

CAN 'GOOD CONVERSATIONS' MAKE SUCCESSION SMOOTHER ?

Executive summary and practitioner insights by Angèle Marinelli, PhD Fellow, and Cécile de Lisle, Executive Director, Dieter Schwarz Foundation Family Business Center, based on Janjuha-Jivraj, S., & Woods, A. (2002). The art of 'good conversations': A strategy to negotiate succession within South Asian family firms. *Strategic Change*, 11(8), 425–434.

This summary draws on the core findings of Janjuha-Jivraj et al. (2002), with interpretation and application developed independently by Angèle Marinelli and Cécile de Lisle for a family business audience



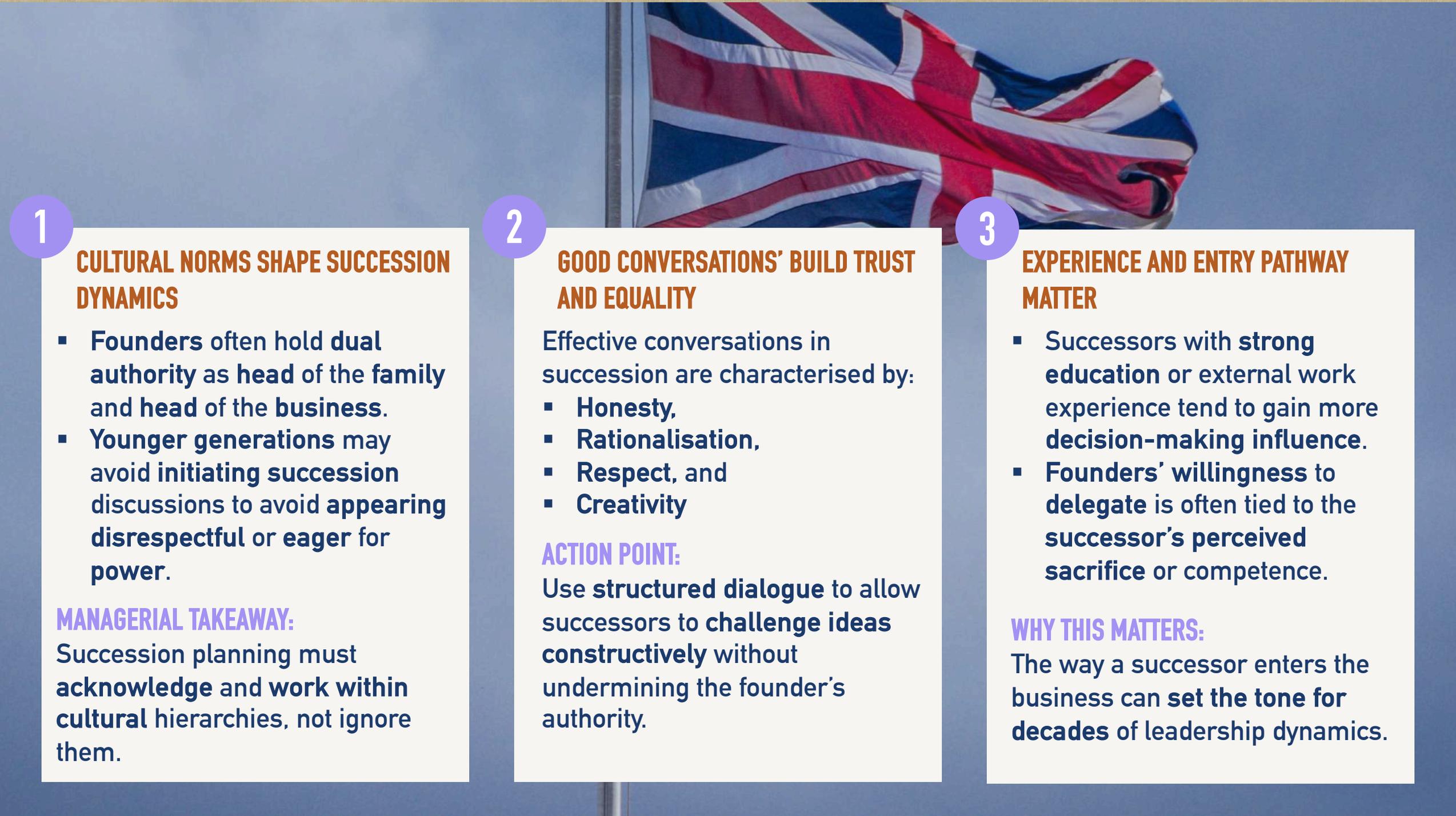
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Succession in family businesses is rarely simple. In South Asian family firms, **cultural norms, generational expectations, and strong patriarchal traditions** can make the process especially delicate. This study of **nine British Asian family firms** shows that while **formal succession planning** is rare, but introducing structured, respectful dialoguel (what the authors call **good conversations**) can **bridge emotional divides**, clarify expectations, and allow **both generations to shape the future** without **undermining authority**. The findings reveal that succession in these contexts is **less about rigid plans** and more about creating a culturally sensitive environment where both generations can **talk openly** without triggering conflict.

BUT WHAT DOES THIS MEANS FOR YOUR FIRM?

Continue reading to learn our **three key insights** and **questions to ask** within your family firm!





1

CULTURAL NORMS SHAPE SUCCESSION DYNAMICS

- Founders often hold **dual authority** as head of the family and head of the business.
- Younger generations may avoid initiating succession discussions to avoid appearing **disrespectful** or **eager for power**.

MANAGERIAL TAKEAWAY:

Succession planning must **acknowledge** and **work within** cultural hierarchies, not ignore them.

2

GOOD CONVERSATIONS' BUILD TRUST AND EQUALITY

Effective conversations in succession are characterised by:

- **Honesty,**
- **Rationalisation,**
- **Respect,** and
- **Creativity**

ACTION POINT:

Use **structured dialogue** to allow successors to **challenge ideas constructively** without undermining the founder's authority.

3

EXPERIENCE AND ENTRY PATHWAY MATTER

- Successors with **strong education** or external work experience tend to gain more **decision-making influence**.
- Founders' willingness to **delegate** is often tied to the **successor's perceived sacrifice** or competence.

WHY THIS MATTERS:

The way a successor enters the business can **set the tone** for **decades** of leadership dynamics.



QUESTIONS TO ASK WITHIN YOUR FAMILY FIRM



Are we creating safe spaces for both generations to share their vision for the business?



Does our succession approach unintentionally silence younger voices?



How can we respect cultural traditions while preparing for a professionalised leadership transition?



Do successors have opportunities for external experience before joining?



Are we discussing the *future of the business* before a crisis forces the issue?



BOTTOM LINE

In British South Asian family firms, succession is not just a **business process** but it's a **deeply cultural negotiation**. By adopting the principles of *'good conversations'*, families can reduce misunderstandings, respect hierarchical traditions, and still move toward a shared vision of the future. The goal isn't to eliminate conflict but to channel it into **constructive, culturally aware decision-making**.