

Polygamy and Family Owned Business Succession in Nigeria

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Abstract- *With the alarming rate Family Owned Businesses (FOBs) die at the demise of its founders/owners, this study looked at polygamy and the role it plays in smooth succession of FOBs in the Southeast Nigeria as its major objective. The study demystified the concept of FOB and Succession in FOBs vis-a-vis polygamy. The kitchen model of succession in FOBs operated by polygamous was also explained. Some factors militating against succession in FOBs of polygamous Families were discussed in detail. It was concluded that since FOBs play a great part in the economy of nations Nigeria and the South East inclusive, those owned by polygamous families need to start the processes of succession early enough to avoid squabbles at the demise of the owner/founder. Professionals should also be brought in early to handle major business decisions as well as avoid playing into the hands of sentiments and emotions while making critical succession decisions.*

Keywords: Polygamy; Family Owned Businesses; Business Succession; Survival

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Family Owned Businesses (FOBs) have been with us for quite a long time. As a matter of fact, it is seen as the oldest form of business in the world as adduced by De-Alwis (2011) who opines that FOBs represents the oldest and most prevalent type of business organizations worldwide. Similarly, Morck & Yeung (2004) posit that FOBs dominate the world economy in particular eras in the past and also at present. The existence of FOBs has contributed immensely to the economies of the local communities where they are established and even to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of different countries and the world at large. FOBs are believed to be a major contributor to the economy of different nations (Lee, Jasper & Goebel 2003[29]; Grassi & Giarmarco, 2008[20]; Boudewyn, Morgan & Watson, 2012)[12]. Corroborating this claim, Ghee, Ibrahim & Abdul-Halim (2015)[19] assert that FOBs are credited the world over for nurturing cross-generational entrepreneurial talents who contribute in great measures to the growth of any economy. Hence, the continuation and survival of FOBs appear to be paramount to the government of different nations. This was the view of Dumbu (2018)[18] who states that continuity of FOBs is critically important for the economic emancipation of any nation.

Many businesses are formed to be going concerns and to exist in perpetuity. Continuity or survival is one of the key objectives of every business (Babangida & Semasinghe, 2014)[7]. However, as a result of many factors, this fails to be achieved by these business especially FOBs that are managed by one person in most

cases at the inception. The person continues nurturing and growing the business and grows with the business. He becomes very attached to the business that it becomes difficult to let go and allow other members of the family or professionals to come in and help in the management of the business. This situation has hampered the survival of FOBs in the Southeast and the world over beyond the founder and probably the first generation. Babangida & Semasinghe (2014)[7] state that most small businesses and FOBs fail to continue after the retirement, incapacitation or death of the founder and only very few survive beyond the generation of the original founder.

One of the ways to ensure that organizations including the FOBs survive beyond the owners and first generation is to have a succession plan. Dumbu (2018)[18] insists that succession planning is the lynchpin for continuity of enterprises despite the form. This is because it develops employees to ensure that the organization has highly qualified employees who are capable of filling critical positions (Rollinson, 2017)[40]. It prepares an organization for the time when a key member or members of the work force moves on (Oyewole, 2018)[37]. Succession plan ensures that the management team and the Human Resource (HR) department share a vision concerning the staffing needs of the organization and ensures that there are no staffing gaps (Diamond, 2006)[17].

Succession plan is a conscious effort to prepare the organization to be a going concern. It is an act that makes an organization to exist beyond the founders by making sure that proper hands are brought in either within the family or outside to manage the business. However, despite the importance of succession plan, a lot of FOBs

seem not to be putting it into practice. Oyewole (2018)[37] avers that despite the many benefits of having a succession plan in managerial transition, many companies neglect to develop such plans that will encourage effective organizational performance.

Succession plan appears to be more enshrined and easier in a corporate and well-structured organization than in an FOB. This is probably because in a corporation, sentiments and emotions are relegated to the background in making decisions about the sustenance and continuous existence of the business, but in FOBs, the above in addition to pride emotions could becloud the sense of judgement of the business founders. This is even more prevalent in FOBs owned by polygamous families where there is more than one wife and children from different mothers but the same father. Oyewole (2018)[37] views this situation as dicey because it often creates huge succession problems, especially when the father/founder dies. This is probably because each member will be fighting for the interest of his closest bloodline thereby endangering the survival of the business. Ugoani (2015)[46] explicates that without a definite succession plan at the demise of the founder who is a polygamist, struggle for leadership may start. The rivalry between the siblings and spouses that follows the demise of polygamous entrepreneurs, coupled with a variety of cultural laws guiding inheritance in Nigeria which do not make room for the objective selection of the best persons as successor (Herman, 2015)[24]. It is against this backdrop that this work looks at polygamy and how it influences survival of FOBs in South East Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It is no longer news that FOBs are major contributors to major economies of the world, and Southeast Nigeria is not an exception as scattered all over the five states of the region are numerous FOBs of different sizes. However, most of these businesses as have been observed in the past appear to have issues once the owner/founder retires from the business or dies. This stance is corroborated by Ogundele, Idris & Ahmed-Ogundipe (2012)[35] who opine that despite the importance of FOBs to the national economy, the survival rate of family firms beyond the founder's generation is extremely low especially in Nigeria. Similar situations abound in the South East, North East, North West and many other parts of Nigeria where some enterprises have become moribund after their proprietors passed on (Arogundade, 2011)[5]. Very promising and vibrant organizations have closed down at the death of their founder, due to lack of adequate planning for succession (Ogundele, et. al., 2012)[35]. This brings to the fore the issue of proper succession planning in the FOBs in Southeast Nigeria.

The case of lack of succession is even more worrisome in FOBs owned by polygamous families. This is probably because there is a lot of concerns and considerations to be made while planning for succession if they wish to. There is usually one man and more than one wife with children

from different mothers. This usually breed problems as tension may arise as to who would take over the business whether it is going to be done on the basis of competence, seniority, tradition, interest of the kids, emotions and or trust. As a result of all these considerations, most FOB owners shy away from planning for the life of the business after them. When this is the case, the business will be thrown into turmoil at the demise of the founder/owners. This appears to be responsible for the death of so many FOBs owned by polygamous families in the Southeast region of Nigeria and has negatively affected the economies of the states in this region since the resultant effect are unemployment, poverty and many social vices in these states. It is against this backdrop that this study was deemed necessary to examine the issues of death of FOBs owned by polygamous families in the Southeast.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- a) Examine how polygamy affects the decision to plan for succession in FOBs in the Southeast Nigeria.
- b) Ascertain the reasons succession planning is difficult in FOBs owned by polygamous families in the Southeast Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Family Owned Businesses (FOBs)

FOBs have been around for a very long time, yet, there appear to be lack of consensus with respect to its definition. Many researchers, (Haag, Helin & Melin, 2006[21]; Kaiczy, 2013[28]; Ansong, 2013[4]; Vagneur, 2016)[47] have attempted to define the term but with little success to coming up with a commonly agreed position. This situation is even compounded according to Adedayo, Olanipekun & Oladipupo (2016)[1] by a lack of consensus about what constitutes a family: whether it should include only parents and children, or all blood relations and in-laws. Sequel to this, the definition differs along cultural, ethnic or even based on region and country. It has even been suggested that the definition of family business varies with culture (BirdThistle, 2009)[11].

Studies by Sarbah & Xiao (2015)[42] and Harms (2014)[22] characterized FOBs as an enterprise owned and controlled by multiple family members. Chrisman, Chua & Sharma (2005) [14]opined that the best way to define an FOB is by prioritizing the component of family involvement in management and control. The level of family involvement and participation in FOBs has to be intense. Family involvement in the management and ownership distinguishes the FOB form other business creations (Viriri & Muzividzi, 2013)[48]. In view of this, Ansong (2013)[4] purports that owner of family businesses are expected to be altruistic and so manage the business to the best of their potentialities to meet their family expectations.

Kraicz (2013)[28] buttressed the above point indicating that FOBs are firms governed with the intentions to shape and pursue the vision of the business held by the dominant coalition controlled by members of the same family for sustainability of the firm. An FOB is one that is owned by members of the same family to shape and/or pursue the formal or implicit vision of the business, in which it is the intention of family members to hand the business over to the next generation, or which has already been handed over to a family member to manage and/or control (Venter, 2002).

2.2 Family Business and Polygamy

There are different forms of marriage arrange ranging from a man and a wife, a man and many wives (polygamy) or in some societies, a woman and many husbands. Polygamy which is the crux of this study, simple means a man having more than one wife. Ugoani (2015)[46] explains that there are basically two major types of families. One is a family that is comprised of a father, mother and their children or, a husband, wives and their children in the case of a polygamous family. The children are related to each other as brothers, half brothers, sisters, and half-sisters. Polygamy is a widespread phenomenon in African countries that ranges from 20%-50% in comparison to 10 times of Asian societies (Al Hammadi, 2015)[3]. Polygamy is the marriage of a man to more than one wife, or the practice of having several wives at the same time.

Having more than one wife presupposes having children from different mothers but the same father. This appears to have implications on ease of succession in family businesses. This is probably because the owner/founder of the business may be faced with the challenge of how to ease the children into the business to avoid bias in the eyes of the children and their mothers or even the society. As a result of this, many polygamous family that own business run into issues at the demise of the father because the father may not have made adequately

provisions for succession while still alive for fear of troubles. This was the assertion of Barclay, Foskey & Reeve (2007) who posit that some business owners, especially polygamous ones, do not entertain the thought of succession in the sense that it brings them face to face with the reality of the problem of equal treatment of their children. For these and many other reasons, owners of FOBs would rather leave the issue of succession unattended to, and allow any family member to take over their businesses at their demise/death.

There is usually rivalry among the children and mothers on who will take over the business and this has led to demise of many FOBs. Adedayo & Ojo (2016)[2] opine that the rivalry between the siblings and spouses that follow the demise of polygamous entrepreneur coupled with a variety of cultural laws guiding inheritance in Nigeria does not make for an objective selection of the best material as successor. Machingambi (2014, p.276)[30] states "... in the case of death of the owner and if the owner had more than one wife and left no will, there was bound to be infighting as to who would take control of the business". This infighting and internal squabbles end up affecting the business negatively as asserted by Onuoha (2013)[36] who states that the chaos or strife that often follows the death of a founder on inheritance issues also militate against the continuity of family enterprises.

2.3 The Kitchen Model of Succession in Polygamous FOBs

Succession in FOBs owned by polygamous families is usually difficult considering the complexity and the dynamics in the family setting. Hence, a model known as the kitchen model has been recommended by Ugoani (2015)[46]. He avers that sometimes it takes the "kitchen model" to come nearer to an acceptable arrangement. The kitchen model was borne out of field work and experience and it is in vogue in Nigeria where the founder has polygamous status (Ugoani, 2015)[46].

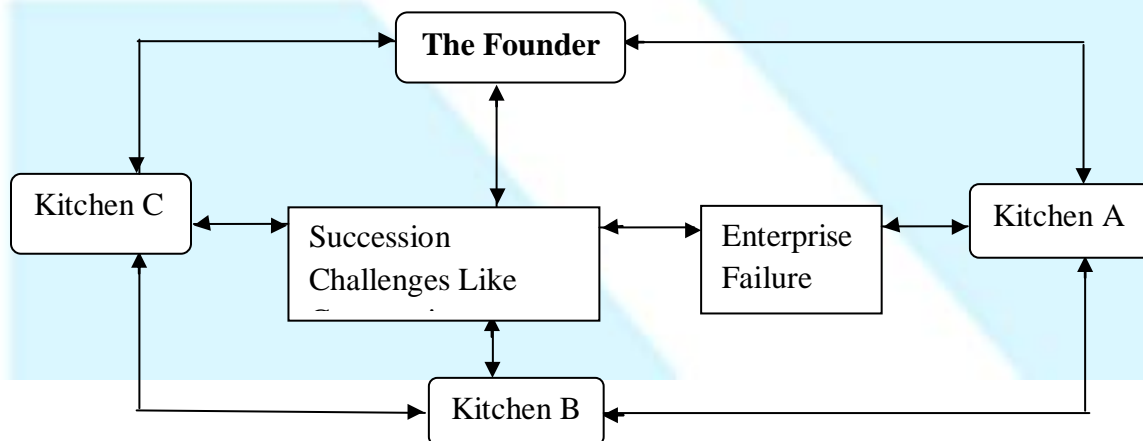


Fig. 1 Kitchen Model of Succession

Source: Ugoani, J. N. N. (2015). Challenges of Succession on Family Business Success-Kitchen Model. American Journal of Social Science Research 1(3), 163-168.

This model shows a hypothetical polygamist founder who had three wives on incapacitation or demise. The struggle for leadership rotates from the first son from the first wife in kitchen 'A', to the first son of the second wife in kitchen 'B,' and to the first son of the third wife in kitchen 'C' in that order or from whoever is the first son in the same order. This type of arrangement is not free from strife and squabbles as it could pose serious challenges such as blackmail, name calling, litigations and even threats to life, among brothers, sisters and other members of the same family or the extended family (Ugoani, 2015)[46].

2.4 Succession Planning in Family Owned Businesses

Succession is drawn from the word succeed, which means to come in the place of another person; to follow in order; to come next after; to take the place of. Hence, succession in business sense deals with who takes the place of the owner, who manages the business when the founder/owner or manager is no more or has retired. Succession in organizational theory and practice refers to the process of transferring managerial control from one leader or one generation of leaders to the next. It includes the dynamics preceding the actual transition as well as the after-math of the transition (Shepherd & Zacharakis, 2000)[44].

In the context of family business, Sharma, Chrisman, Pablo & Chua (2001)[43] define succession as the actions and events that lead to the transition of leadership from one family member to another. By extension, succession is the process by which ownership and control of the production or commercial infrastructure accumulated by one generation of a nuclear or extended family is transferred to the next (Adedayo, Olanipekun & Oladipupo, 2016)[1]. The motive behind succession is to transfer ownership of the firm to any of the family members rather than shutting down the business altogether.

Succession planning is a process where firms plan for the future transfer of ownership and it is generally considered to be a unique, case-by-case process, where a one-size-fits-all mentality is simply not appropriate (Sambrook, 2005)[41]. It is a comprehensive approach to strategic human resources management (Kesner & Sebor, 1994)[26], leadership development (Bernthal & Wellins, 2006)[9] and overall workforce planning (Kiyonaga, 2004)[27].

It is however important to note that succession planning is the processes leading to the final handing over. It deals with the whole gamut of selecting, training and relinquishing leadership, management and control of the business to the successor. Henry, Erwee & Kong (2013)[23] corroborating this, point out that FOBs succession planning is a process not a one event based on series of decisions and computations. It simply identifies specific people to fill key positions within an enterprise irrespective of its status (Ugoani, 2015)[46]. It is the

organized process of identification, preparation and grooming of potential successor(s) to take over the management, ownership and possession of the business (Arowolo, Ogunrombi, Apantaku & Adeogun, 2017)[6]. To succeed in this difficult exercise there is need for the implementation of thorough communication in the organisation. Haag et al (2006)[21]; Mutunga & Gachunga (2013)[33] Mohd, Javeed & Ayaz (2013) are of the opinion that succession planning in family owned businesses requires articulate and clear flow of communication to raffle out conflict in the process. One of the major ingredients of succession planning is the inclusion of conversation among all the parties concerned. In support, Phikiso & Tengeh (2017)[39] argued that succession cannot be planned without recourse to conversations in which different voices are heard. Inclusion of conversation and communication in family business over the matter of succession remains paramount and inevitable.

Succession is central to the sustainability and survival of FOBs and any other forms of business as it ensures that the business is carried along even when the manager, owner or founder is no longer active in the enterprise. Singhry (2010) maintains that succession is critical to ensuring the continuity of any family owned business. An effectively developed succession plan provides for a smooth transition in management and ownership (Chrisman, Sharma & Yoder, 2009)[13]. Lack of planning, however, could put large numbers of family businesses at undue risk and have serious impact on the national economy (Bewayo, 2009)[10].

Succession process is only complete when the next generation of entrepreneur has gained legitimacy of ownership and control of the business entity (Wahjono, Idrus & Nirbito, 2014)[49]; Devins & Jones, 2015[16]; Nelson & Constantinidis, 2017)[34]. In the process of succession, it is difficult to downplay the role of the founding entrepreneur's influence. Pardo- del-Val (2008)[38] argues that founder's concept of business influences the plan they design to appoint a successor in the game of succession.

In many cases, succession planning targets the most important positions in an organization, usually a candidate from within the organization is nurtured and developed over the years. He or she must have displayed 'skills, knowledge, leadership qualities and experience required for such a grooming exercise (Morfeld, 2005)[32]. Johnson (2016)[25] suggests four main components to Succession Planning as follows:

- a) Identifying the potential successor; the process of selecting a suitable candidate to take reigns of the business upon the departure of the current CEO begins with the identification of at least one and preferably more than one candidate and should begin as soon as possible and long before the CEO decides to step down
- b) Changing management style: something that can be both a hallmark and at times can be an identified

weakness of many organizations is the CEO's management style.

- c) Successor training and development: the principle function of the CEO in helping to ensure the success of his or her successor lies in the appropriate leadership development of the candidate.
- d) Selecting the successor: there are many factors that will qualify an individual to lead and manage a business. Those factors should include knowledge, skills, abilities, motivation, ambition, temperament, formal education and experience (p.317).

Johnson (2016, p. 317)[25] also states that the three basic goals of succession planning include:

- a. Identification of critical management positions within the organization,
- b. Identification of future vacancies in those positions,
- c. Identification of managers who would potentially fit into these vacancies.

2.5 Factors Militating against Succession in FOBs of Polygamous Families

Factors which may militate against successful succession in polygamous families can take any of the following forms:

- 1) Sentiments and emotions: founders of FOBs that belong to polygamous families may be carried away by emotions and love for one of the wives and hatred for the others and the above may becloud sensible judgment when it comes to selecting a good successor that will be able to handle the business properly.
- 2) Fear of bias: the founders/owners of polygamous FOBs may avoid the whole process of succession for fear of being seen as biased in the decision making and escalating problems in the family. Hence, to avoid such issues, these owners may shy away from the process of succession entirely.
- 3) Lack of succession planning knowledge: some of the owners of FOBs may completely lack the knowledge of succession planning. They do may think of what will happen in future or see the business as a going concern. They just run the business based on what unfolds on a daily basis. This hinders succession in these businesses.
- 4) Not writing a will early: writing wills is one of the ways that owners of founders of FOBs may use to select who will take over which property and which business at their demise. However, writing will in this part of the world appears to be viewed as synonymous with death and so most persons avoid it and before they know it, death strikes. This contributes to poor succession of FOBs, especially in polygamous families.
- 5) Internal squabbles: as a result of many contending elements in a polygamous family, all fighting for their own interest, there seem to always be one form of internal wrangling or the other. This also tends to

spill into the family business and affects succession decisions.

- 6) Not taking the business as a going concern: going concerns are the hallmark of corporate entities which are managed with the future in mind. The same may not be said of small FOBs belonging to polygamous families. They are operated as businesses based on whatever the day may offer without thinking of what becomes of them when the founders/owners are no more around. As a result of this, succession issues are not taken very seriously by these FOBs.
- 7) Cultural Hindrances: culture being a peoples' way of life, sometimes constitute an insurmountable problem to succession in polygamous FOBs. Culture in Nigeria and the Southeast favours male children becoming heirs over their female counterpart, and when there is no male issue, the founder/owner becomes discouraged to talk about succession of his business. Also, when the male children seem not to be capable of taking over the business, it also leads for loss of interest in discussing succession by the founder/owner.

3. CONCLUSION

FOBs play a great part in the economy of nations and Southeast Nigeria is no exception. However, succession usually poses lots of problem especially when the business is owned by polygamous family. Therefore, it is concluded that FOBs owned by polygamous family can only survive if they take the issue of succession serious and start its planning and implementing early in the life of the business.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Sequel to the detailed discussions in this study regarding polygamy and the role it plays in succession in FOBs, this work recommends as follows:

- a) FOBs owned by polygamous families need to start the processes of succession early enough to avoid squabbles at the death or incapacitation of the owner/founder.
- b) Professionals should be brought in to handle major decisions of succession to avoid playing into the hands of sentiments and emotions while making critical succession decisions.
- c) The owners would need to professionalize the business by bringing in competent hands to manage the business while the members of the family become shareholders in the business.

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