

Leadership Values in Succession Processes

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Abstract : Background and Significance of the Study: Family-run businesses are a decisive economic factor in the Alpine tourism and leisure industry. Within the next years, it is expected that a large number of family-run small and medium-sized businesses will transfer ownership due to demographic developments. Four stages of succession processes can be identified by several empirical studies: (1) the preparation phase, (2) the succession planning phase, (3) the development of the succession concept, (4) and the implementation of the business transfer. Family business research underlines the importance of individual's and family's values: Especially leadership values address mainly the first phase, which strongly determines the following stages. Aim of the Study: The study aims at answering the following research question: Which leadership values are dominating during succession processes in family-run businesses in Austrian Alpine tourism industry? Methodology: Twenty-two problem-centred individual interviews with 11 transferors and their 11 transferees were conducted. Data analysis was carried out using the software program MAXQDA following an inductive approach to data coding. Major Findings: Data analysis shows that nine values particularly influence succession processes, especially during the vulnerable preparation phase. Participation is the most-dominant value (162 references). It covers a style of cooperation, communication, and controlling. Discipline (142) is especially prevailing from the transferor's perspective. It addresses entrepreneurial honesty and customer orientation. Development (138) is seen as an important value, but it can be distinguished between transferors and transferees. These are mainly focused on strategic positioning and new technologies. Trust (105) is interpreted as a basic prerequisite to run the family firm smoothly. Interviewees underline the importance to be able to take a break from family-business management; however, this is only possible when openness and honesty constitute trust within the family firm. Loyalty (102): Almost all interviewees perceive that they can influence the loyalty of the employees through their own role models. A good work-life balance (90) is very important to most of the transferors, especially for their employees. Despite the communicated importance of a good work-life-balance, but however, mostly the commitment to the company is prioritised. Considerations of regionality (82) and regional responsibility are also frequently raised. Appreciation (75) is of great importance to both the handover and the takeover generation -as appreciation towards the employees in the company and especially in connection with the family. Familiarity (66) and the blurring of the boundaries between private and professional life are very common, especially in family businesses. Familial contact and open communication with employees which is mentioned in almost all handing over. Conclusions: In the preparation phase of succession, successors and incumbents have to consider and discuss their leadership and family values of family-business management. Quite often, assistance is needed to commonly and openly discuss these values in the early stages of succession processes. A large majority of handovers fail because of these values. Implications can be drawn to support family businesses, e.g., consulting initiatives at chambers of commerce and business consultancies must address this problem.

Keywords : leadership values, family business, succession processes, succession phases

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