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*Professional Development as a Selected Factor Influencing  
Succession in Family Businesses*

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### Abstract

**Theoretical background:** Professional development plays a key role in succession in family businesses. Succession in family businesses means transferring control and ownership of the company from one generation to the next, and choosing the right successor is very important for the future of the company. Therefore, professional development can be a significant factor influencing this decision.

**Purpose of the article:** The article presents professional development as a selected factor that affects succession in family businesses.

**Research methods:** The primary research method chosen for data collection was a survey in the form of a questionnaire. The survey was done through a free online questionnaire – Google Form. This was intended to reach a wider audience from all over the country, so that the respondents would be as representative group as possible. The respondents were contacted through social media messaging and e-mail. This form of data collection was motivated by the desire to obtain responses primarily from young people. While 402 respondents participated in the survey, 305 responses were considered for analysis.

**Main findings:** The following article presents the results of a survey on awareness of the importance of building a career path and professional development and the actual status of the implementation of plans. The survey also addresses issues of satisfaction with respondents' current working conditions. The current shortage of workers in the labour market and the deepening demographic decline may cause a situation in which a successor does not become a single member of the immediate family. The best effect can be achieved by linking succession planning with the conscious and thorough construction of a career path and professional development based on the family business. The results of the paper relate to research analysing the career decisions of future managers, take into account the impact of the career path on professional development, and contribute to the understanding of the factors analysed in the succession process.

### Introduction

Today, family businesses are an important part of the Polish economy and are one of the most popular forms of business, especially in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector (Kuta et al., 2017). In addition, they are the subject of consideration by many researchers in Poland and around the world. The literature section introduces the concepts of family business, succession, and professional path and career. However, we have not found publications that directly answer the question: how professional development through the choice of an individual career path affects succession in family businesses. Family businesses are distinguished by certain characteristics that make them unique and are often based on family values and traditions, which can affect long-term business strategy and relationships within the company. Decisions made by family-owned companies are often more focused on long-term development and are geared primarily toward continuity and survival, rather than just profit maximisation (Domanowska, 2017). Furthermore, their specific nature requires careful management of both business and family social aspects.

We can find many definitions of the term “family business” in the literature, but they are usually related to the criterion of ownership or management (Małyszczek, 2012), and are also related to the involvement of the family in the business (Sułkowski, 2011). A family business is considered to be a company owned by related individuals, often parents and children. Such a business is managed by one of the

owners, who employs family members. Therefore, among the definitional criteria most considered, the ownership or management criterion dominates (Gheribi, 2017). Donnelley argues that we are dealing with a family business if at least two generations of one family had a significant influence on the goals and policies of the company (Donnelley, 1988). In turn, according to Sułkowski, a family business is a business entity in which most of the ownership structure and the management function of the entire entity remain in the hands of one family (Sułkowski, 2004). Another definition defines a family business as an enterprise of any legal form, the capital of which is held wholly or in a decisive part by the family and at least one member of the family exerts decisive influence on the management or exercises the management function himself with the intention of keeping the enterprise permanently in the hands of the family (Jeżak et al., 2004). An important factor in the success of family businesses, and often a distinguishing characteristic of their identity, is the period of their operation, which involves the passing of the business from one generation to the next (Kuta et al., 2017). Succession is understood as the process of transferring power and ownership from the current owner to the successor(s), and in the case of family businesses, this process takes on particular importance (Perz & Kaszuba-Perz, 2016). Succession in family businesses is an opportunity to smoothly transfer power to those best equipped to do so. Seniors have a significant influence on shaping the succession process, as a result of which the incoming successor has the opportunity to build authority among employees, which facilitates the subsequent process of managing the company (Kempa, 2015). When analysing the succession process, it is also necessary to take into account the factor of globalisation, which to change the style of business, reduce its dependence on family resources, and adopt more modern professional ideas (Wijaya, 2008).

Very many factors are taken into account when transferring a company, in the first one in addition to the involvement of many interests and parties, which often requires expertise in various fields, such as legislation, taxation, valuation, organisation, strategy, psychology. This makes succession a multistage process that requires strategic planning and management. It is also possible that a company decides to retain family ownership, but the successors hire an external manager. In either situation, the competence of the potential manager is crucial. In order to increase the likelihood of transferring knowledge, power, and ownership of the business to the successor, the preparation process should be carried out over a longer period of time. There are also theses that external managers are professionally trained and can use their managerial skills to increase the company's performance, as opposed to managers selected from among family members, who may lack managerial skills (Villalonga & Amit, 2006; Lotto, 2013). The development of leadership skills sub-needed in succession, can be accelerated with the help of a professional advisor. Adoption of transitional leadership roles by advisors accelerates the succession process (Salvato & Gorbetta, 2013). Not all the competencies required for managerial positions are trainable. Knowledge of the company and long-standing ties to it can form the basis

of the family's organisation, translating into professionalisation of company management (Lissoni et al., 2011). These factors that shape attitude, as a component of competence, occurring in family businesses, are an important part of the professional development of managers, and they cannot be overestimated (Hall & Nordqvist, 2008). The issue of the scope of managerial competencies in family businesses often shows an analogy with the needs for competencies in small and medium enterprises. Therefore, for preliminary analysis, it is worthwhile to analyse the needs of family firms for managerial positions in a broader scope comparing both family and nonfamily firms (Broccardo et al., 2016; Dobrowolski et al., 2021). Given the importance of a development path for employees, especially for those aiming for managerial positions, family firms should provide viable opportunities for employee advancement and skill development to retain nonfamily professionals (Núñez-Cacho Utrilla et al., 2023).

The article aimed to examine aspects of professional development also in the context of potential succession. The basic research questions that were posed narrowed down to problems:

Does a conscious choice of career path affect job satisfaction?

Do those who follow a chosen career path experience greater job satisfaction than those who do not have a chosen career path?

Does the choice of career path depend on the level of education or age?

To answer these questions, the first two chapters, based on the literature, take a closer look at the factors affecting succession and the aspect of professional development as a factor affecting succession. They refer to the determinants affecting the course, effectiveness, and satisfaction of the succession process. Aspects affecting succession were also related to the career development process. The next chapters describe the research method, where the main source of information was a direct survey, and a chapter containing the results and analysis of the findings. The analysis began with a compilation of responses about the willingness to change the current job on a Sankey diagram, followed by a compilation of factors determining satisfaction with job attributes, among those with and without their own career path. The relationship between following a career path and satisfaction with advancement opportunities by age and education was also examined. Discussion and conclusion make up the last two chapters.

## **Background**

The purpose of answering the research questions is to analyse the literature, among other things, what factors affect succession in family businesses. Succession in family businesses is a complex process and is affected by many factors. Internal or controllable factors such as family size, family ties, degree of successor preparation, successor preparation, planning and management activities, legal advice, advice,

and human resources play an important role in determining the ease of generational change and the future success of the family business (Mishra et al., 2022).

Among the more important conditions affecting the course of succession, we can distinguish:

- the desire to take over a family business,
- interest in business affairs,
- knowledge and skills,
- experience in working and managing a business prior to the succession process,
- willingness to learn and deepen knowledge,
- idea for further business and personal development (Perz & Kaszuba-Perz, 2016).

Succession planning is also significantly influenced by the characteristics of successor and family relationships (Oury Bailo et al., 2023). Among the factors influencing the succession process is the senior's desire to hand over the business and the successor's desire to take over the family business. It is also worth mentioning that one of the factors influencing this is the benefits the successor gains by taking over the business, for example, personal satisfaction, financial security, and the opportunity to pursue professional interests (Marjański, 2012). The family business system is a combination of three interacting subsystems: management, ownership, and family life (Koiranen, 2003).

In her study, Roszko-Wójtowicz identifies five critical factors that determine the success of the succession process, such as:

- the will and desire of the transferor to leave,
- the desire of the successor to take over the enterprise,
- positive relationships, communication,
- succession planning,
- successor preparation (Roszko-Wójtowicz, 2016).

These factors affect the effectiveness and satisfaction of the succession process. There are also barriers in the succession process that affect both the senior and the successor. Typical barriers we can include negative attitudes toward succession by young successors and the successors' fear of evaluation, competition and responsibility. These barriers may be due to inadequate preparation of the younger generation to take over the business (Więcek-Janka, 2013). Preparing successors to take over a business requires seniors to tailor a development plan to their individual needs, during which the individual sets goals and objectives, that he or she includes in his or her "career path" (Więcek-Janka & Hadryś-Nowak, 2016). Succession in a family business can be a unique form of professional development, especially for family members who are interested in continuing and managing the business. It is also worth mentioning that a critical element affecting the succession process is effective communication, both between doyens and potential successors, and between the owner and employees, customers, and suppliers. Implementing formal succession procedures is a key factor for effective succession in a company (Worytkiewicz-Raś,

2020). In addition, the lack of a long-term, strategic approach to succession planning can hinder the continuation of family businesses (Kęsy & Kęsy, 2022). Proper management of the process and consideration of these factors can help ensure the success of the business for future generations.

Also significant in supporting managerial succession is professionalisation, the emergence of professional managers and the adoption of control systems affect the formulation, implementation, and control of strategy. Formal performance management systems have positive effects on the operation of family businesses – this allows the objectification of decisions made – especially financial ones (Culasso et al., 2018; Marcelino-Aranda et al., 2020). The process of succession determines to a large extent professional development. Since all employees, including managers, are embedded in complex networks of social organisation and exchange, and family relationships in companies lead to unique goals, management structures, resources and results, it is necessary to take into account the successors' career and life plans when making succession decisions (Rofcanin et al., 2017; Zellweger et al., 2019). In addition to the professionalization aspect, other mechanisms that positively affect succession outcomes are also identified, i.e.: planned entry and exit mechanisms for the organization, inclusion of key professional managers as an advisory body, and planning for ownership interests of key managers in the company (Chittoor & Das, 2007).

There are also studies in the literature on the subject indicating that successor training plays less importance than the quality of family members' relationships, knowledge transfer from founder to successor, and family culture (Jahmurataj et al., 2023).

Equally important to answering the research questions is analysing how professional development affects succession. Work and professional development are important elements of everyone's life and often determine their satisfaction and even self-realisation (Krause, 2006). There are many definitions of the term "career" in the literature. Kędzierska presents it as a description of "changes in the sequence and professional roles of individuals that take place in the course of a person's life in different sectors of the economy" (Kędzierska, 2012) or it is described as "a sequence of changes in professional life that reflects the actual development of a person's professional competence and consists of performing the functions that are most appropriate at a given moment from the point of view of a person's potential and professional preferences" (Suchar, 2003). On the other hand, according to Pocztowski, a career can also mean "a patterned sequence of attitudes and behaviors of an individual, related to his or her experiences at work or, in other words, the professional development of an individual in the course of his or her life" (Pocztowski, 2008). Analysing the ways of understanding career, it can be noted that it has the character of a process and is related to professional activities, competence development and achievements (Jakimiuk, 2016). In the definitions of career, there is no evaluation criterion to compare the achievements of other individuals or to assess the components of a person's career. As a result, only the individual who is affected by this career can assess whether his or her career progression is in line with predetermined goals (Ober & Karwot, 2018).

Career development is understood as the way in which employees reach successive career levels, either through promotion or expansion of their responsibilities (Miś, 2007). Furthermore, when analyzing the determinant of a career, it is also necessary to take into account the external environment, and in particular the educational and upbringing influences that form a person's attitude towards his or her professional and personal life (Jakimiuk, 2016). In addition, career choice can be influenced by the education received (Jarosik-Michalak, 2018). As young people enter adulthood, they face the difficult task of making decisions that will shape their future career paths. This is a complex decision-making process that is made even more difficult by the instability of the economy and labour market, resulting in long-term consequences for each individual's chosen path (Zaleszczyk & Kot, 2019). An important area of interactions that support career realization in a family business is generational transfer. Successors have a career path prepared, but they have to decide whether they want to follow it when taking over the family business.

### **Methodology**

The research method chosen to collect and then process the data was a survey in the form of a questionnaire. The survey was done through a free online questionnaire – Google Form. It was intended to reach a wider audience from all over the country, so that respondents would constitute a representative group of respondents. Data were collected from respondents between 3 and 30 November 2022. Each respondent could participate in the survey only once. Respondents were contacted through social media messaging and e-mail. This form of data collection was motivated by the desire to elicit responses primarily from young people entering the labour market who should begin to build their career path, so examining their awareness in this regard was crucial to develop relevant conclusions. The survey was entitled “Career Development Based on Career Path Building” and consisted of two parts: questions on education, career path building, and professional development (8 questions) and a metric (4 questions).

The research method used to collect and analyze the data was a survey in the form of a questionnaire study. The survey was constructed using a free online questionnaire tool, based on the Google Forms platform. The main objective of this approach was to reach an extensive group of respondents from all over Poland, in order to ensure the best possible representativeness of the group of respondents. The chosen method helped ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the information shared by respondents. Informed consent was obtained by explaining the purpose of the survey and how the collected data would be used at the beginning of the survey. Data collection took place between November 3 and 30, 2022. Each participant was allowed to take the survey only once. Communication with respondents was configured through the use of social messaging and e-mail. The choice of this form of obtaining information

was based on the intention to obtain responses, primarily from young people entering the labor market. Investigating their awareness of building a career path was crucial to identifying trends and developing adequate conclusions.

The survey consisted of two main parts. The first part was focused on questions about student status, career path and current job satisfaction. It contained eight questions to explore respondents' experiences in these areas. While the second part – a metric – consisted of 4 questions to gather demographic data and basic information about the respondents. There were questions about age, education, gender and place of residence.

The first question from the first section was: “Are you currently working professionally?” and could be answered with “Yes” or “No”. While 402 respondents took part in the survey, 305 responses were included for analysis, as 97 people were not working professionally, and this was the main requirement for analysis and drawing conclusions from the survey. Failure to reject these responses would have made it impossible to confront assumptions with reality and would not have ensured the reliability of the survey, and consequently to draw reliable conclusions based on it. The prepared data set included 188 people aged 18–25, 67 aged 26–35, 36 aged 36–45 and 14 people over 45. Meanwhile, in the education field, the group of people with higher education consisted of 219 people, with incomplete higher education 65 people, with secondary education 19 and 2 people with vocational education.

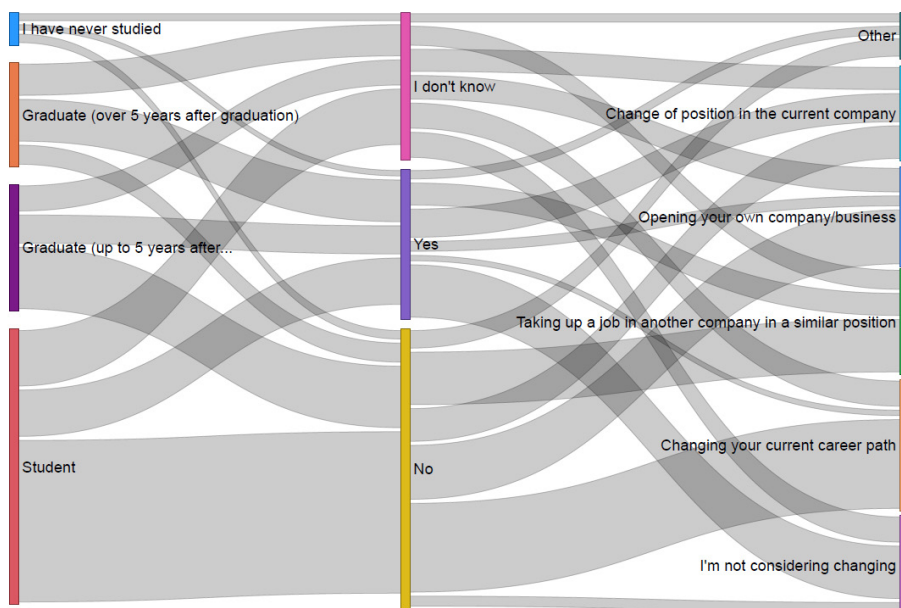
At the beginning of the analysis, the number of responses to the question about student status and willingness to change the current job was visualized on a Sakey diagram. The purpose of this visualization was to show the number of respondents by student status and the diversity of their responses. Then, in order to answer the question: “Does a conscious choice of career path affect job satisfaction?”, two heat maps were prepared, where the saturation of the color determines the intensity of the answer in the studied group.

In the next stage of the analysis, the relationship between satisfaction with development opportunities and following a career path was visualized using box plots. Data were grouped by education and age. Then, in order to confirm the correlations noted in the graphs, a statistical test was performed to compare multiple groups. This was the Dunn test with Bonferroni correction.

## Results

Using a Sakey diagram, a summary of three questions is presented: 1) Are you a student/graduate, 2) Is your current job your target job, 3) What kind of change are you considering? This relationship is shown graphically in Figure 1.



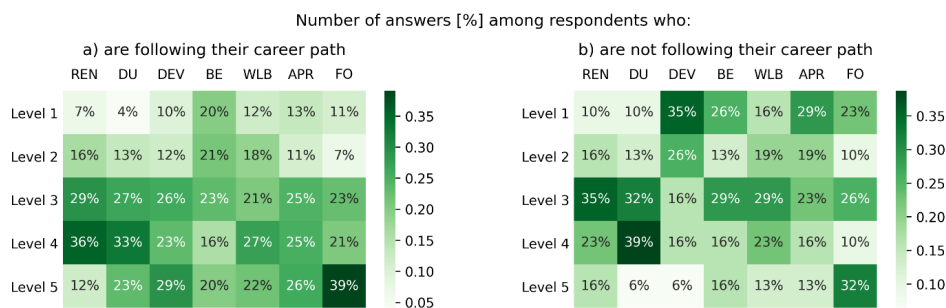


**Figure 1.** Sakey chart for three questions: 1) Are you a student/graduate, 2) Is your current job your target job, 3) What change are you considering?

Source: Authors' own study.

It can be noted that most of the respondents are students and graduates (except for three people). As many as 105 students rate their work as not yet targeted. This is understandable due to the fact that students often do casual work. Those who do not consider their jobs as target jobs are most likely to want to change their current career path, open their own business or work for another company. There is also a portion of respondents who recognize their job as a target job, but are considering changing their position at the company, taking a job at another company or starting a business. Two respondents also declared their job as a target, and then answered that they wanted to change their career path which may indicate a misunderstanding of the questions, confusion, or a lack of decision-making.

Next, an analysis was conducted on whether respondents who follow the career path are more satisfied with their jobs (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Satisfaction with job attributes vs. following a career path

REN – satisfaction with salary, DU – satisfaction with duties, DEV – satisfaction with development opportunities, BE – satisfaction with benefits and perks, WLB – work-life balance rating, APR – appreciation by supervisor, FO – form of work (stationary/remote/hybrid).

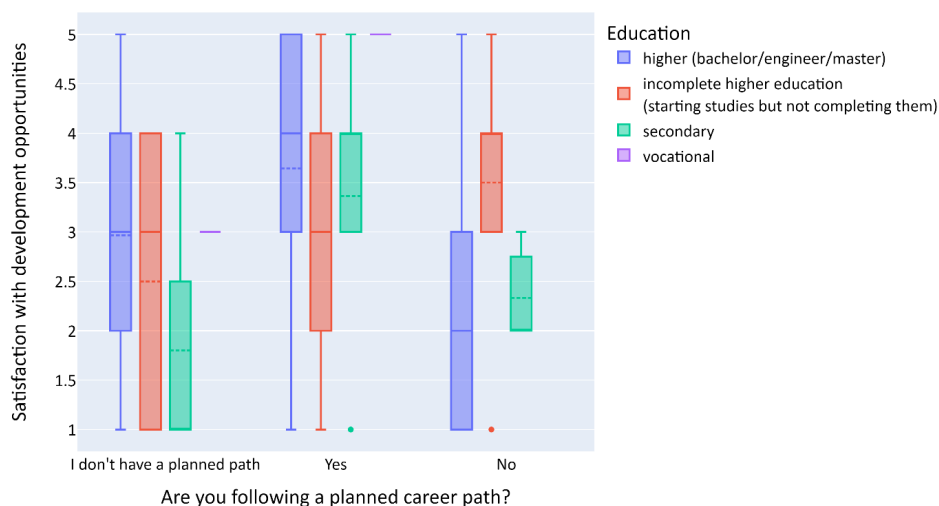
Source: Authors' own study.

It turns out that respondents who follow their career path most often marked ratings of individual job attributes above 3. Only satisfaction with benefits was evenly distributed (about 20% of respondents for each rating). This is most likely due to the fact that in companies the benefits offered are the same for every employee regardless of their position. As many as 39% of those who follow the career path are satisfied with the form of their work on a rating of 5. This means that companies currently offer their employees more flexible forms of work such as hybrid or remote work, which further positively influences employee satisfaction. In contrast, those who did not follow a career path were less likely to give a rating of 5. They were almost never fully satisfied with their responsibilities and development (6%). As many as 35% of those who did not follow their career path were extremely dissatisfied with the development opportunities, rating them at 1.

The satisfaction with development opportunities was then examined according to following a career path relative to education (Figure 3).

It can be seen that respondents with a college degree or secondary education who follow a career path have a higher average satisfaction rating for development opportunities than those with a college degree or secondary education who do not follow it. Interestingly, this relationship does not apply to those surveyed with incomplete higher education, who obtained a higher average satisfaction score when they did not follow a career path. This may be related to dissatisfaction with the choice of career path or field of study and dropping out of college. Respondents with a secondary education and who follow a career path usually rate their satisfaction above 3. However, regardless of education, there are individual situations in which a person following a career path is not currently satisfied with the development opportunities.

Due to the fact that the differences in the box plot do not confirm statistical differences between the groups, a Dunn test with Bonferroni correction was performed for multiple groups. Table 1 shows the significant relationships obtained.



**Figure 3.** Relationship between following a career path and satisfaction with development opportunities by education (dashed lines indicate means and solid lines indicate medians)

Source: Authors' own study.

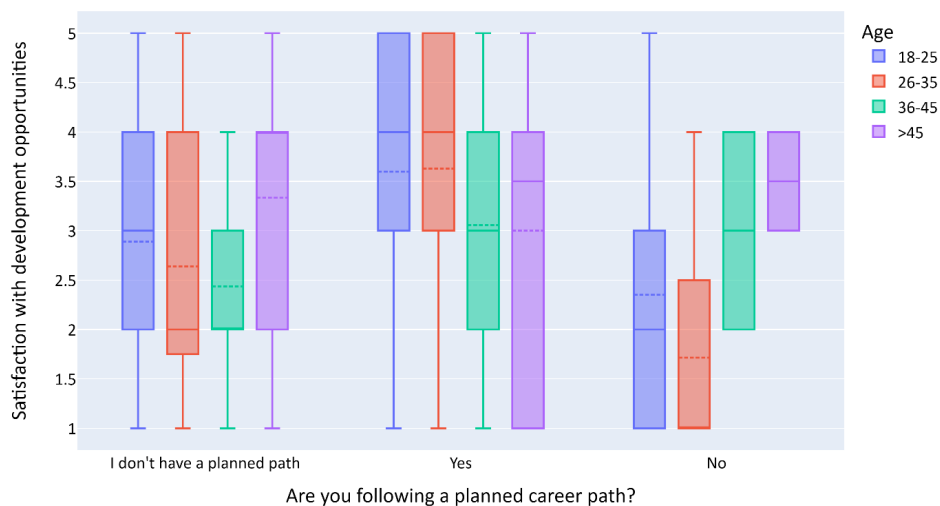
**Table 1.** Groups of data that are statistically significantly different due to satisfaction with development opportunities by education

Group 1	Group 2	<i>p</i> -value
People with higher education following a career path	People with higher education not following a career path	0.000009
People with higher education following a career path	People with higher education without a planned career path	0.012360
People with higher education following a career path	People with incomplete higher education without a planned career path	0.001256

Source: Authors' own study.

It turns out that respondents with a college degree who follow a career path are statistically more satisfied with their opportunities for advancement than those with a college degree who do not follow a planned career path or do not have a planned career path at all. In addition, they are also more satisfied than those with incomplete higher education without a planned career path. Other differences observed in the graph did not prove to be statistically significant. However, this may be due to the small sample size, and an expanded study would be needed to determine the significance of the observed differences.

Figure 4 shows the relationship between following a career path and the satisfaction with development opportunities according to different age groups.



**Figure 4.** Relationship between following a career path and satisfaction with development opportunities by age (dashed lines indicate means and solid lines indicate medians)

Source: Authors' own study.

It can be observed that for respondents who do not have a planned career path, satisfaction with development opportunities is distributed in at least 50% between the values of 2 and 4. Only in the 36–45 age group rates are lower, in 50% of cases they are between 2 and 3. Respondents aged 18–35 are definitely more satisfied when they are following their career path. In contrast, respondents over the age of 35 did not rate their satisfaction with development opportunities higher when they are on their career path. However, due to the variation in the number of respondents in each age group, additional statistical analysis is necessary.

Table 2 shows the significant data relationships confirmed by the Dunn test with Bonferroni correction.

**Table 2.** Groups of data that are statistically significantly different due to satisfaction with development opportunities by age

Group 1	Group 2	p-value
People aged 18–25 following a career path	People aged 18–25 without a planned career path	0.037702
People aged 18–25 following a career path	People aged 18–25 not following a career path	0.010371
People aged 18–25 following a career path	People aged 26–35 years not following a career path	0.036108
People aged 26–35 following a career path	People aged 18–25 not following a career path	0.033508
People aged 26–35 following a career path	People aged 26–35 years not following a career path	0.049623

Source: Authors' own study.

It can be seen that statistically significant differences have been confirmed between respondents aged 18–25 who follow a career path and those of this age who do not have a career path planned or have one but do not follow it. Their satisfaction is also higher than respondents aged 26–35 who do not follow a career path. For those aged 26–35, there was also a significant difference in satisfaction with development opportunities between those who followed a career path or not. No significant differences were shown between the other groups. This may have been due to the fact that a small percentage of respondents were over 35 years old (only 22%).

### **Conclusions and discussion**

The research described in the article is a preliminary identification of the concepts described in the literature and a preliminary survey research answering questions such as: Does conscious choice of career path affect job satisfaction? The pool of respondents was geared to young workers and those entering the labor market. Due to the form of implementation of the survey – the choice of survey instrument – the time perspective of carrying out the succession process was not explored in detail. On the other hand, the method of obtaining responses allowed freedom of expression, and statistical analysis confirmed the statistical significance of the relationship of the factors studied. From the above, it can be concluded that the results obtained allow us to believe in the reliability of the implemented research.

The research questions that appeared at the beginning of the article were answered in the research that was being carried out. It was confirmed that following a career path increases job satisfaction. The authors conducted an analysis of the results, focusing on a group of working respondents. They used diagrams, such as a Sakey chart, to show the relationship between student status and willingness to change current job. This type of visualisation made it possible to clearly show the relationships between the variables studied, making it easier to interpret the results. Heat maps showed that people who are following their career path rated job satisfaction factors higher than people who are not following their career path (especially when it comes to development opportunities).

This influence of following a career path is particularly evident among those with a university education, meaning that those who consciously direct their careers often experience higher job satisfaction. For the large group of respondents who are young workers entering the labour market, statistical analysis of the data made it possible to show that following a career path increases their satisfaction with development opportunities.

The results indicating a higher average rating of satisfaction with development opportunities than those not following their path may indicate that it is advisable to design one's future when it comes to careers in managerial positions. This is confirmed by a study of career paths in Finnish family businesses (Kansikas, 2015).

Also analyzing factors affecting satisfaction with job attributes, and following a career path, one can refer to research on potential and successors in Europe (Ljubotina et al., 2018), where the importance, subjective norms and attitudes towards risk affecting the succession process was similarly indicated. The analysis of the results, confirms that there is a potential confrontation and discrepancy between the individual's choice of career path and the expectations of the family, which is also indicated in the literature on the topic (Achtenhagen et al., 2022; De Groote & Kammerlander, 2023). The paper also shows the impact of development opportunities and salary levels on job satisfaction, these factors are often indicated, along with job stability, as the main motivators for hiring managers (Rivo-López et al., 2020)

Considering how important development opportunities are in satisfaction ratings, it can be inferred that this is also an important aspect in deciding on succession in a family business. Successors have a prepared path, but their decision to take over the family business can shape their careers. This confirms that the family aspect and succession of the business have a significant impact on an individual's career development. Converging the results of the study, they are related to the fact indicated in the literature that the specific characteristics of tacit family knowledge, combined with a favourable atmosphere, make the family member receive significant support in choosing a career path (Royer et al., 2008). Accordingly, the results of the analysis suggest that conscious management of one's career, especially during the initial professional period, and consideration of business succession in family businesses, are key factors affecting job satisfaction and the overall professional development of the individual.

The results of the paper are part of the scope of research on the professional decisions of future managers, taking into account the impact of the career path on professional development, and contribute to the understanding of the factors analysed in the succession process.

## Summary

In conclusion, having a high level of social awareness of one's competencies has a decisive impact on career development. People with this awareness are better able to plan their activities and are more easily adapted to changing trends, increasing their chances of achieving professional success. This means that having the right skills and competencies can significantly affect the progress of a company's management. Social awareness helps to increase the range of knowledge and competence, allowing an individual to analyse situations with integrity and make optimal decisions. This involves developing and improving certain skills, which consequently contributes to better performance at work. Professional development helps not only to develop the skills necessary to manage a company, but also to build self-confidence, which is crucial when making difficult decisions. Family businesses that invest in the pro-

professional development of their members can better prepare for succession, ensuring a stable and successful future for the company.

Due to the large differences in the size of age groups and education, it was not possible to confirm or deny the relationships for age groups other than 18–25 years, 26–35 years and people with higher education. The first studies should take into account the expansion of the group of respondents. Continuing the exploratory research, attention should be also paid to the selection of respondents to those with close ties to family businesses – this is more time-consuming, but will allow to obtain precise answers. The consequence of purposeful selection of respondents will be to detail the scope of questions directly related to succession processes.

There are still many areas of this topic that need to be explored in more depth, making it worth further qualitative research to gain a more complete picture of the issue and better understand the complex correlations between variables. In-depth research will allow for better investigation and understanding of these topics, which can contribute to lessons learnt and better practices developed.

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