PRACTICAL GUIDE

NON-FAMILY MANAGEMENT IN FAMILY BUSINESSES

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES, AVOIDING PITFALLS

by
Michael M. Meier,
Tom A. Rüsen and
Katja Portz

Editors

EgonZehnder

WIFU FOUNDATION

IMPRINT

RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONTENTS:

WIFU Foundation
Prof. Dr Tom A. Rüsen
Alfred-Herrhausen-Straße 48
58448 Witten
Germany

Design: Weissheiten Design, Wuppertal
Title photograph: iStock/akinbostanci
Photographs p. 4: WIFU Foundation;
Egon Zehnder (2)

Please note: The Witten Institute for Family Business (WIFU) and the WIFU Foundation seek to use language in a non-discriminatory way that takes account of the diversity of all people. Wherever possible, we therefore use gender-neutral wording.

Disclaimer: The contents of this Practical Guide are authored by the named author or authors unless otherwise indicated. AI-generated texts and content are identified as such.

ISSN (Print) 2626-3424
ISSN (Online) 2626-3432

July 2026

CONTENTS

Preface 4

1 The family and non-family management 5

1.1 The family: the changing mental model 5

Four Types of non-family manager 9

1.2 Non-family management: the external perspective as entrepreneurial added value 11

1.3 Good governance as a guarantee of successful collaboration 12

2 Finding the right leader 13

2.1 Challenges in external appointments 13

2.2 The succession process 14

2.2.1 The role of business values in the succession search 15

2.3 Developing a professional role specification 16

2.3.1 Personal characteristics 18

2.3.2 Key competencies 20

2.3.3 Potential and the right mindset as keys to successful leadership 21

3 Integrating the non-family senior executive into the business 22

3.1 Integration and onboarding process 22

3.2 Practical insights: What does good integration look like? 23

4 Conclusion 26

5 Sources and further reading 28

Contact 30

PREFACE

In economically challenging times, appointing people to top-management positions is particularly critical. For some business families, this may be the moment of truth: no suitable candidates can be found within the family to succeed to a senior leadership role – whether because the required qualifications are not available or because there is no interest or inclination to take on a leadership role in the family business.

At this point in the history of the business, a profound change takes place. The top leadership team is made up entirely of non-family managers, and the family is represented only on supervisory and advisory bodies. Is our business still a family business? Are we still a business family? The family's self-understanding needs recalibrating. This applies especially to the senior generation, for whom taking on leadership responsibility within the family was once a matter of course.

Non-family top managers must show an understanding of this process of self-discovery, as it will shape their entry into the business. At the same time, they are entitled to have expectations of their own. To work successfully, they need professional onboarding and clear support from the shareholder group. Non-family top management is not a stopgap solution; it is a way of securing the survival of the family business. The times in which we live, with their many challenges, have significantly raised the expectations of employees, banks, suppliers and the wider public regarding the professionalism of businesses. This also applies to family businesses. Competence profiles have become more demanding, and there is no shame in acknowledging that certain specific experience and qualifications cannot be found within the family. Ultimately, the guiding principle is "business first". If non-family candidates are more experienced and better qualified than NextGen members of the business family, the interests of the business must determine recruitment decisions, especially for top-management roles.

Every business family is therefore well advised to put aside the emotional aspects of the appointment decision, as well as sensitivities and sentimentality, and to develop a welcoming culture for the new top manager or CEO. Family businesses have distinctive characteristics, especially where they have long been managed in a highly person-centred way. A non-family manager must bring considerable empathy and personal skills to this situation. At the same time, they may expect the business family to open up and not to make a mystery of the often less-than-obvious mechanisms behind existing communication and decision-making channels. Both sides will need to show understanding for the different forms of socialisation they bring to this integration process.

Tom A. Rüsen

Michael M. Meier

Katja Portz

Tom A. Rüsen
CEO of the WIFU Foundation

Michael M. Meier
Partner, Egon Zehnder

Katja Portz
Consultant, Egon Zehnder

1 | THE FAMILY AND NON-FAMILY MANAGEMENT

1.1 | THE FAMILY: THE CHANGING MENTAL MODEL

There is a trend in medium-sized to large family businesses: top-management teams (TMTs) made up entirely of external executives are becoming more common. At first glance, this seems to run counter to the familiar image of the family business. A family business without family members at the head of the business? And yet there are good reasons not to cling rigidly to the principle of family-internal leadership. One important reason is that the tasks to be managed have become vastly more complex. In the often idealised "good old days", the founder's wife may have kept the accounts with pen and ledger. Since then, however, every management process has changed rapidly. Added to this are new requirements for specific competencies arising from innovation or changes in the business model. Not every business family is adequately equipped for this in terms of personnel – whether in the number of potential family-internal top managers or in the qualifications and inclination of possible candidates. Competence gaps emerge, and no family business can afford to leave them open or fill them only inadequately.

It must also not be overlooked that stakeholders such as suppliers, customers and employees have justified expectations of professionalisation within the family business and the business family. Indecision, hesitation and misjudgements run counter to these expectations and can have an unfavourable impact on the business, especially in economically challenging times.

This is the sober side of the issue. On the emotional side, which must also be taken into account in every family business, the picture looks different. The generation active in the business and the heads of the family or family branches usually find it difficult to acknowledge this personnel gap within the family. How can it be that, in a growing business family, there are not enough suitable and motivated members to lead the business into the future? Even though there is usually consensus that the NextGen should not be forced into what others regard as their "good fortune", a latent sense of disappointment remains when succession from within the business family is not possible. This shows particularly clearly how inseparable the two social systems of "family" and "business" are. The NextGen's life and career decisions may sometimes change, and a daughter or nephew may later decide to join the business after all – but certain vacancies and succession issues have to be addressed in the present, not in the future.

From many years of observing and engaging with business families, one insight can be drawn: such unclear situations, disappointments and disruptions have a deeper underlying cause.[1] Families may well recognise these frictions as a phenomenon, without understanding the development behind them. Family business research sees such fault lines as changes in the so-called "mental model". The Witten Institute for Family Business (WIFU) describes the following mental models[2]:

- the patriarchal logic (Model 1)
- the logic of the managing family (Model 2)
- the logic of the controlling family (Model 3)
- the logic of the investment family (Model 4)[3]

Although the sequence does not necessarily, invariably or irreversibly move from Model 1 to Model 4, a business family, for example, does not remain at the stage of patriarchal logic across generations. Establishing a TMT made up entirely of non-family executives is typical of the transition from the managing business family to the controlling family, the latter being represented "only" on advisory and supervisory bodies. This change in the mental model needs to be understood so that the issues arising from it can be addressed appropriately.

[1] Sometimes there is more than one cause, but these must be left aside here.
[2] For a detailed discussion, see Rüsen, Schlippe & Groth (2023) and Gimeno et al. (2010).
[3] For a detailed discussion, see Schlippe, Rüsen & Groth (2021) and Rüsen, Schlippe & Groth (2023).

GUIDING BELIEF IN MANAGING FAMILIES	GUIDING BELIEF IN CONTROLLING FAMILIES
We, the family, operate and manage the business together. As a professional team, we are unbeatable. We set the highest standards for ourselves – and for every family member who works in the business. The interests of the business take precedence over private interests. For us, it is essential that at least one – ideally several – family member is represented in the business and within the executive management. Without representatives of the family at the head of the business, we are no longer a family business![4]	As an owning family, we bring in the most professional management, selected from the market. We understand our responsibility for steering the business, but not for managing it. We set the strategic and value-oriented framework. Through our role as owners, we assume entrepreneurial responsibility from within the relevant bodies and committees.[5]

Yet even if this transition has already taken place in many business families, is currently taking place or will do so in future, each individual family will initially feel as though it is standing on shifting ground. Many inherited patterns of thinking, behaviour and feeling are called into question at this threshold. Long-established beliefs[6] are put to the test and must ultimately be relinquished. The business family as such must therefore redefine itself: it must reinvent its role, its self-understanding and the expectations it has of itself. Only with this changed view of itself can the business family approach the appointment of top-management positions in a meaningful way. Otherwise, it risks confusing the strategic steering of the business with its operational leadership.

It is evident from experience that businesses which attempt to operate within the paradigm of the "controlling family" frequently find themselves succumbing to the temptation to maintain a degree of influence. This approach can have a detrimental effect on the business. Such a blending of roles can be the source of multiple conflicts that may damage, demotivate and drive away a TMT made up of non-family executives. Indeed, practical observation shows that the first appointment of a fully non-family executive management team often comes under precisely this kind of strain. In many cases, non-family top management then fails after an unexpectedly short period. This can be observed in particular where the non-family executive has not emerged from within the family business itself, having worked "under" or alongside the last family-internal manager, but has instead been sought and selected externally, usually through an extensive recruitment process. Such an unfavourable scenario is the result of unclear expectations. If the business family wants a non-family solution for leadership succession, it must understand what it is entering into: it is giving up control.

But is that really the case? In fact, it is not. If the owning family wishes to continue exercising a formative influence on the business, then, in line with "good governance", it should do so through the supervisory or advisory body. Nevertheless, giving up leadership responsibility is often difficult for family-managed family businesses. The following quotations illustrate those mixed feelings very clearly:

[4] From Rüsen, Schlippe & Groth (2023), p. 12.
[5] See ibid., p. 17.
[6] This is pointedly illustrated by the statement of one family entrepreneur: "Without representatives of the family at the head of the business, we are no longer a family business. In that case, we might as well sell!"

"For 25 years now, no member of the family has worked in the business. We, the representatives of the sixth generation, who still experienced a time when three cousins were active as personally liable partners, somehow still mourn that loss. Even though we are entirely satisfied with our non-family executive board, we feel that we have lost our entrepreneurship."[7]

Others are now at the helm – and, it should not be forgotten, for good reason: it was not possible to recruit top management from within the business family. That individual family members may occasionally think they would have made different decisions than the current CEO is to be expected.

At the same time, external top managers need to understand clearly what they are entering into when they join a family business – as the quotation above illustrates. Despite the increasing professionalisation that characterises the way family businesses operate, certain features remain that distinguish them from anonymous publicly held companies.[8] These typical characteristics include strong loyalty and trust with stakeholders (employees, suppliers, customers, banks, advisers), less formalised processes, more direct communication and – usually still perceptible at least to some extent – decision-making principles shaped more by people than by procedures.[9]

Both sides therefore face a learning curve. The business family must learn what family-neutral governance entails, while the non-family managers must understand that they are entering a setting with an informal governance system too, and must learn how to deal with it. Both the business family and the external top managers should communicate their mutual expectations in a structured process. Here, implicit expectations are particularly important. Precisely those points that remain unspoken and are taken for granted can become highly charged in a sensitive situation, which is why a careful comparison of respective assumptions is so crucial. Open and appreciative feedback is essential, especially at the beginning of the collaboration, and should ideally take place within the "governance triangle" of owners ↔ management ↔ supervisory bodies (see box). Finally, part of the personal strength of a CEO who has come into the family business from outside is a willingness to speak with their predecessors from the family from time to time. Such conversations are at the very least a sign of appreciation and, at best, can help create understanding for divergent perspectives and defuse emerging conflicts.

BECOMING A CONTROLLING FAMILY: CLARIFYING ROLES WITHIN THE "GOVERNANCE TRIANGLE"

For the so-called "governance triangle" of owners ↔ management ↔ supervisory bodies to function effectively, the business family must clarify its understanding of roles – both as shareholders and as family representatives on governance bodies – and establish clear rules for collaboration. Each of the three corners should stand in a constructive and balanced relationship with the other two. Such interaction rarely emerges naturally. On the contrary, to succeed as a controlling family, and to remain one, the business family must develop a clear and detailed picture of its future and of the interactions between the individual actors involved.

Many things once taken for granted, along with many established habits, will no longer work after the transition from Mental Model 2 to Mental Model 3. This is because non-family top management has been shaped by different professional backgrounds and, in some cases, has entirely different expectations of governance than the owners' representatives. Disappointment, failed communication and the feeling of not being understood, or of not speaking the same language, often arise here from insufficient clarification of expectations. Figure 1 shows how a new understanding of roles can be developed and described.

[7] Rüsen, Schlippe & Groth (2023), p. 24.
[8] At least, this applies to business families operating within Mental Models 1 to 3.
[9] Although the extent to which such characteristics are present varies considerably and is closely linked, not least, to the size of the business.

Figure 1: The governance triangle

For each of the three corners, or roles, it is necessary to clarify what its tasks are and how it brings this structure to life.

1. **What self-image is linked to the role, and what objectives are to be achieved?**
2. **What specific tasks need to be carried out?**
3. **What rights and duties are linked to the role?**
4. **What does the relationship with the other two roles look like, and how are the role and these relationships lived in everyday practice?**
5. **What commitment exists regarding presence in the business, such as participation in conferences and company events?**

Across the business landscape, there are numerous stable appointments of non-family top managers. Where non-family top management comes from within the business's own ranks, this can be an ideal solution, especially in the transition from Mental Model 2 to Mental Model 3. Such candidates have acquired knowledge within the business over many years, or even decades, particularly with regard to informal aspects. This can be extremely valuable during the family's transition phase and can help establish a stable position for the non-family manager.[10]

[10] Family businesses such as Merck, Henkel and Freudenberg are examples of such solutions.

FOUR TYPES OF NON-FAMILY MANAGER

The importance of personal and cultural fit between the non-family manager and the business family cannot be overstated. A study conducted in the 1980s[11] produced a matrix of basic types of non-family managers that remains valid today. According to its findings, the dimensions of "autonomy" and "personal relationship" define the space in which motivation, power structures, authority, trust and conflict develop.

1. The confidant

Executives of this type place great importance on a close and harmonious relationship with the owner(s). They always involve the business family, or specific family members, in important decisions. The confidant is accustomed to the family exerting influence and accepts such interventions as the undisputed prerogative of the owners of the business. In this circumstance, the personal relationship with the owner or owning family has an impact on motivation and willingness to perform. Managers of the confidant type do not seek to expand their own autonomy or to build an independent power base within the business. For them, the backing of the owning family is sufficient.

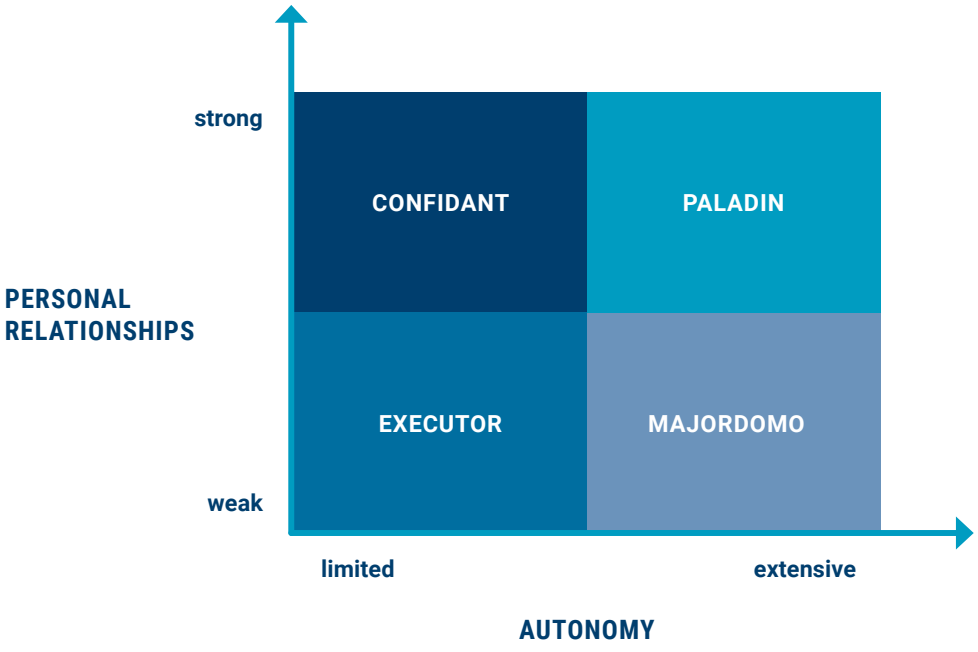


Figure 2: Four types of non-family manager

[11] von Schultzendorff (1984).

2. The paladin

Executives of this type also value a good relationship with the owners, marked by mutual appreciation. However, the personal relationship must not become so close, or so unbalanced, that the paladin feels controlled; the paladin wants to act as independently as possible. They have their own ideas about how they wish to lead the business and consciously use success to strengthen their own position of power.

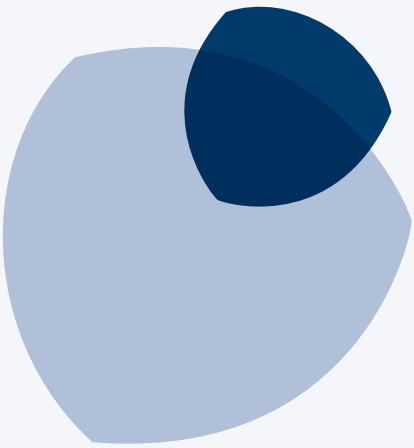
3. The executor

This type of manager acts as the implementor of the owners' will. Their autonomy is limited and, at the same time, their personal relationship with the business family is only weakly developed. This setup has the features of a subordinate relationship. The executor does not just take orders, but the owners' influence (and their approval of the manager's actions) is very strong. Typically, an executive of this type will either try to strengthen their relationships with the business family or to expand their position within the business. In general, however, the executor role is only a transitional state.

4. The majordomo

This type of executive has the greatest and most undisputed autonomy. The personal relationship with the owners is only weakly developed. The majordomo has acquired so much power, whether delegated to them or fought for, that they can act like an entrepreneur and as their own boss. This form is found mainly in larger businesses, where the influence of the owning family may, for example, be restricted under stock corporation law. The majordomo consolidates their power within the business and does not derive it from the goodwill and backing of the business family.

Each business family must explore which type is most suitable for their business – considering their needs and those of the business. How much closeness to the family can and does it wish to allow? How much autonomy and freedom can and does it wish to grant a top manager? One of the four types may appear more or less suitable given the answers to those questions. Ultimately, however, the decisive question is which type of manager the family business needs. If the business is in crisis, the executor type – who may, at first glance, seem the least conspicuous – may be precisely the right appointment. Without strong entanglement in family matters or internal loyalty conflicts, they may be the person who can lead the business out of crisis calmly and dispassionately.



1.2 | NON-FAMILY MANAGEMENT: THE EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE AS ENTREPRENEURIAL ADDED VALUE

One of the most effective ways to remain agile and adaptable in VUCA[12] times is the ability to adopt different perspectives. The central idea is reducing complexity through diversity. Since the ability to respond, and to respond intelligently, will play an even greater role in entrepreneurial success in future, it will become increasingly important to think and act from different points of view. Therefore, those who enable their organisation to actively integrate diverse internal and external perspectives will be fit for the future.

However, it is not enough simply to hire employees with different backgrounds. The real benefit of diversity only becomes clear when the views of those who think differently are consciously valued in everyday working life and deliberately incorporated into decision-making. This also applies, and especially so, to the selection of a non-family top manager and to the design of their role within the business.

Family businesses are unique in many respects, both in their structure and in the way they operate. Their strongly developed organisational culture is often linked to the expectation that new external executives are a "cultural fit" if they adapt easily to existing structures and processes, and if their behaviour and type are as similar as possible to previous leaders. This, however, can cause potential to be overlooked – potential that can only be unlocked when differences in thinking and action are seen as a strength.

The following example shows that divergent perspectives can sometimes be challenging in everyday practice, yet they are the best safeguard against the entrepreneurial risk of a monoculture of thought. This applies not only to top management, but also to the appointment of important bodies such as advisory boards. External individuals with operational experience can offer considerable added value here, provided they are professionally selected and highly qualified.

PUTTING UP A STOP SIGN

Shortly after the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008, a family business from southern Germany – a leader in its industry – decided on investments running into several millions of euros. Despite significant drops in revenue, the majority of shareholders were in favour of building new, costly production facilities abroad, as these investments had been planned for years and the shareholders were emotionally attached to the new-build plans.

The non-family managing director recognised that this expensive project was primarily about the interests of individual family branches, while entrepreneurial considerations had become secondary. He argued emphatically in favour of postponing the investments, fully aware that no one could reliably predict future economic developments. The shareholders were persuaded and later acknowledged that the managing director had been right in his critical assessment. Given his external perspective, he had been able to judge the situation more objectively than the internal actors.[13]

The specific combination of business, family and ownership, together with the significance of the relationship between owning families and their business, creates a particular relationship between the family and non-family top managers. This requires a high degree of sensitivity and adaptability on the part of top managers. To be successful, they must understand family dynamics, build trust and, at the same time, assert their professional authority. They must learn how to work in an environment in which personal relationships and family ties play such a central role. They must also recognise that these specific characteristics are not "irrational", but represent a distinctive imprint that needs to be understood and handled productively.

[12] VUCA: volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous.
[13] Example taken from Ritter (2014).

Working with and for the family becomes problematic for non-family top managers when the family is not united and they are confronted with differing expectations from family members. Such hidden or open conflicts all too quickly have a negative impact on management. In such cases, it is often impossible to satisfy everyone and find a solution that is satisfactory to all parties. In the worst case, this leads to decisions no longer being made or being deliberately blocked.

In such situations, external top managers sometimes make the mistake of acting like "would-be" owners in order to impose a clear line and force the family to reach a consensus. This indicates that non-family managers have misunderstood their role and lack the tact and sensitivity required to deal with the owning family. To avoid such situations, the consistent implementation and clear communication of good, robust family governance are crucial.

1.3 | GOOD GOVERNANCE AS A GUARANTEE OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

In family businesses, informality plays a greater role than in many other organisations. Important decisions are often not made by official bodies, but within the family setting, with founder figures enjoying strong authority. These family-based principles of functioning and unwritten rules have a considerable influence on everyday business life. For outsiders, this often means that power relations and decision-making processes are difficult to understand. The familiarisation period for non-family top managers is therefore extended, as they first have to understand those internal structures. A higher degree of formality, by contrast, enables external executives to realise their potential more quickly. Good governance structures support a family-shaped corporate culture by formalising unwritten rules and creating a binding framework.[14]

A central aspect of good governance in family businesses is that everyone involved correctly understands their and each other's roles. The composition of the advisory board or other decision-making bodies is often based both on competence and on family affiliation, with major shareholders occupying a special position. This dynamic can make it more difficult for non-family managers to assert themselves, even when they hold senior leadership positions. It is therefore essential that all those involved know and accept their roles in order to safeguard the overall success of the business.

In addition, the family's ability to engage in dialogue plays a decisive role. Emotional family factors can give rise to conflicts and misunderstandings that place a burden on the business. Members of supervisory bodies have the demanding task of moderating such conflicts and ensuring that family disputes are not played out at the expense of the business. The professionalism and leadership quality of the chairs of these bodies are of great importance: they must ensure that everyone's roles[15] are respected and that all members are encouraged to fulfil their duties. It is particularly important to involve young shareholders and to make use of all members' potential. Strong family governance, ideally developed in conflict-free times, is a prerequisite for effective corporate governance.

Openness and honesty in communication are further key factors in successful collaboration between the family and executive management. Regular communication is crucial here, both through informal exchange and through reports from non-family top managers to the shareholders. Identifying and observing the duties to obtain and provide information – which often differ from one family business to another – is essential. Tact and empathy are required. Good governance in family businesses relies not only on structures and processes, but above all on the willingness of family representatives to put them into practice consistently.

[14] See on governance: Koeberle-Schmid, Witt & Fahrion (2010).
[15] See the governance triangle on p. 8.

2 | FINDING THE RIGHT LEADER

The search for a suitable leader, whether as part of the top-management team or as successor to the current entrepreneur, always represents a significant change. In the case of entrepreneurial succession, it is about far more than simply filling a vacant position; it marks a decisive turning point in the history of a business. This is shown by the fact that, in around 65 per cent of all first appointments involving external successors,[16] problems arise six to twelve months after they take office, which in most cases make a new recruitment process necessary.

2.1 | CHALLENGES IN EXTERNAL APPOINTMENTS

The causes of problems with external successors vary:

- **Insufficient clarification of the business strategy:** There is often a lack of clear alignment among shareholders and family members regarding the future direction of the business and the mandate of the new non-family successor.
- **Insufficient moderation of the succession process:** The succession process, or external search process, should be well structured and include a competence-based evaluation of both internal and external candidates.
- **Poor integration of the new CEO/member of executive management:** A successful candidate needs appropriate integration into the business at the start of their role.
- **Lack of shareholder involvement:** The CEO does not involve the shareholders sufficiently, whether intentionally or unintentionally, in the preparation and implementation of important decisions.

To lower the chance of these challenges arising, it is essential to clarify a number of questions and issues in advance:

Do the shareholders share a long-term perspective regarding …

- the future role of the family?
- the vision, direction and form that the business will pursue or take on?
- the leadership and organisational model?
- the distribution of authority within the decision-making process?

Are there clear structures and areas of responsibility within the advisory board regarding …

- the family's involvement in decision-making?
- the nomination procedure and term of office?
- the role of the chair/CEO?
- the scope of the advisory board's authority and its relationship with executive management?

Who controls and is involved in the hiring decision?

- Does the decision rest solely with the advisory board or supervisory board, or with a body entrusted with the executive search?
- Do family members have a right of veto or a role in the interview process?
- Are there family members who need to be consulted, even if they are not members of the advisory board or of the body entrusted with the executive search?

What organisational and decision-making models exist?

Is the business based on:

- hierarchical models that require a leader who makes decisions from the top?
- cooperative and consensus-based models that rely on discussion and iteration?
- a model in which there is also "control from the background" by family members?

[16] From an internal Egon Zehnder analysis of succession projects at 400 German family businesses with revenues between EUR 50 million and EUR 1.5 billion.

In the event that the current CEO or a senior executive steps down, it will be essential to consider the following questions:

- **Future role of the departing CEO:** What role will the departing CEO take in future?
- **Supporting the leadership transition:** How will the change in business leadership be supported within the existing organisation?
- **Requirements for the new leader:** What specific requirements must the new senior executive meet in the current phase of the business's development?
- **Transition management:** Is a temporarily appointed "wise adviser" required to take over leadership during the transition phase?
- **Protection against turbulence:** Does the business need a "shock absorber" to protect it from internal conflicts within the advisory board or among the shareholders?
- **Mentoring for the next generation:** Should the new senior leader also act as a mentor for younger executives or the NextGen, preparing them for future challenges?
- **Strategic leadership:** Is a strategically oriented leader needed to guide the business in improving its market position?

Carefully answering these questions and taking the above aspects into account are crucial to finding a suitable successor and ensuring a successful handover of business leadership.

2.2 | THE SUCCESSION PROCESS

A professional succession process is crucial to successfully managing the challenges associated with non-family succession in family businesses.[17] It not only helps avoid potential stumbling blocks, but also ensures that the succession is structured smoothly. In addition, it enables the identification of the non-family top manager who is the best fit for the business. A succession process aimed at appointing a non-family leader can be divided into three key phases:

1. **Alignment and shared commitment among the shareholders:** In this first phase, it is essential that all shareholders develop a shared understanding of the need for, and the objectives of, the succession process. This includes carefully moderating discussions within the business family and in the relevant bodies. A strategy workshop can help discuss and specify the vision and future of the business. In addition, the shareholders should jointly determine the design of the succession process, and select a suitable process facilitator and brief them in advance, providing all relevant background information. A comprehensive analysis of the business's current overall situation is also essential in order to make informed decisions.
2. **Selection and decision-making process for candidates:** In this phase, potential succession candidates are systematically identified and selected. Criteria should be defined that take account of both professional qualifications and personal and cultural fit. A transparent and structured decision-making process is crucial to ensuring acceptance of the chosen candidates.

[17] See also Fernández-Aráoz & Iqbal (2024) in the international context, and specifically Fernández-Aráoz (2020).

3. **Integration and development of the candidate:** This phase is crucial to the long-term success of the succession. Targeted onboarding and continuous support for the new non-family leader are necessary to ensure a smooth handover of responsibility and to strengthen trust between the new top management and the business family.

2.2.1 The role of business values in the succession search

When considering the current overall situation, the vision and the future of the business as part of the first step, business values should play a central role. This is especially true in family businesses, where these values are often deeply rooted in the corporate culture. They not only shape the identity of the business, but also influence the decisions and behaviour of everyone involved. They act as a moral centre that supports the business in difficult times, enable differentiation in the market and provide long-term orientation.[18] When selecting a suitable successor, it is therefore crucial that the candidate not only has the necessary professional qualifications, but also shares and embodies the business's values.[19] Especially in today's volatile times, no fundamental fault lines should run through the top leadership team or between non-family management and the family. A shared understanding of values, by contrast, promotes acceptance and trust between the new top management, the business family and employees. It also helps ensure that the future strategic direction of the business remains aligned with its original values.[20]

At the same time, the succession process should be understood as an opportunity to examine whether the current corporate culture still fits the strategy. It may be appropriate to use the upcoming leadership transition to clarify which aspects of the corporate culture should be preserved and where succession now offers an opportunity to develop that culture in a targeted way. Leaders play a decisive role in shaping corporate culture, especially in family businesses. Successors must be aware that the behaviours of their predecessors often continue to influence the business.

Cultural change in the course of a succession process should not be regarded as self-evident or automatic. Rather, it requires active shaping and communication. Ideally, the departing leaders will initiate a corresponding transformation process. It is helpful here to understand corporate culture as the result of repeated behaviours. To further develop an organisation's culture, leadership teams can introduce, model, enable and encourage new behaviours, thereby establishing new norms.

It is important to emphasise that no single culture or strategy alone leads to above-average performance. Rather, it is the deliberate alignment of cultural and strategic priorities that determines an organisation's overall success. This process will only succeed, however, if the new leadership team agrees on shared goals for the transformation process and consistently practises the associated behaviours themselves while supporting them in others.

Business values should guide the selection and integration of new leaders. By ensuring that their values are clearly defined, communicated and integrated into the selection process, family businesses can increase the likelihood that the new successor will not only meet the professional requirements, but also preserve and strengthen the cultural identity of the business.

[18] Fernández-Aráoz et al. (2019).
[19] On the relationship between the CEO's personality, corporate culture and business performance, see also O'Reilly et al. (2014).
[20] See also Fernández-Aráoz, Iqbal & Ritter (2015).

2.3 | DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL ROLE SPECIFICATION

Family businesses face a variety of challenges and opportunities that shape the context for a successful succession search. Digitalisation, demographic change and geopolitical tensions[21] not only bring new requirements, but also create opportunities to develop innovative business models.

The **role of the business family** is central here. It influences the strategic direction of the business, and the way in which decisions are made. In addition, it is important to clearly define how the business family presents itself both internally within the business and externally towards stakeholders, especially once non-family top management has assumed responsibility. Such clarity helps avoid misunderstandings that could lead to conflict. How employees and the public perceive executive management also plays an important role.

The **strategic priorities** for the future must be guided by a clear vision that provides the business with direction for long-term growth. It is necessary to clarify which resources and changes are required to realise this vision. This also includes identifying the major changes that will shape the future, such as technological innovation or changing customer needs. Proactively addressing these questions at the beginning of the succession process is crucial in order to respond to the challenges of the present day.

The challenges and opportunities facing organisations now, together with the strategic priorities for the future, form the framework within which the profile of the new non-family CEO or member of executive management is developed. This profile covers the required experience, personal characteristics and specific competencies.

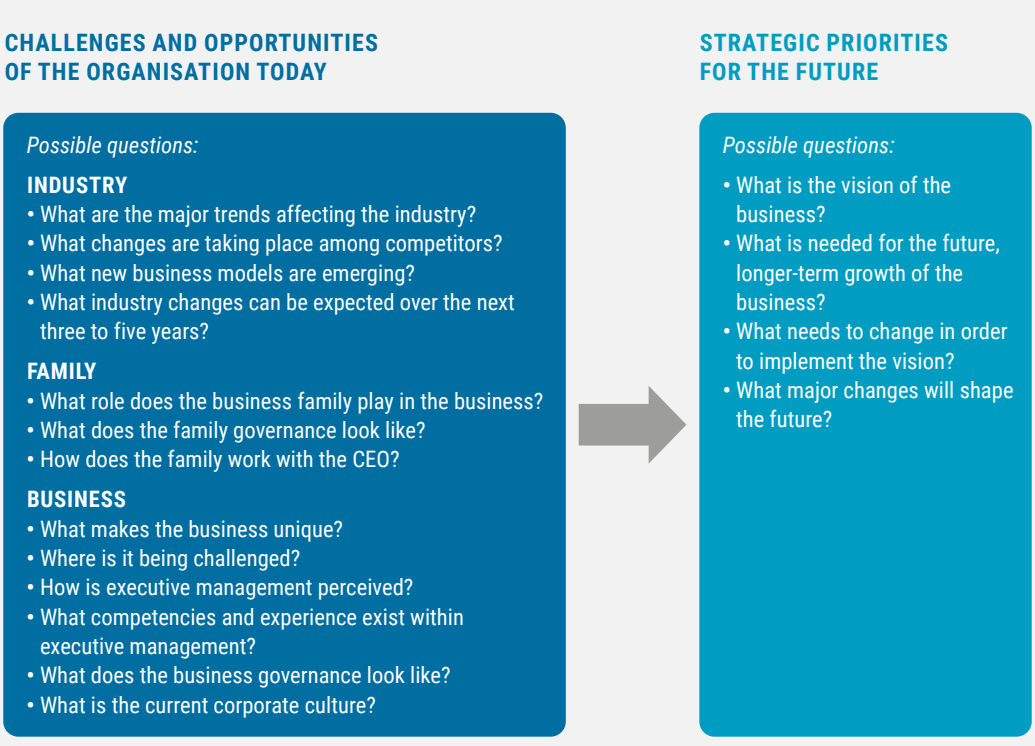


Figure 3: Addressing questions about the future (own illustration)

[21] On the many challenges of leadership, see also Busch et al. (2023), specifically Najipoor-Smith & Gerhard (2023).

Depending on the specific tasks involved in the role and the business, certain forms of experience are required in order to meet the challenges of the position:

- **Business context**
  The non-family manager should be familiar with the specific business field of the company and understand the dynamics of the market.

- **Management experience**
  Sound management experience is essential in order to steer the various aspects of business leadership effectively.

- **Industry context**
  Knowledge of the industry in which the business operates is necessary in order to make well-founded strategic decisions.

- **Global experience**
  In an increasingly globalised world, it is advantageous for the non-family manager to have international experience. This enables them to understand global markets and align the business accordingly.

However, it is important not to look only at past experience and achievements. The focus should be on suitability for current requirements, personality and potential to meet future challenges.

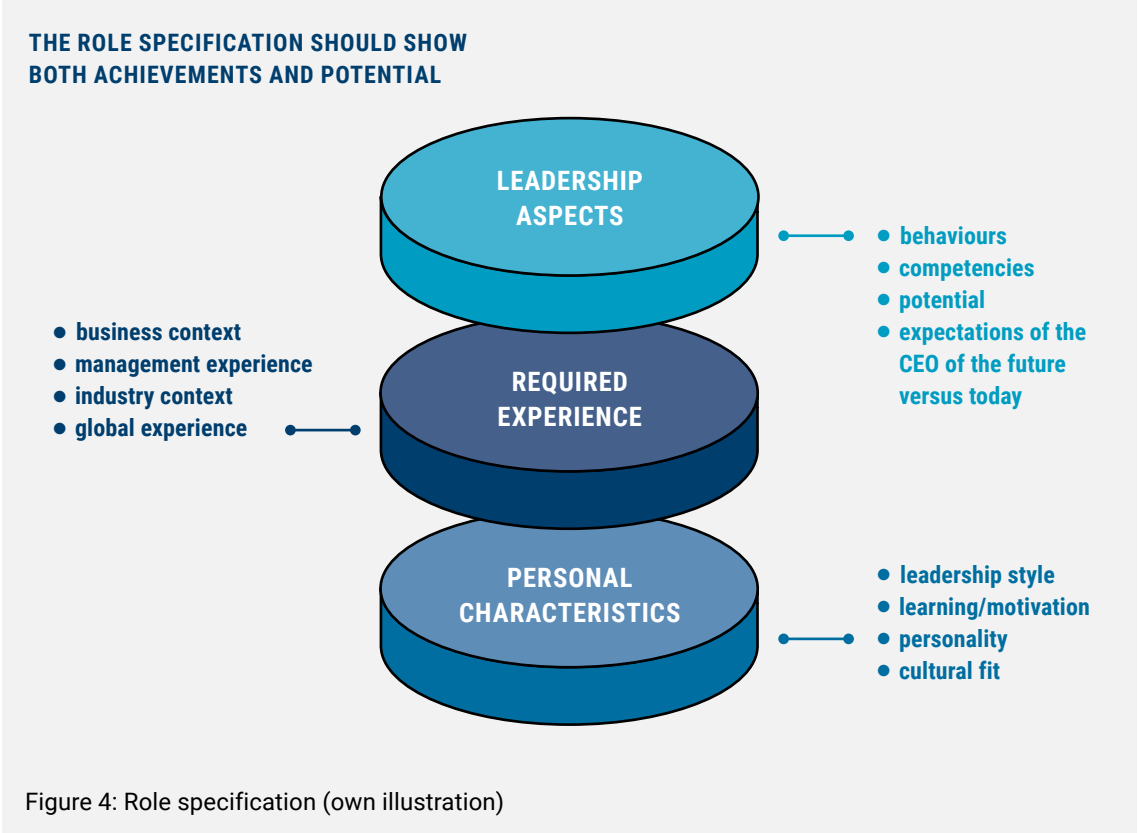


Figure 4: Role specification (own illustration)

2.3.1 Personal characteristics

A suitable leader for a family business should possess a range of personal characteristics that shape both their leadership style and their ability to integrate into the corporate culture. The most important characteristics include:

- **Leadership style**
  The non-family CEO or managing director should develop a leadership style that both motivates employees and supports the business's objectives. An inspiring and supportive leadership approach helps increase employee commitment and productivity.

- **Willingness to learn and motivation**
  A strong willingness to learn, together with intrinsic motivation, is essential in order to adapt to the constantly changing demands of every industry. The non-family successor should be prepared to acquire new skills and to continue developing.

- **Personality**
  Individual personality plays a central role, as it has a significant influence on the working environment and team dynamics. A positive and open-minded personality can help create a harmonious working atmosphere.

- **Cultural fit**
  New senior leaders should fit well with the existing corporate culture in order to ensure harmonious and productive collaboration. A good "cultural fit" consists above all in shared values and a common understanding of leadership. Only on this secure shared basis can a non-family top manager contribute valuable new perspectives and build trust in their decisions given the tension between what they should do, what they are

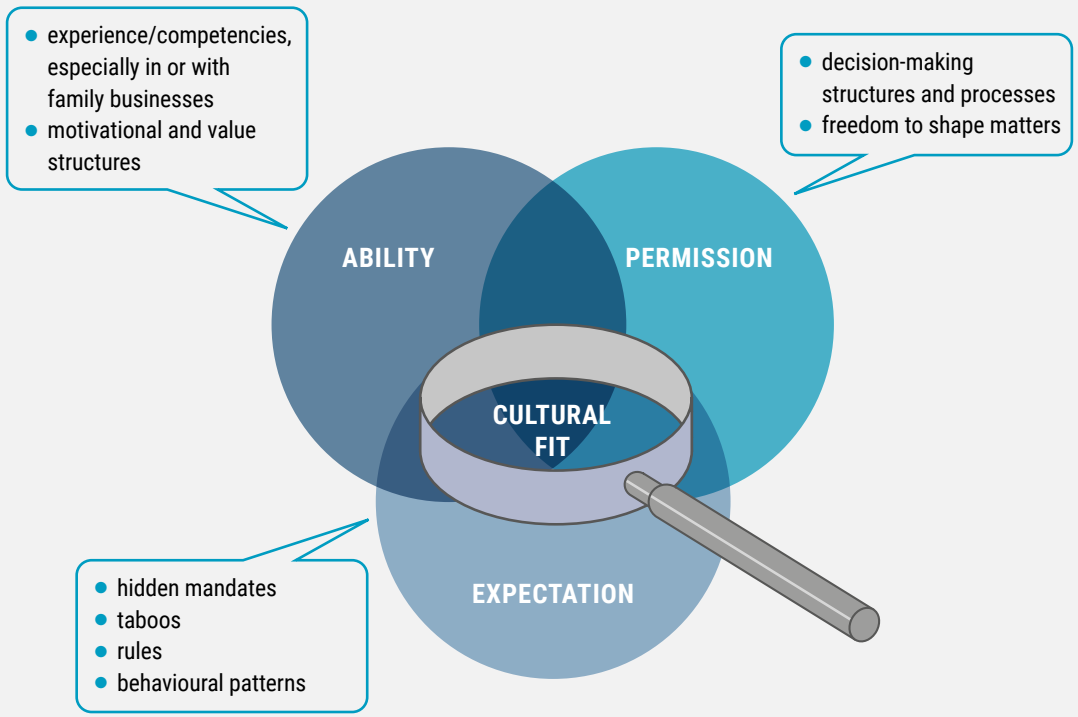
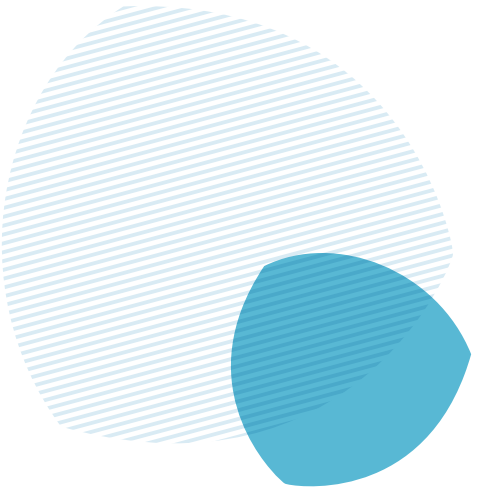


Figure 5: Cultural fit (own illustration)

able to do and what they are permitted to do in the complex structure of a family business.

In addition, the following questions should be considered: What behavioural patterns and informal, unspoken rules apply in the business? How will candidates show they have a personality profile that will support these informal rules? Within which decision-making structures will the new top managers operate, and how much freedom to shape matters can and should they be given – especially with regard to decision-makers from within the family? What are the no-gos and red lines in relation to forms of behaviour? What kind of conduct, leadership style and communication will not be tolerated or accepted? It is particularly important to identify and address the usually unwritten and implicitly prevailing behavioural expectations.



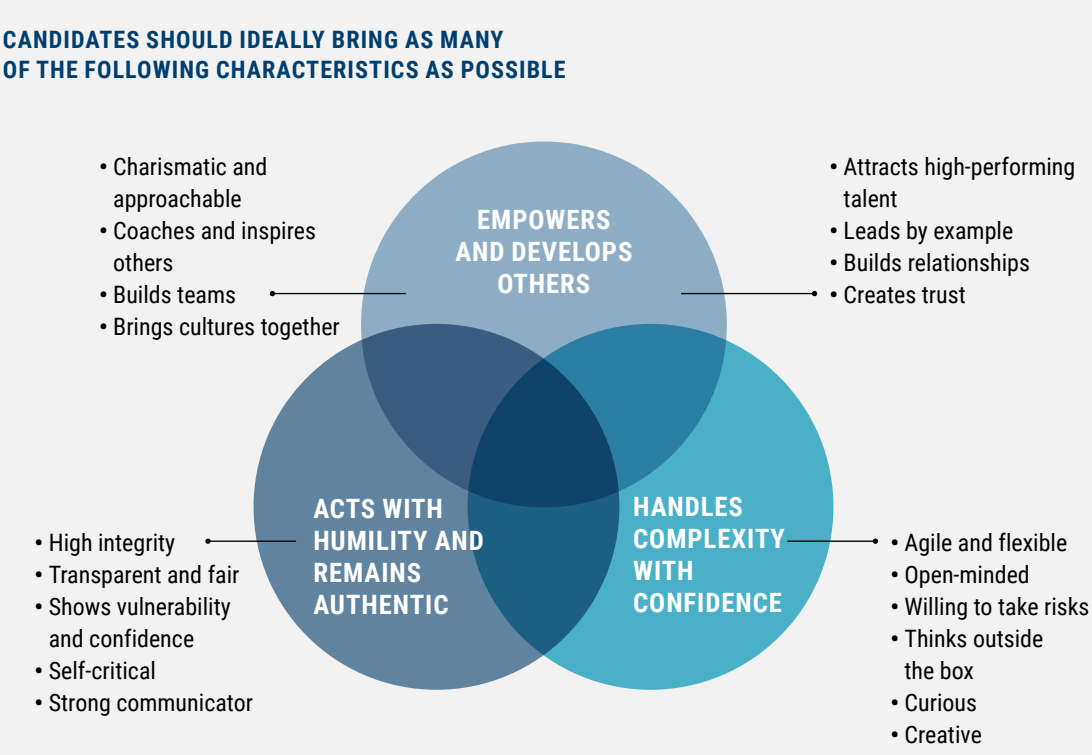


Figure 6: Personal characteristics (own illustration)

2.3.2 Key competencies

The ability to lead comprises various dimensions that are important for the role of the new CEO or managing director.

- **Behaviours:** The way in which the non-family successor acts and makes decisions shapes the corporate culture and employees' trust.
- **Competencies:** Professional and social competencies are crucial to understanding the many challenges of business leadership.

The competencies a leader needs depend on the vision and challenges of the business, as well as its positioning in the market.[22] Leaders should bring competencies in three core areas that are particularly important in family businesses:

- **Awareness of the distinctive character of family businesses** describes the ability to recognise the specific features of family businesses and to take them into account in decision-making. This includes understanding the history, values and long-term objectives of the owning family, as well as the ability to integrate these perspectives into strategic and operational decisions. People with this competency show sensitivity to cross-generational interests and act in the interests of the business's sustainable continuity.
- **Understanding and steering family dynamics** describes the ability to actively recognise, shape and moderate generational changes in the ownership of family businesses. This includes understanding family engagement, involving future generations and anticipating and supporting changes in the ownership structure. People with this competency promote transparent decision-making processes and contribute to the sustainable development of both the owning family and the business.
- **Implementing sustainable business leadership** describes the ability to shape entrepreneurial action in such a way that economic value creation, long-term sustainability and social change are brought into alignment. People with this competency recognise and moderate trade-offs between these dimensions, develop future-proof business models and act in line with the values of current and future generations.

In relation to the four types of non-family manager (see pp. 9–10), these core competencies should be present to varying degrees, depending on the relationship pattern between the manager and the family.

	awareness of the distinctive character of the family business	understanding and steering family dynamics	implementing sustainable business leadership
majordomo	●●●○	●●●○	●●●●
executor	●●○○	●●○○	●●●○
paladin	●●●○	●●●○	●●●○
confidant	●●○○	●●●●	●●●○

Figure 7: Levels of core competencies (own illustration)[23]

[22] An effective method for reaching a shared consensus on the key competencies required by the business is an existing competency model. Based on their values and strategies, businesses develop a catalogue of qualifications and skills that serves as the "lowest common denominator" for the entire management team. The advantage of this approach is that both family-internal and non-family managers are subject to a consistent, adaptable assessment framework aligned with the organisation's overarching objectives.

[23] The typological classification is based on insights gained from Egon Zehnder assessments of non-family executives.

2.3.3 Potential and the right mindset as keys to successful leadership

While evaluating competencies provides important insights into a candidate, it only shows the track record of past successes. Potential is an aspect of career development that encompasses what someone has achieved in the past, the abilities they currently possess and their capacity for future growth. Potential therefore refers to the qualities or leadership competencies that indicate whether someone will be able to succeed in a larger role. It also allows an assessment of how quickly this may happen.

- **Past: evidence of proven performance**
  How has the leader reached this point? At what pace have they progressed?

- **Present: readiness for the new role**
  Is the leader the right person for the position now? Will they be able to clear the next hurdle?

- **Future: potential**
  Will the leader grow into their role and continue to develop as their responsibilities change?

To assess a candidate's development potential for the next generation of the top leadership team, it is worth considering the following four drivers:

- **Curiosity:** Does the candidate actively seek new experiences, ideas and knowledge? Do they ask for feedback and adjust their behaviour accordingly?

- **Insight:** Does the candidate proactively gather and process a broad range of information? Do they discover new insights, revise existing views and set new priorities?

- **Persuasiveness:** Is the candidate able to appeal to both the emotions and rational judgement of others in order to communicate a compelling vision and bind individuals to the business and its leadership?

- **Determination:** Does the candidate drive the vision forward despite challenges while actively seeking disconfirming information?

The dimension of "curiosity" plays a particularly important role. At the individual level, curiosity means seeking new experiences, knowledge and feedback, and being open to change. Without curiosity, the motivation to look for new information, seek feedback or explore new possibilities is weaker. This can also make individuals more susceptible to confirmation bias, which may have a negative impact on their personal development.

WHAT SHOULD RECEIVE PARTICULAR ATTENTION WHEN SELECTING A NON-FAMILY TOP CANDIDATE?

- Analysis of social aspects ("continuity of life trajectories", value orientation)
- Analysis of previous business and shareholder structures
- Previous patterns of alignment in decision-making situations
- Analysis of media and public communication appearances
- How growth has been organised to date, for example, organically or inorganically
- How successfully post-merger integration processes have been managed
- What role profitability has played and what the main drivers behind it were
- Which "strategy type" the personality and management profile fits
- Assessment of "patience and interest" across a large number of conversations
- Analysis of personal handling of setbacks
- Personal fit in terms of willingness to spend a weekend with the candidate and their partner
- Of *increasing importance*: obtaining references over a longer career period.

3 | INTEGRATING THE NON-FAMILY SENIOR EXECUTIVE INTO THE BUSINESS

Starting a new role, especially in the C-suite, is challenging for any executive. It is therefore important, as part of integration or onboarding, to give top managers time to familiarise themselves with the business and build influence.

3.1 | INTEGRATION AND ONBOARDING PROCESS

The term "onboarding" often describes only the basic administrative steps involved in familiarising new executives with their role.[24] A broader view, in the sense of proper integration, is required: one that aims to introduce the new leader quickly and effectively to the corporate culture. A structured induction process that includes regular feedback and support is necessary to facilitate integration and enable early successes.

In general, there are five core tasks that new non-family managers must successfully take on in the first few months:

- **Taking on operational leadership:** quickly understanding operational challenges and achieving early successes.
- **Leading the team:** rapidly assessing the team and, where necessary, making adjustments.
- **Aligning with stakeholders:** building relationships and understanding the expectations of colleagues and the business family.
- **Interacting with the culture:** becoming familiar with the values and norms of the business.
- **Defining strategic intentions:** developing and communicating a clear strategy.

Many new non-family top managers focus too heavily on operational tasks and neglect the task of building relationships with their team and, in particular, with the business family. Such mistakes can slow down the integration process or have a negative effect on it. These new executives often find it difficult to settle into the corporate culture. The challenge then does not lie in a lack of competence on the part of the new executive, but in insufficient understanding of the organisational culture and politics, or in difficulties in building networks and connecting with the business family. The first 90 days after appointment are therefore key for the success of the new non-family top manager, as they lay the foundation for future collaboration.[25]

In these first 90 days in particular, attention should therefore be focused on introducing the new executive to, and integrating them into, the existing communication patterns and structures of collaboration with the owning family. This is one aspect of onboarding non-family executives that must go beyond the more general procedures used when onboarding top managers. The decision to appoint a new external CEO or managing director in a family business personifies the shift towards a controlling family. The external top manager must engage with the particular expectations the family has of them in this context, and with the extent to which their role will shape the future of the business. This often also involves recognising that not everyone in the family may welcome this change. Targeted and structured onboarding can enable non-family top managers to address the resulting conflicts quickly and productively. In this way, the external top manager consolidates their position at an early stage.

By investing in such a targeted integration programme tailored to the needs of a family business, the time needed to reach full effectiveness can be significantly shortened, with a positive effect on productivity and business profits.[26] Evidence shows that when executives receive professional support as they enter the role, the time they need to reach full performance can be reduced by up to 40 per cent, or from six to four months.[27]

A good start – by building trust, gaining a rapid overview of the business and achieving early successes – also increases the likelihood that new

[24] See also Fernández-Aráoz et al. (2015).
[25] On this, see Ritter (2014).
[26] On this, see Fernández-Aráoz & Iqbal (2024).
[27] The figures stated here refer to an internal evaluation conducted by Egon Zehnder of more than 1,000 projects.

executives will remain with the business for longer. Those who feel they belong, can celebrate successes and receive affirmation are more likely to identify with the business. External managers should therefore not be regarded as "outsiders".[28]

3.2 | PRACTICAL INSIGHTS: WHAT DOES GOOD INTEGRATION LOOK LIKE?

Integration should, ideally, extend over a long period and begin before the first official day in the business. The aim is to shorten the time the non-family top manager needs to settle into their role. Broadly speaking, this process can be divided into three phases:

Phase I: Preparing for entry

One of the challenges in the first few days is access to relevant information. There is often a lack of structured and open insight into the corporate culture, existing power structures and the unspoken expectations placed on the new executive. Coordination with several stakeholders is another challenge, as different perspectives from HR or within the business family can often be contradictory. The new leader should therefore prepare intensively before their first working day – ideally with the help of an external coach – and work with the HR partner, the TMT and the business family to anticipate the challenges of the first days in office, understand the corporate culture and prepare in a targeted way.

Phase II: Building momentum

One of the challenges in this phase is finding the right balance between listening and acting. The executive must build trust quickly without making decisions prematurely. There is considerable pressure to meet expectations. In this phase, the executive quickly becomes dependent on strong relationships with the team, the family and stakeholders at the same time. Communication barriers can also pose a challenge, as different communication styles or unspoken conflicts within the team may make it harder to build relationships based on trust. Unclear expectations may also arise if roles, responsibilities and objectives are not clearly defined, leading to misunderstandings. Different communication styles or unspoken conflicts within the team may likewise prove to be obstacles here.

In the first 30 days, the new executive should therefore focus on making a strong initial impression and investing in relationships of trust with colleagues and employees, with their team, the business family and the most important stakeholders. It is important to ensure clear expectations and effective communications between those involved.

Phase III: Maximising impact

One of the challenges in this phase is creating visibility while maintaining credibility. Partly unspoken expectations – especially regarding early visible successes or changes – can place pressure on this phase. An open feedback culture is often not yet in place or is not actively practised, which can hinder development and learning. Finally, initial measures must be translated into long-term strategies, requiring patience and perseverance in order to ensure sustainability.

In this third phase, it is therefore useful to focus on early successes in order to build credibility. Regular reflection – ideally supported by a coach and carried out in cooperation with the business family – is important to ensure that the direction taken still serves the interests of all those involved.

[28] See Ritter (2014).

In all three phases, various accompanying coaching interventions can support the executive on their path to full effectiveness. These measures include, among others:

- **Team workshop(s):** With new leadership at the top, the TMT must also redefine and realign itself. Depending on the starting situation, one or more workshops on team development, team alignment and crisis management can support both individual and team development.
- **Pulse check:** A survey to assess perceptions of the new executive and to plan any necessary adjustments.
- **360-degree review:** Feedback from colleagues, the business family and the team in order to identify obstacles and performance barriers.

CASE STUDY A

An experienced CEO takes over the leadership of a long-established family business with an international orientation. They previously led a major foreign unit of the business successfully, realigning it strategically and achieving significant growth. Their appointment to the top of the corporate group was made directly by the owning family, with whom they had already worked in a trusted relationship for many years.

The relationship with the family is characterised by mutual respect and close coordination. The CEO is aware of the particular dynamics of an owner-led business and accepts the family's active role in strategic matters. At the same time, they place great importance on a clear leadership style, independent decision-making and a long-term strategic orientation, which they develop together with their leadership team.

They do not use their successes to emancipate themselves from the family or to build a power base of their own. Instead, they use them to strengthen trust and expand their room for manoeuvre in the interests of the business. Governance structures such as an active supervisory board and investment approvals by the owners are, for them, a natural part of the system.

This executive can primarily be assigned to the confidant type:

- They maintain a close and trusting relationship with the owning family.
- They accept the family's influence as a natural part of their role.
- Their motivation derives from the family's backing, not from a personal pursuit of power.

At the same time, paladin tendencies are also evident:

- They aspire strongly to strategic independence.
- They want to actively and independently drive issues forward.
- They have a clear and assertive leadership personality.

This combination makes them a strategic confidant: an executive who combines closeness to the family with entrepreneurial independence.

CASE STUDY B

A long-established industrial company, owned by the same family for several generations, has developed over the years into a globally active technology group. The owning family remains fully involved as owner, but is not operationally active. Instead, the business relies on professional, long-term leadership by an external management team.

The relationship between the owning family and management is characterised by mutual trust, shared values and a clear understanding of roles. Fundamental strategic decisions are made in close consultation with the family, while the operational business lies entirely in the hands of management. The owning family contributes through structured governance formats such as advisory boards and shareholders' meetings, without intervening in day-to-day operations.

Management acts with a high degree of personal responsibility and entrepreneurial freedom. It pursues a long-term growth strategy, invests heavily in research and development, and places great importance on sustainability and social responsibility. The executives identify strongly with the values of the business and see themselves as stewards of a cross-generational legacy.

The leader in this context can be defined as a strategic confidant:

- They have a close, trusting relationship with the owning family.
- They accept family influence at the strategic level.
- Their motivation is derived from backing and a shared values base with the owners.

At the same time, majordomo tendencies are also evident:

- They appreciate a professionalised leadership structure with a high degree of autonomy.
- There is clear separation between ownership and operational leadership.
- They take entrepreneurial action in a global context.

This combination makes the business a prime example of a modern owner-managed organisation that combines family continuity with professional excellence.

4 | CONCLUSION

The search for, and integration of, a non-family senior executive as CEO, managing director or even direct successor to a managing family member in a family business is a complex process that requires careful planning and support. By taking the emotional aspects, governance structures and best practices in succession search and integration into account, businesses can set the course for successful collaboration. To overcome possible hurdles, family businesses should consider a number of best practices and success factors.

1. PROACTIVE, LONG-TERM AND STRATEGIC SUCCESSION PLANNING

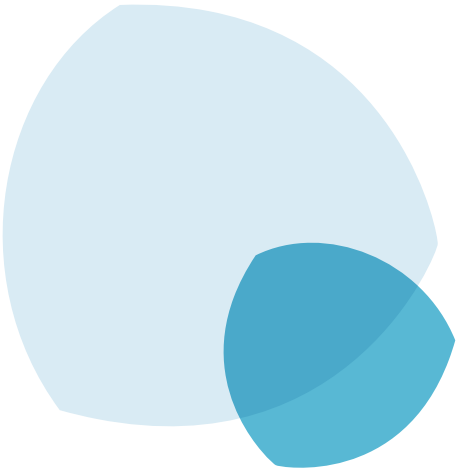
Strategic and proactive succession planning is essential to safeguarding the future of the business. It is important to address at an early stage whether operational leadership can be taken on from within the family and, if necessary, to develop a Plan B that includes a non-family top manager. Both family-internal and non-family candidates should be included on an equal footing in the professional succession process. This enables a comprehensive view of the best options for business leadership and helps identify the right talent. The role specification must be adapted to the organisation's strategic focus, its long-term perspective, its corporate culture, leadership dimensions and the desired dynamic between the new executive and the family. Cultural fit is of outstanding importance.

2. QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

Rather than concentrating on a large number of candidates and extensive documentation, family businesses should select suitable candidates in a targeted way and prioritise a deeper analysis of their qualifications and cultural fit. Too many candidates do not lead to better results.

3. SUPPORT NEW EXECUTIVES FROM THE OUTSET

Businesses that invest in the integration of new executives see faster results and fewer transition problems. Structured onboarding and continuous support are crucial to ensuring a smooth handover of responsibility. Effective support enables the potential of new leaders to be realised more quickly and the associated benefits to be achieved sooner. Confidence in the new executives is also greater because there is better knowledge of their abilities, which has a positive effect on the relationship between the family and the non-family manager.



4. CLEAR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Clear roles and responsibilities are crucial for successful collaboration between the business family and non-family top managers. The family should communicate its values, expectations and vision for the business openly in order to create a shared understanding and build trust. A sound understanding of roles and the ability to engage in dialogue within the business family are also important in order to avoid conflict and promote collaboration. The non-family top manager must familiarise themselves closely with the family culture and represent the family's values in the business context. Clear governance structures are necessary to make decision-making processes transparent and reduce uncertainty. Professionalising decision-making processes, based on data and proven practices, supports the efficiency and resilience of the business.

5. THE ROLE OF VALUES IN SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

The business's values should serve as a guide for the selection and integration of new executives. A shared understanding of values promotes acceptance and trust between the new top management, the business family and employees. It helps ensure that the strategic direction of the business remains aligned with its original values in future.

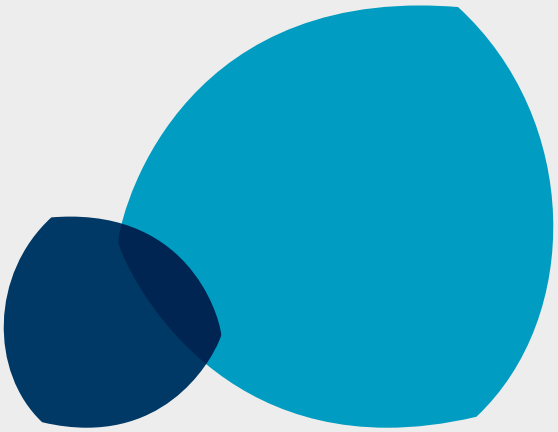
Overall, the successful search for and integration of a non-family top manager is not only a challenge, but also a valuable opportunity for family businesses. By implementing these best practices and success factors, businesses can lay the foundations for a sustainable future and make the best possible use of the advantages of non-family management.

5 | SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

This practical guide is a translation of the German practical guide from 2025 and does not seek to represent the international literature on this subject.

- Elsemann, A. (2022): Das gemischte Geschäftsführungsteam. Wege zu einer erfolgreichen Zusammenarbeit im Familienunternehmen. Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU Foundation.
- Felden, B.; Rüsen, T. A.; Wirtz, M. & Peyerl, C. (2023): Kompetenzbeurteilung in Unternehmerfamilien. Die Entwicklung der NextGen fördern – professionell und wertschätzend. Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU Foundation.
- Fernández-Aráoz, C. (2020): Developing the Next Generation of Leaders in Your Family Business. In: Harvard Business Review, January 31, 2020.
- Fernández-Aráoz, C. & Iqbal, S. (2024): Lessons from Large Family Firms About Choosing a CEO. In: Harvard Business Review Magazine, January-February 2024.
- Fernández-Aráoz, C.; Iqbal, S. & Ritter, J. K. (2015): Leadership Lessons from Great Family Businesses. In: Harvard Business Review Magazine, April 2015.
- Fernández-Aráoz, C.; Iqbal, S.; Ritter, J. K. & Sadowski, R. (2015): Familienunternehmen besser führen. In: Harvard Business Manager, 06/2015, pp. 56–65.
- Fernández-Aráoz, C.; Iqbal, S.; Ritter, J. K. & Sadowski, R. (2019): 6 Traits of Strong Family Businesses. In: Harvard Business Review, June 18, 2019.
- Gerken, M. & Hülsbeck, M. (2018): Auswahl und Einbindung familienexterner Geschäftsführer in Familienunternehmen. WIFU Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU.
- Gimeno, A.; Baulenas, G. & Coma-Cross, J. (2010): Familienunternehmen führen, Komplexität managen. Göttingen: V&R.
- Groth, T.; Rüsen, T. A. & Schlippe, A. v. (2020): Nachfolge im Familienunternehmen langfristig sichern. Wie Nachfolge in Unternehmen und Gesellschafterkreis gestaltet werden kann. 2nd updated edition. WIFU Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU.
- Iqbal, S. & Ritter, J. K. (2015): Leadership Succession: Wovon weltweit führende Familienunternehmen berichten. Lausanne: FBN-I.
- Kirchdörfer, R.; Kögel, R. & Wiedemann, A. (2024): Der Beirat in Familienunternehmen. Brückenschlag zwischen Rationalität und Emotionalität. 2nd updated edition. Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU Foundation.
- Kleve, H.; Rüsen, T. A. & Stibi, J. (2024): Motivation in der Unternehmerfamilie. Vom Engagement der Gesellschafter für das Familienunternehmen am Beispiel der NextGen. Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU Foundation.
- Koeberle-Schmid, A.; Witt, P. & Fahrion, H.-J. (2010): Gestaltung der Governance im Familienunternehmen. Gremien und Instrumente der Business und Family Governance. In: Zeitschrift für Corporate Governance, 4/10, pp. 161–169.

- Meier, M. M. & Rüsen, T. A. (2025): Succession to the Management Role – How to Succeed. Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU Foundation.
- Najipoor-Smith, K. & Gerhard, T. (2023): An der Spitze: Rollen, Potenziale, Perspektiven. In: Busch, A.; Knauf, A.; Najipoor-Smith, K.; Ritter, J. K. & Rocholl, J. (eds.) (2023): Leading Global Champions. Wiesbaden: SpringerGabler, pp. 3–10.
- Obermaier, O. (2023): Familienunternehmer als externer Beirat. Was es bei der Auswahl und Zusammenarbeit zu beachten gilt. Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU Foundation.
- O'Reilly, C.; Caldwell, D.; Chatman, J. & Doerr, B. (2014): The Promise and Problems of Organizational Culture: CEO Personality, Culture, and Firm Performance. In: Group & Organization Management, Vol. 39(6), pp. 595–625.
- Ritter, J. K. (2014): Die Chancen gelungener Integration. Externe Manager in Familienunternehmen. In: May, P. & Langenscheidt, F. (eds.) (2014): Familienunternehmen – 10 Themen, 10 Experten, 10 Seiten. Hamburg: Deutsche Standards, pp. 41–50.
- Rüsen, T. A. (2025): Gesellschafterkompetenz in Unternehmerfamilien. Was Familiengesellschafter und deren Angehörige wissen und können sollten. 2nd expanded edition. Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU Foundation.
- Rüsen, T. A.; Schlippe, A. v. & Groth, T. (2023): Mentale Modelle von Familienunternehmen. Wie Unternehmerfamilien über sich und ihre Verbindung zum Familienunternehmen denken. Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU Foundation.
- Schlippe, A. v.; Rüsen, T. A. & Groth, T. (2021): The Two Sides of the Business Family – Governance and Strategy Across Generations. Cham: Springer.
- von Schultzendorff, D. (1984): Fremdmanager in Familienunternehmen. Eine empirische Analyse. Dissertation. Hochschule St. Gallen.
- Wimmer, R. (2022): Postpatriarchale Führung. Wie Familienunternehmen eine neue Führungsstruktur entwickeln können. Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU Foundation.
- Wimmer, R.; Groth, T. & Simon, F. B. (2022): Erfolgsmuster von Mehrgenerationen-Familienunternehmen. Was ermöglicht Langlebigkeit? Practical Guide. Witten: WIFU Foundation.



CONTACT

EDITOR

The non-profit WIFU Foundation, founded in 2009, is committed to promoting not only research and teaching, but in particular practice transfer in the field of family entrepreneurship. Our most important supporters include around 80 family businesses from German-speaking countries. The focus of our activities is the acquisition, communication and dissemination of high-quality and current issue-related knowledge on family businesses and business families.

Our funds are primarily used to establish and maintain chairs, to support research projects and to award scholarships to young scientists. One focus of our funding is to support the work of the Witten Institute for Family Business (WIFU), based at Witten/Herdecke University, with its three research and teaching areas of business administration, law and psychology/sociology. The WIFU has been making a significant contribution to the cross-generational sustainability of family businesses in the field of research and teaching for more than 25 years.

Another focus of our work is the organisation and execution of congresses and other events on family entrepreneurship-related topics. Practice-oriented knowledge and skills to promote succession in the management of family businesses within the business family are conveyed in working groups, training courses and other formats. Our events are characterised by a protected framework which provides room for an intimate and open exchange. A comprehensive and active public relations work for research results in the field of family entrepreneurship completes the range of tasks of the WIFU Foundation.

Prof. Dr. Tom A. Rüsen
CEO of the WIFU Foundation
Alfred-Herrhausen-Straße 48
58448 Witten
Germany
E-mail: tom.ruesen@wifu-stiftung.de
Phone: +49 2302 88 98 300

AUTHORS

Dr. Michael M. Meier
Partner, Egon Zehnder

Prof. Dr. Tom A. Rüsen
CEO of the WIFU Foundation

Dr. Katja Portz
Consultant, Egon Zehnder

EGON ZEHNDER is one of the world's leading consulting firms for executive search and leadership advisory, and is the market leader in Germany. Egon Zehnder's clients include family businesses, corporate groups, private equity firms, start-ups and public-sector institutions.

Through the Family Business Advisory Group, business families, owners and managers receive support in addressing the cross-generational challenges of leadership, succession and governance. This includes, among other things, establishing and evaluating professional governance structures, supporting generational transition and developing family-internal executives, as well as appointing advisory boards and managing directors from among both family-internal and non-family candidates. Clients have access to the experience of 600 consultants worldwide, including more than 70 in Germany.

Egon Zehnder
Kö-Bogen, Königsallee 2a
40212 Düsseldorf
Germany
E-mail: michael.meier@egonzehnder.com
Phone: +49 211 13999 22

WWW.WIFU.DE

Alfred-Herrhausen-Straße 48
58448 Witten
Germany
E-mail: editor@wifu.de
Phone: +49 2302 88 98 300

www.wifu.de
https://de.linkedin.com/company/wifu-stiftung