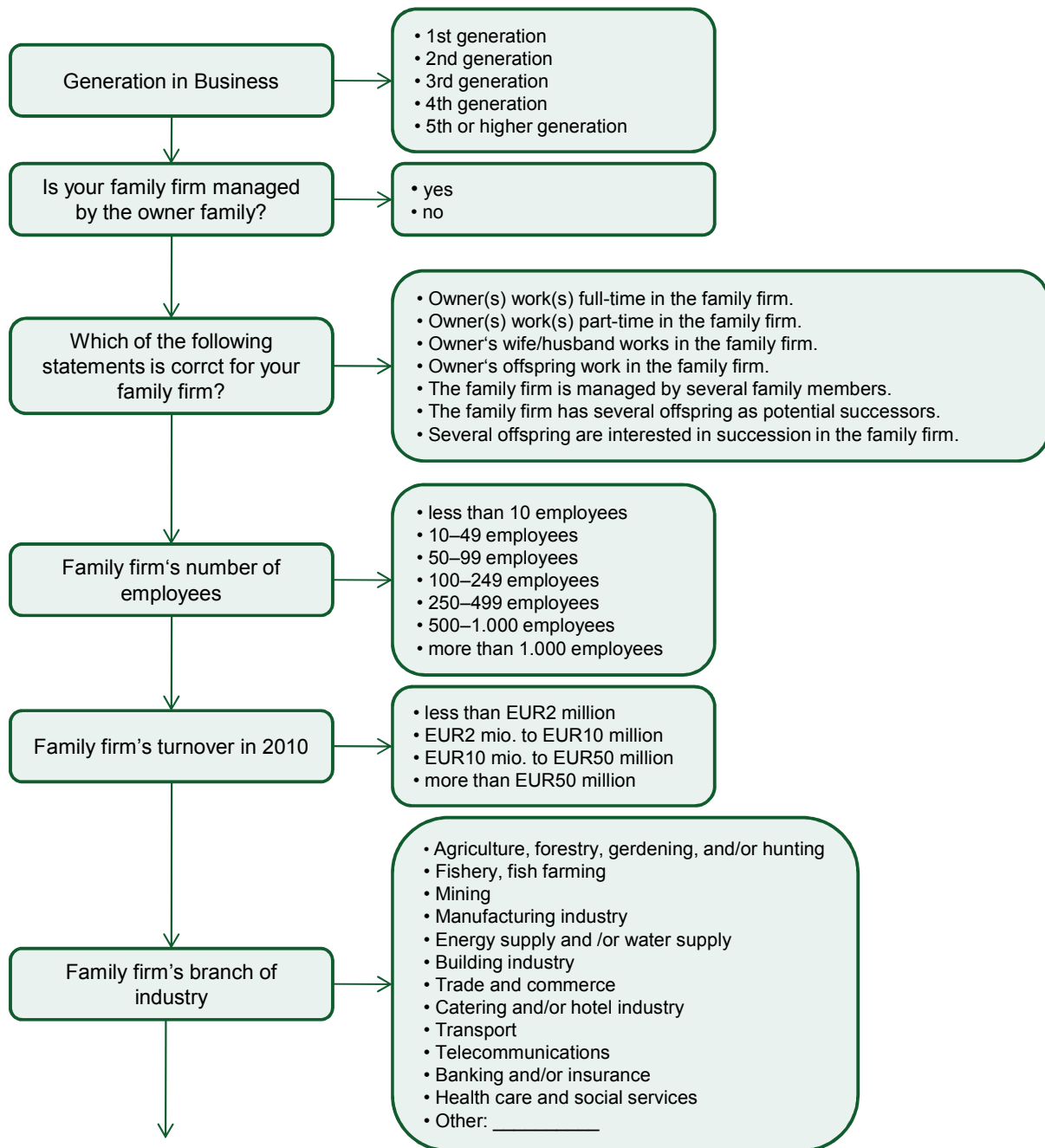


Figure 9.1. Flowchart Research Partner Acquisition

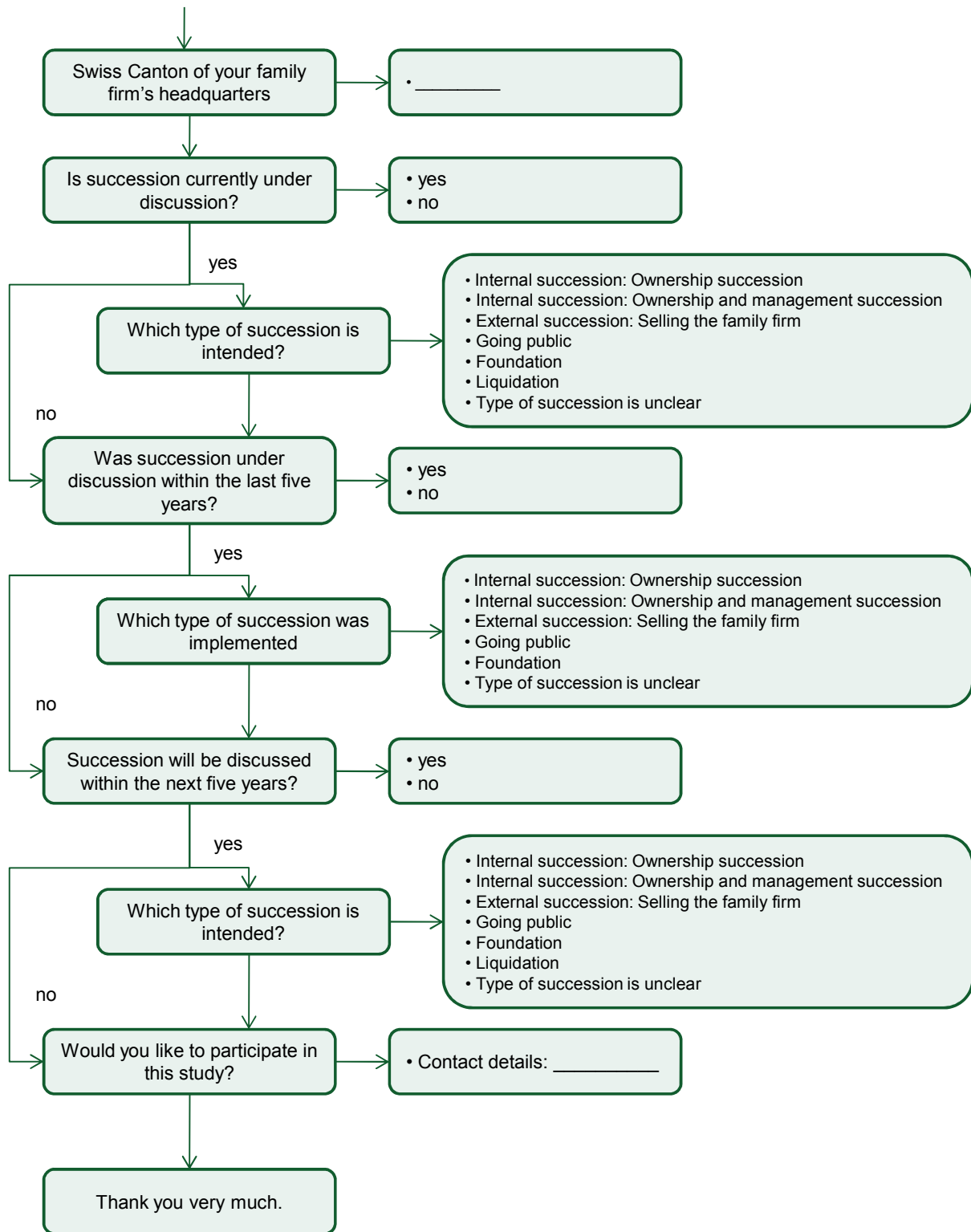


Figure 9.2. Flowchart Research Partner Acquisition (cont'd)

9.3 Appendix C: Interview Guide Main Study

9.3.1 Family Firm Succession Interviews

Part 1: General Questions regarding the family firm and the succession process within the family firm

- Please introduce yourself and describe your family as well as the family firm.
- Please describe the succession process in your family firm and your position within the process.
- How did you perceive the situation of growing up with a family firm when you were a child and/or a young adult?
- How were you affected by the family firm?
- Please name and explain the reasons why you decided to take over / not to take over the family firm.
- Who influenced you regarding your decision to take over the family firm and whose opinion was thereby important for you?
- Please describe the succession process in your family firm
 - Which criteria were important regarding succession in general?
 - Which criteria were important regarding succession for you?
 - Are there aspects, which you would do differently today?

Part 2: Selection criteria regarding the successor

- Which criteria were decisive factors during the succession process?
- Please describe your future plans regarding succession in the family firm.
- Questions for non-successors: How did you perceive the selection of you / your sibling(s) as successor?
- How was succession handled within your family?

Part 3: Influence of the sibling(s)

- Did your sibling(s) influence your decision regarding succession in the family firm? If yes, how did they influence your decision (positively or negatively)?
- Did your sibling's / siblings' career choice(s) influence yourself as to your own career choice?
- Question only for successors: If you had not taken over the family firm, would your sibling(s) have taken over the family firm instead?

- Do you think that your sibling(s) would run the family firm differently?

Part 4: Sibling relationship

- Please describe your sibling relationship (and your teamwork within the family firm).
- Please describe your siblings and your parents.
- Which factors particularly shaped your sibling relationship? E.g., family, family firm?
- Did the sibling relationship influence family firm succession?
- How did succession influence your sibling relationship?

Part 5: Equality among the siblings

- How was equality among the siblings handled regarding succession in your family firm?

Part 6: Birth order

- Did birth order influence the succession process? If yes, how did birth order influence the succession process?
- Is there a family tradition regarding succession that for instance favours a firstborn?
- Can you identify specific characteristics or abilities for yourself and for your sibling(s) that you ascribe to the specific birth order position? If yes, what sort of characteristics or abilities?
- How were specific characteristics or abilities, for instance in character and/or in personality considered within succession? Did these characteristics or abilities influence succession?

Part 7: Family structure

- How did age spacing between the siblings influence succession?
- How did age spacing between you as successor/non-successor and your parents influence succession?
- How did gender influence succession?
- Please describe how your parents prepared yourself and/or your sibling(s) for your/his/her/their future role within the family firm?

Part 8: Further considerations

- Further conversation based on the answers from the interview.

Thank you very much.

9.4 Author's Curriculum Vitae

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