

## Mindsets in Intra-familial Farm Transfer: Successful Successor and Predecessor Prototypes

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### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates mindsets in the context of family farm succession. Using a grounded theory approach, interviews and group discussions were analyzed. Results based on both data sets present prototypical mindsets of successful predecessors and successors. The mindset construct, which has been developed for this study, was expanded with stakeholders, information flows, and time, according to the results of this study. The findings provide insights into information processing in intra-familial farm succession and the mindsets of successful predecessors and successors. The mindset approach offers a supplementary and valuable perspective on the succession process. It can contribute to early action taking of farming families or consultants.

**Keywords:** *grounded theory; family farm succession; intra-family farm succession; family business; mindset.*

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## 1 Introduction

In the German agricultural sector, the largest share of businesses is family-owned (BMEL, 2019). Family businesses cultivate the majority of all agricultural land in Germany (BMEL, 2019). However, the number of agricultural family businesses has decreased in recent years (BMEL, 2019). During the same period, the age structure of the business owners and managers in Germany has changed to older farm managers and owners (EUROSTAT, 2021a; EUROSTAT 2021b). In 2005, there were 117,640 business owners aged younger than 45 years, which decreased to 55,450 in 2013 (EUROSTAT, 2021a). In the same period, the group of business owners aged 55 years and older increased from 79,690 to 83,010 (EUROSTAT, 2021a). This trend has since continued (Deutscher Bauernverband, 2019). Among farms surveyed, the willingness to take over the farm is related to farm size; only for farms of 100 hectares and above is the share of farms with committed successors higher than the farms where no successor has been identified (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 2011). However, most farms in Germany are in the under 50-hectares category (BMEL, 2019). In 2010, the succession situation was secured for only 31% of the farms with a manager-owner of 45 years of age or older (BMEL, 2015). 21% of the manager-owners without successors were at least 60 years old (BMEL, 2015), increasing the likelihood that they will retire without successors.

Many researchers have addressed the topic of intra-familial farm succession identifying factors that enhance or discourage a successful farm transfer (e.g. Bertoni and Cavicchioli, 2016; Rodriguez-Lizano, Montero-Vega and Sibelet, 2020; Coopmans et al. 2021). In this study, we propose the mindset of predecessor and successor who are the main actors of the farm transfer as an additional aspect to be considered in the intra-familial farm succession process. The goal of this approach is twofold. First, to shed light on the information processing of the main actors in the context of farm succession. This is addressed by developing a mindset construct, i.e., the arrangement of factors contributing to how a person filters and processes information, and revising it throughout the study along with the data analysis. Second, to identify topics on which successful predecessors and successors focus during the succession process. This is addressed by developing prototypical mindsets of these actors, i.e., identifying mindset aspects in relation to farm succession. Because a potentially successful farm transfer starts in the mind of the main actors, the mindset approach holds the promise of potential early action when farming families or respective consultants engage in the farm succession process. Using a qualitative grounded theory approach, this study adds to the literature strand of theoretical-qualitative inquiry of the succession process aiming to describe family dynamics pertaining the farm transfer (Bertoni and Cavicchioli, 2016). The research takes into account both the individual and the familial/social dimension of farm succession as it includes the analysis of individual interviews with predecessors, successors, and non-succeeding siblings as well as group discussions with farming families in the succession process.

The analysis starts with a short overview of family business and family farm succession research, followed by the elaboration of the mindset construct developed for this study. After that, the methodological approach is explained, along with data collection and analysis. The result section draws the outcomes of the interview and group discussion analysis together, suggesting revisions of the initial literature-based mindset construct and showing the resulting prototypic mindsets of successful predecessors and successors as well as their comparison. In the following section, aspects of the prototypical mindsets as well as the mindset construct are compared with the literature. Finally, limitations of the study and conclusions from the research are addressed.

## 2 Literature Analysis

### 2.1 Family Business and Family Farm Succession

Most family businesses share the transgenerational prospect of the firm, involving the business succession from one generation to the next (De Massis, Chua, and Chrisman, 2008). Given the nature of a family business, it is advantageous for the succession process to maintain a cohesive business and adaptable family culture (Bozer, Levin, and Santora, 2017). The farm transfer to the next generation involves not only the retirement of the current farm manager but also the legal transfer of ownership and managerial control, as well as the ability and willingness of the successor to take over the business (Potter and Lobley, 1996). Especially for an effective farm transfer process, apart from handing over managerial control also the transfer of intangible assets like farm-specific knowledge should be taken into account (Lobley, 2010).

Errington (1998) investigated patterns and processes of farming succession with data from England, France, and Canada. Results showed the progressive delegation of particular areas of responsibility from

the predecessor to the successor. Ideally, the successor climbs the “ladder of farming succession” and takes over more and more areas of responsibility over time. By analyzing the amount of responsibility of the successor in decision-making on the farm and the extent to which the successor is able to run an autonomous enterprise, Errington (1998) found four stereotypes of succession patterns. These are the partnership between predecessor and successor, the farmer’s boy (when the potential successor serves as source of manual labor, but is not involved in managerial activities), the separate enterprise (when the home farm is big enough to offer room for the successor to develop an own enterprise within it), and the stand-by holding. Due to geographic and temporal variation, and especially due to the economic environment of a farm, these patterns are varied in reality and a successor may move from one category to another in the course of his or her life (Errington 1998).

Intra-familial succession in a family business may begin years before the actual transfer to an offspring (Giambatista, Rowe, and Riaz, 2005). Moving through the process can take time, which can make succession the lengthiest strategic process of a family business (Barach and Ganitsky, 1995). In different countries, the time it takes for a successor to take over more and more managerial control differs (Errington, 1998). Several authors have categorized factors with an impact on intra-familial farm succession (Bertoni and Cavicchioli, 2016; Engelhart, Vogel, and Larcher, 2018; Rodriguez-Lizano et al., 2020). Descriptive statistics, like demographics and the average age of people involved in the succession process, environmental or farm external and surrounding conditions, like the local labor market (Cavicchioli et al. 2019), as well as farm-related factors like running the farm full or part-time, size of the farm, capital, growth, and specialization all play a role. Moreover, social, relational, and emotional (Bertoni and Cavicchioli, 2016; Engelhart et al., 2018) as well as psychological factors (Rodriguez-Lizano et al., 2020) influence intra-familial farm succession. For instance, conditions of living of different generations on the farm (together or apart, on or off the farm) and communication have an impact. De Massis et al. (2008) summarized their findings into five antecedent factors, which may prevent intra-familial business succession in family businesses in general. These are individual factors relating to the successor or the predecessor, relation factors referring to relationships among family members, financial factors, context factors from the business environment, and process factors that are related to the succession process and are moderators of individual and relation factors. The impact of these factors on the intra-familial succession process highlights both the importance of the attitudes of and relationship between the individual members of the family and business-related aspects. Furthermore, the factors point to the interplay between the business and its environment with the respective family and their individual members who are actors in the social dimension.

Therefore, family businesses are complex systems, with influences and feedbacks between the two interdependent subsystems family and business (Zehrer and Leiß, 2018; Matser, Bouma, and Veldhuizen, 2020). Kets de Vries (1993) even calls them the “Achille’s heel” of family firms, as the two systems are not necessarily compatible with each other. The manager-owner must deal with the desires of several parties in the business and the family (Taigiuri and Davis, 1992). The familial situation determines attitudes, norms, and values in the business, which in turn serve to create a common purpose and a sense of identification and commitment for the employees in the business (Kets de Vries, 1993). Personal relations in the family business are vital in general (Freiling and Grossmann, 2014), but especially familial stakeholders and the relationships between them and towards the business play an important role during the succession process (Lerchster, 2018). In this phase, their loyalty and perceptions of justice may become visible (Lerchster, 2018), as well as competing desires and needs in relation to the farm transfer (Pitts et al., 2009). Especially when transferring a farm to the next generation, a strong emotional attachment of family members to the property, which often is family and business residency at the same time, can be observed (Matser et al., 2020). Therefore, the willingness of family members to transfer the farm to the successor and the attitude and behavior of non-succeeding siblings play an important role throughout the farm succession phase (Matser et al., 2020). Rivalry between siblings and their perception of parental fairness can be critical for the succession outcome (Avloniti et al., 2014). Disagreement on fairness regarding the transfer process can cause strained relationships (Pitts et al., 2009) or lead to conflicts (Taylor and Norris, 2000). Families that are close, however, are likely to be able to solve conflicts and foster the perception that the transfer process is fair (Taylor and Norris, 2000).

The successor is one of the main actors in the farm succession process. His or her development, training, and education have an impact on the succession process (Bertoni and Cavicchioli, 2016; Rodriguez-Lizano et al., 2020). The choice of identity of the potential successor within family and business can be a determining factor in the succession process (Mair and Bitsch, 2018). To construct the successor identity, early childhood socialization with intensive contact between farmer, farm, and child is crucial (Fischer and Burton, 2014). Personal characteristics like growing up and being socialized in the family business and external experiences can help determine the commitment of the successor to the family business (Bozer

et al., 2017). To be able to take over the family business, successors must take advantage of their own expertise, competencies, and family values (Barach and Ganitsky, 1995). The willingness of the successor to take over the business also plays an important role for the satisfaction with the succession process and the continued profitability of the business (Venter, Boshoff, and Maas, 2005).

The second main actor in the succession process of a family farm is the predecessor, who can have difficulty to let go of power (Kets de Vries, 1993). As family businesses often represent a life's work, they can be deeply imbued with the personality of the owner, representing identity, social belonging, and continuity throughout life phases to the owner (Breuer, 2013). When the firm becomes a part of the identity of the owner, incumbent owners of family businesses may find themselves feeling anxious about whether the successor will respect or destroy what the predecessor has built (Kets de Vries, 1993). Moreover, the task of predecessors to choose a successor for the firm from within their family, may keep them torn between familial stewardship and stewardship of the business (Bizri, 2016). Illness, ageing, and the predecessor's wish to see the business continue on the other hand can facilitate the business transfer (Kets de Vries, 1993).

Communication between familial stakeholders in the farm succession process is crucial (Matser et al., 2020) and a lack of communication between and within generations involved in the farm transfer can pose a significant threat to a positive outcome (Mair and Bitsch, 2018). However, in most cases, communication is neither structurally nor formally organized, resulting in topics of succession not discussed frequently or systematically among family members (Matser et al., 2020). Stakeholders are described as passive communicators, relying on implicit communication concerning roles and expectations in the succession process (Kaplan et al., 2009). Especially the communication between predecessor and successor about the process and/or intention of succession has an impact on the farm transfer process (Rodriguez-Lizano et al., 2020). Non-explicit communication can cause problems (Rodriguez-Lizano et al., 2020).

## 2.2 Mindsets

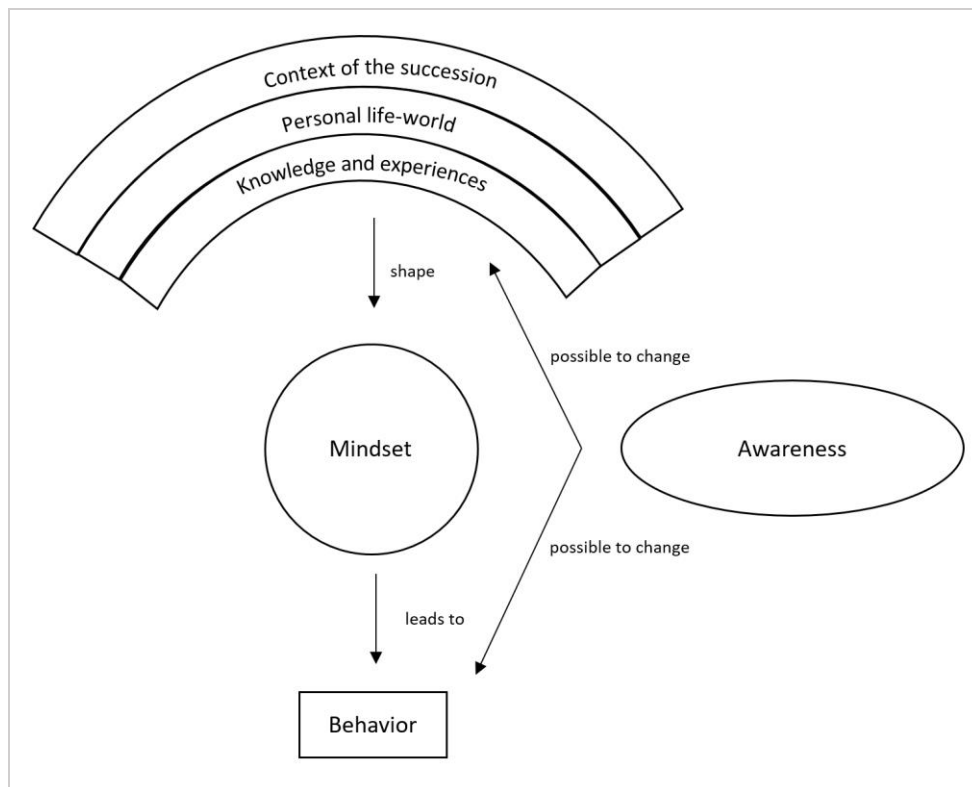
The literature analysis of family business and family farm succession shows that farm succession is accompanied and influenced by various factors from the surroundings of the farm, the farm itself, and various actors, especially from the farming family. This study aims to add another perspective to the research about intra-familial farm succession by focusing on the mindset of the main actors in the process, the predecessor and the successor. In order to do so, first, a mindset construct was developed. Through literature analysis, factors contributing to how a person filters and processes information were identified and arranged into an initial version of the mindset construct to be adapted and refined along with the data analysis. The following illustrates the development of the initial version of the mindset construct.

As Simon (1972) indicated with the term 'bounded rationality', humans are limited regarding their capacity to process information. Simon (1972) argues that humans' rational behavior therefore is restricted to approximation when having to reach a decision, as actors have to work with incomplete information. Their behavior instead is determined by the inner environment of their minds, meaning memories and processes, and the environment of the world outside, which acts on them (Simon, 2000). Likewise, the mindset construct incorporates the idea that humans are limited in their ability to absorb information from the environment. Therefore, they filter information, are selective about what they absorb, and biased regarding interpretation (Gupta and Govindajaran, 2002). These filters, or 'mindsets', are a product of individual life histories (Gupta and Govindajaran, 2002). The interactive nature of mindsets and the environment puts them in a constant state of change and development, evolving according to an individual's interactions and experiences with the environment (Cao and Ngo, 2019). Based on this prior work, the initial mindset construct for the succession process needed to incorporate the *context of succession*, the *personal life-world*, and an individual's *knowledge and experiences* as factors shaping an individual's mindset (figure 1). The individual context of succession represents past and current situations of an individual's life relevant to the development of the mindset and to the succession process, such as the socialization, the current state of the business or themes related to the business and the succession process the individual is dealing with. The personal life-world of an individual may include beliefs, values, and attitudes of that person. Finally, an individual has gone through life experiences and acquired knowledge in relation to the business and the succession process with potential impact on the mindset in the succession process.

Mindsets are expressed through behaviors (Cao and Ngo, 2019). The above described aspects of the individual life history shape the mindset in the context of the succession, leading to behaviors in the interaction with others, including interactions during the succession process. *Behavior* was therefore included as the outcome of the mindset (figure 1).

Current mindsets guide the collection and interpretation of new information (Gupta and Govindajaran, 2002). New information that is inconsistent with the current mindset can either lead to a rejection of that information or a change in the current mindset (Gupta and Govindajaran, 2002). The latter becomes more likely the more self-conscious one is about one’s mindset (Gupta and Govindajaran, 2002). Although Mathisen and Arnulf (2013, p. 134) stated that eventually all mindsets “may become automated and happen without awareness”, awareness of one’s own mindset can be a particularly powerful tool for transcending mindsets (Meadows, 1999). To avoid getting “trapped in one’s own mental web” (Gupta and Govindajaran, 2002, p. 121), learning and the cultivation of self-consciousness about one’s mindset is recommended (Gupta and Govindajaran, 2002). Intentional awareness and experiences can shape one’s mindset, but changes must be reinforced and practiced to make them stable (Bosmann and Fernhaber, 2018). In order to incorporate these ideas into the mindset construct, the factor *awareness* was added (figure 1).

The mindset construct developed for this study is similar to the mental models introduced by Craik (1943), in that it is based on individuals’ experiences in life and their understanding and perceptions of the world around them (Jones et al. 2011). However, mental models are referred to as cognitive structures, small-scale, incomplete models in the mind that represent complex systems, constructed mentally to serve an individual’s understanding of the world, reasoning and decision-making (Johnson-Laird, 1990; Johnson-Laird, 2010). The mindset construct discussed here does not refer to structures or concrete models individuals construct for reasoning and decision-making. Rather, it represents how an individual’s mind is set in the sense of a paradigm, i.e., how this individual sees the world and complex systems within it (Meadows, 1999).



**Figure 1.** Literature-based definition of the mindset construct in the context of intra-familial farm transfer.

### 3 Materials and Methods

Given the exploratory goal of the current work, to investigate the mindset construct in the context of intra-familial farm transfer, grounded theory was chosen as the research approach. Grounded theory serves the purpose of constructing theory, grounded in data (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). During the research process, data collection and data analysis are intertwined procedures, which enable theory development along with data collection; data analysis generates findings as well as new questions, which are then addressed in an adapted data collection (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

In the present study, theory development started with the application of mindset literature to the succession process (figure 1). This application then was examined and revised based on two different data sets, semi-structured in-depth interviews and semi-structured moderated group discussions (figure 2). The use of in-depth interviews is based on the assumption that the interviewees have unique and important knowledge about the succession context they are part of and are able to share this knowledge in a conversation (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Because interviews are issue-oriented, they are especially useful when the researcher has a particular topic to focus on and wants to gather information about it from individuals (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The semi-structured nature of the interviews means they were based on a set of questions, which guided the conversation but that there was space and freedom for the interviewees to talk about what was interesting and important to them (Hesse-Biber, 2017) in the context of intra-familial farm succession. Group discussions as a means of data collection integrate the interaction between multiple people into the process (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The participants in the moderated group discussion do not only respond to the questions provided by the researcher/moderator, but also react to each other as well as the group dynamic (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Thereby, insights into concepts the discussion participants find meaningful in the context of the issue at hand, their behavior, and their feelings and thoughts are possible (Krueger and Casey, 2015; Hesse-Biber, 2017).

The first data set, interviews with stakeholders of succession processes in horticultural family farms, stems from an earlier research project of the second author about family farm succession. This rich data set has not yet been analyzed fully and was available to serve as the initial source of empirical insights regarding the aspects contributing to the mindset construct and to highlight the individual dimension of the succession process, as predecessors, successors, and non-succeeding siblings there express their individual perspectives on the succession process. The analysis of the interviews in the context of the mindset construct strengthened some of the literature-based aspects of the mindset construct, but also pointed to factors that needed to be added. Therefore, the group discussion guide for the later group discussions, the second data set, was developed aiming at further insights about mindsets of familial stakeholders in the succession process. Because intra-familial farm succession takes place within the family context, the group discussions between familial stakeholders were considered useful to integrate this social dimension of the succession into the study. The families who participated in the group discussions differed from the ones interviewed for the first data set. The analysis of the group discussions was used to validate and refine the findings from the interviews in the context of the development of the mindset construct. Accordingly, the results of both the analysis of the interviews and group discussions led to a revised version of the mindset construct. Comparing the analyses of the two data sets also revealed mindset characteristics of predecessors and successors that were exposed in both the interviews and the group discussions. Both data sets fed into the development of the mindset prototypes of successful predecessors and successors.

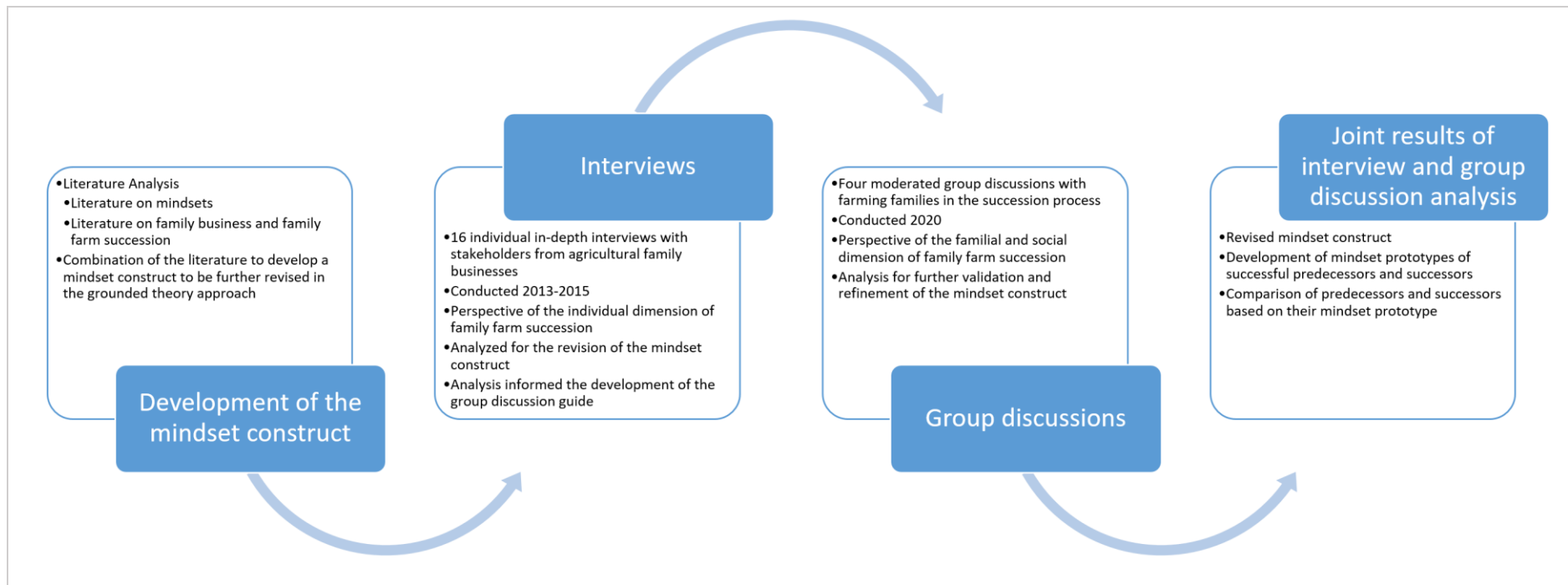


Figure 2. Scheme of the research approach.

### 3.1 Dataset 1: Interviews

In the course of an earlier research project, 16 interviews were conducted by the second author between July 2013 and January 2016 (table 1). The contact with the interviewees was facilitated by consultants and experts from associations, as well as extension agents. The interview partners included seven male predecessors, seven successors (one female), and two non-succeeding children (both female) from 11 family farms in four different federal states of Germany. The state of the succession process on each farm differed, but all can be considered successful in the succession process in terms of identifying a successor determined to take on the business, or already having transferred the business to the successor. The semi-structured interviews were based on an interview guide, which addressed the decision processes during the succession process. The interview guide was continually refined during analysis and theory development of the respective study to ensure the collection of appropriate data. The interviews with a length between 23 to 68 minutes were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Table 1.**  
Description of dataset 1: Interviews.

Region and Date of Interview	Type of Interviewee	Gender	Business No.	Name
Bavaria - Lower Bavaria				
01 July 2013	Predecessor	m	1	Interview 1
05 July 2013	Successor	f	2	Interview 2
08 July 2013	Successor	m	3	Interview 3
08 July 2013	Predecessor	m	3	Interview 4
Bavaria - Lake Constance Region				
09 January 2014	Successor	m	4	Interview 5
Saarland				
11 February 2014	Successor	m	5	Interview 6
12 February 2014	Successor	m	6	Interview 7
12 February 2014	Predecessor	m	6	Interview 8
Baden-Württemberg				
12 February 2014	Successor	m	7	Interview 9
12 February 2014	Predecessor	m	7	Interview 10
Saxony				
25 March 2014	Predecessor	m	8	Interview 11
26 March 2014	Successor	m	9	Interview 12
27 March 2014	Predecessor	m	10	Interview 13
Bavaria - Upper Bavaria				
14 August 2015	Predecessor	m	11	Interview 14
14 August 2015	Sibling of successor	f	11	Interview 15
07 September 2015	Sibling of successor	f	11	Interview 16

### 3.2 Dataset 2: Group Discussions

Personal contacts of the first author with predecessors and successors of agricultural family farms served as access to the field. The first author chose the families from her personal context to overcome the reluctance of participants to share insights into their family dynamics with the researcher. The farms included mainly rely on familial workforce and the predecessor couple (predecessor and wife) has more than one child. The families participating in the group discussions mirrored the phases of succession of the interview partners from the first data set: Some had identified a determined successor but were at the very beginning of the succession process, some close to legally handing over the farm, some already had transferred the farm to the successor. Therefore, the time delay between the interviews and group discussions was not considered relevant for the research process of this study. The willingness of the families to share their farm succession story with the researcher was the final criteria of selection. Four group discussions with families in the course of family farm succession were conducted in August 2020 in two different federal states of Germany (table 2). Familial stakeholders present were at least the predecessor couple and the successor (group discussion (GD) 1, GD 2). In addition, a sibling of the successor and her husband were present in GD 3, and the wife of the successor in GD 4. The families themselves decided if and who they wanted to add to the discussions apart from the predecessor couple and the successor. The individuals involved in the group discussions and the individuals they referred to in



the context of succession are considered stakeholders of the succession process in this study. Because the researcher was no stranger to the families involved, participants felt comfortable enough to interact as realistically as possible with each other as incidences of humor, emotions, and controversy within the group discussions illustrated. The face-to-face discussions lasted between 56 and 64 minutes and followed a moderator guide, which outlined the main topics compiled after the analysis of the first data set. The questions aimed at starting the interaction and discussion between family members present and addressed issues they personally find important in the succession context, their motivation behind actions in the succession process, personal strategies, and situations uncovering potentially differing mindsets between family members involved in the farm transfer process. All group discussions were facilitated, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim by the first author.

**Table 2.**  
Description of dataset 2: Group discussions (GD).

Region and Date of Group Discussion	Participants present	Gender	Business No.	Name		
Bavaria - Upper Bavaria	05 August 2020	Predecessor - Father	m	1	GD 1	
		Mother	f	1		
		Successor	m	1		
	12 August 2020	Predecessor - Father	m	2	GD 2	
		Mother	f	2		
		Successor	m	2		
	16 August 2020	Predecessor - Father	m	3	GD 3	
		Mother	f	3		
		Successor	f	3		
		Sibling of Successor	f	3		
	Lower Saxony	20 August 2020	Husband of Sibling	m	3	GD 4
			Predecessor - Father	m	4	
Mother			f	4		
Successor			m	4		
Wife of Successor			f	4		

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out with the help of the software ATLAS.ti, Version 8. For both datasets, the transcripts were first coded. Therefore, similar sections of text in the transcripts were given conceptual labels leading to “codes” (table 3 and 4, exemplary). Coding was done inductively, meaning that the codes were formulated according to themes emerging from the data. The literature-based mindset construct was not used to inform the coding. Both for the interview and group discussion analysis, two rounds of coding were carried out for each interview and group discussion until no new codes were needed.



In a later step in both analyses, the codes were assigned to more abstract categories, which contain several codes each, structured according to themes (table 3 and 4, exemplary). Here, a mixed approach of inductive and deductive category forming was used, meaning the categorization was performed in two different ways: (1) deductive, to the extent that codes reflected elements of the literature-based mindset construct and (2) inductive, for the emerging elements that had not been discussed in the literature. For the analysis of the individual interviews, some codes could be assigned to categories derived from aspects of the literature-based definition of the mindset construct (table 3, exemplary). Similarly, some codes from the group discussions could be assigned to preexisting categories from the analysis of the first data set. Visualization of the remaining codes in ATLAS.ti networks for the individual interviews and the group discussions served to help clustering them into additional inductive categories (table 4, exemplary). These inductive categories comprised characteristics of successful predecessors and successors as well as additionally uncovered aspects that supplemented the mindset construct.

The codes connected to successful predecessors and successors of both the interviews and group discussions, which were assigned to the deductive categories from the initial mindset construct, as well as to the additional, inductive categories (table 5), were also used for another purpose. Above evaluating the mindset construct with them, these codes served to create mindset prototypes of successful predecessors and successors. The mindset prototypes were developed by regrouping the codes into categories related to the characteristics of the successful predecessors and successors in the present study. Only codes

converging from multiple interviewees and group discussion participants were used in the mindset prototypes.



**Table 3.**

Inductive code and deductive category forming (exemplary) from the individual interviews and group discussions.

Deductive category		Code (assigned to successful predecessors and successors, exemplary)	Quote (exemplary)
Knowledge and experiences		Acquisition of knowledge business-wise	Mhm (affirmative) quite differently, so we already have one, a tutor from the [name of professional club they are in], [name of tutor], who looks after us and who also always puts together the program a little bit and, my, and depending on that we have a lecture about the topic or that. But that is already quite good." (successor (m), interview 3, 00:35:18-4)
		Experiences with own succession process	"And at that time, my parents already acted with foresight and made it possible for me to take over the business in such a way that I was able to do so without having to make severe cuts." (predecessor (m), interview 1, 00:26:04-6)
Behavior		Collaboration with the successor	"Yes, I am now in the process of her taking over production a bit outside, although I am still doing plant protection now, because I have familiarized myself with it, she has to come in first. And it's not like you have to be there at seven on the dot. You can prepare that, you can do things like that, and I'm trying to get rid of that a little bit. I still do the finances myself, but I have more or less involved her in the organization of the work outside, so that she then makes decisions about who does what, how, and where." (predecessor (m), interview 13, 00:44:01-6)
		Integration of the successor in decision making	"[...] but it is so that we have the decisions, everyone has a free hand, just when I now say, yes, we should have more or we do less or so, then we discuss that, for what reason now more or less and then that is implemented accordingly." (predecessor (m), interview 4, 00:29:34-1)

**Table 4.**

Inductive code and category forming (exemplary) from the individual interviews and group discussions.

Quote (exemplary)	Code (assigned to successful predecessors and successors, exemplary)		Inductive category
"So my wife, I had finished my apprenticeship, I was sixteen, seventeen, I was eighteen and I was working at home at the time when I met my wife and that was for us, or that was for her, and I also told her that if we want to stay together then (...) I have a very labor-intensive job and that's just the way it is. And, no, she agreed to it." (successor (m), interview 3, 00:20:11-6)	Partner and business		Familial stakeholders
"Exactly, exactly in the sense, I don't have the father as a burden, I don't have to take care of him or, but he supports me." (successor (f), interview 2, 00:18:23-1)	Predecessor/parents as advisors and supporters		
"Yes, early enough. Make it [the succession process] early enough. Always good. It's like this. When you reach retirement age at 60, it's natural, you slow down, you... When you're young, you have a completely different kind of energy and you put something else on the side, you can do it much faster. Everyone notices that. Everybody notices that. You notice that, you would like to do it fast from the head and so, but you have to do it slower and that's no use, so that you don't... The reactions also decrease and that... Nobody can run away from that, that's just the way it is." (predecessor (m), GD 4, 00:57:21-6)	Timing of the succession		Time
"[...] we wanted to have the handover of the farm already settled actually by 30.06.14, but as I said, then the baby came in between and then that had to be postponed again. And then we realized that it is not so easy to solve that that quickly." (predecessor (m), interview 13, 00:40:02-5)	Succession as a lengthy process		

**Table 5.**

Deductive and inductive category forming with regard to the mindset construct in the context of intra-familial farm transfer with codes from the individual interviews and group discussions.

	Codes assigned to successful predecessors	Codes assigned to successful successors
Deductive categories of the mindset construct		
Context of the succession	Aims and plans for retirement	Socialization on the business area Economic situation of the business
Personal life-world	Setting an example of work-life balance to the successor Wish for education of the successor Freedom of decision making Freedom of decision making for the successor Acting self-directed Openness to hand over the business	Innovation Freedom of decision making Acting self-directed Passion for the profession Motivation to take on business
Knowledge and experiences	Acquisition of knowledge regarding the business Acquisition of knowledge regarding succession Experiences with own succession process	Acquisition of knowledge regarding the business Acquisition of knowledge regarding succession Professional education of the successor Work away from the family business Considering different possibilities for the journey of life Decision of the successor to take over the business
Behavior	Collaboration with the successor Separated areas of work in the business between predecessor and successor Integration of the successor in decision making Investments into the business before the succession Planning thinking of the predecessor with regard to business and succession No pressure put on successor with regard to the succession Financial protection of the retirement Financial and legal protection of predecessor and successor	Organization of work between predecessor and successor Development of the business Planning thinking of the successor with regard to business and succession
Awareness	Being aware of and having sympathy for the successor's situation	Awareness about changes and development Intrafamilial conflicts or potential of conflicts Sense of responsibility Being aware of and having sympathy for the predecessor's situation
Inductive categories of the mindset construct		
Familial stakeholders	Partner and business Successor's siblings Closeness of the family in the succession process Thoughts or worries about successor	Partner and business Successor's siblings Closeness of the family Predecessor/parents as advisors and supporters
Information flows	Consultancy Exchange with colleagues with regard to the business and/or the succession Communication within the family Communication between predecessor and successor	Consultancy Communication with predecessor and the family
Time	Timing of the succession Succession as a lengthy process Anticipation of the future Reflection of the past	Timing of the succession Anticipation of the future Reflection of the past

## 4 Results

The analysis of the individual interviews and the group discussions with successful predecessors and successors empirically supports aspects of the initially developed, literature-based definition of the mindset construct and suggests additional aspects to expand the mindset construct. The joint results of both the analysis of the interviews and group discussions led to detailed categories enumerating specific aspects of the mindsets of successful predecessors and successors in the context of intra-familial farm transfer. These aspects, based on the convergence of multiple interviewees and group discussion participants, were regrouped to develop mindset prototypes of successful predecessors (figure 3) and successors (figure 4).

### 4.1 Mindset Prototype of Successful Predecessors

Successful predecessors shared information relating to the mindset-shaping factors of the initial definition of the mindset construct, including the predecessors' context of the succession, their personal life-world, and their knowledge and experiences. Many predecessors described their aims and plans for their retirement, exploring their personal context of the succession process. Several predecessors addressed their personal life-world by sharing beliefs, values they cherish, and attitudes in the context of the business and the succession process. For instance, some predecessors believed in setting an example of work-life balance to their prospective successors as well as granting them freedom of choice to encourage them to continue the family business. The wish of some predecessors for their successors to undergo education and training is rooted in the belief that education offers social status and professional prospects. Successful predecessors often valued the freedom of own decisions and acting self-directed. When it comes to transferring the farm to the next generation, predecessors expressed their openness to

hand over the farm. Successful predecessors shared experiences from their own succession process and described how they acquired knowledge with regard to business operations in general and the succession process specifically.

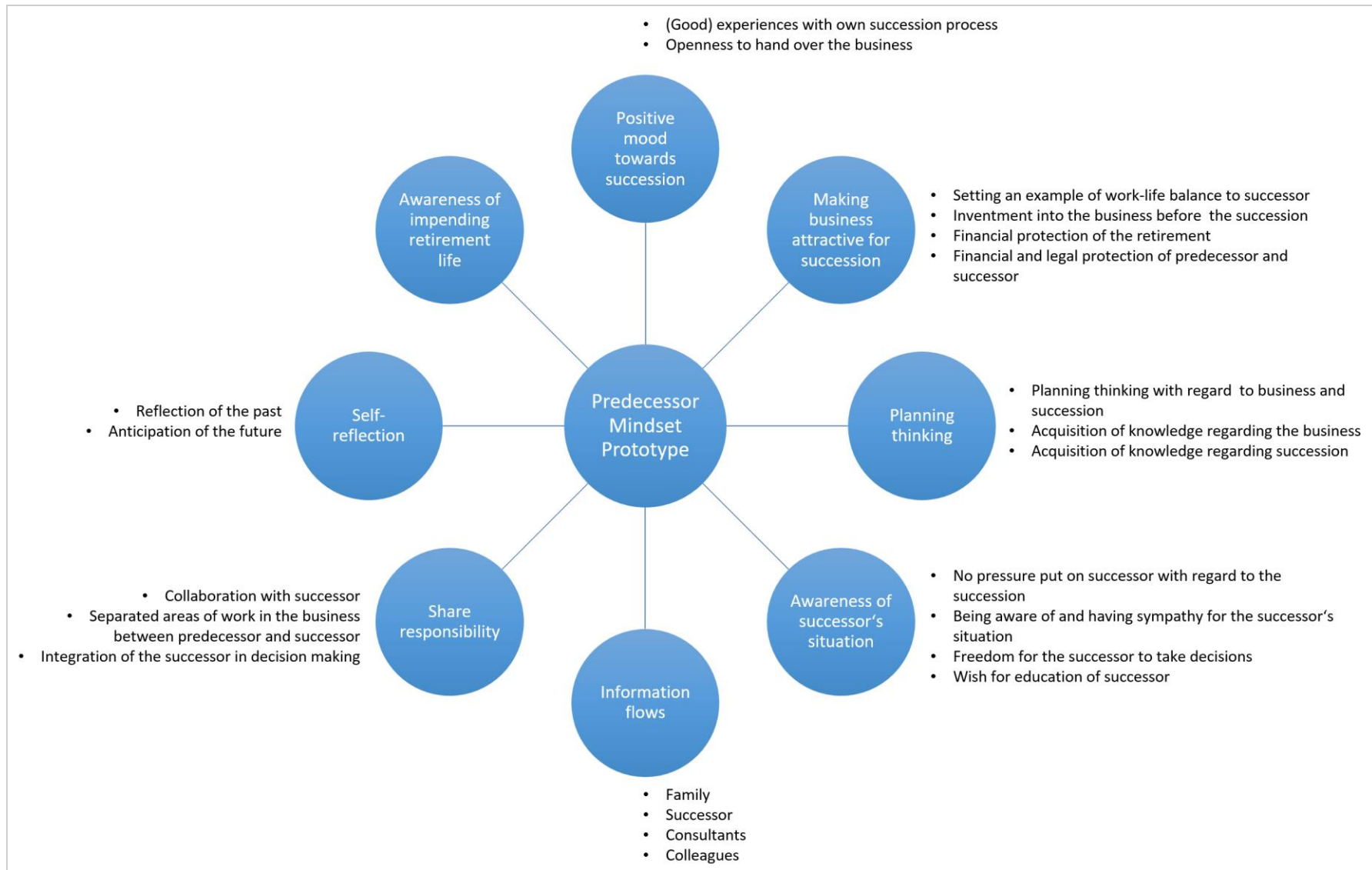
Many predecessors referred to their behavior when describing their work in the family business as well as actions they took with regard to the succession process. They explained how they collaborated with their successor in the daily farm work, how they integrated the successor in decision making processes, and how they distributed different areas of work between each other. Successful predecessors described their plans for the farm and referred to investments into their business before the succession as well as actions they took to ensure the financial protection of the business and their own retirement.

In addition, passages from the individual interviews and group discussions with the successful predecessors mirror their awareness of their own mindset. Many predecessors knew that situations within the succession process were experienced differently by themselves and their successor. They expressed their awareness of the successor's situation and their sympathy for the successor.

Apart from topics that could be assigned to categories from the initial, literature-based mindset construct, the successful predecessors brought up additional aspects during the interviews and group discussions, which had not been captured in the initial mindset construct. These additional aspects were summarized in the inductive categories familial stakeholders, information flows, and time.

In many cases, the successful predecessors mentioned their considerations in the succession process with regard to their successors, their other, non-succeeding children, their children's partners, and the family in general. These other family members represent stakeholders in the succession process that play a more relevant role for the predecessors in this context than colleagues or consultants who are involved in the exchange of information about the business and the succession process. Regarding the flow of information, successful predecessors described several situations. This included the exchange of information with regard to the business or the succession process with consultants or colleagues and also communication and information exchange with family members and the successor especially about daily life issues in general or of specific information regarding the succession process of the family farm. Many situations successful predecessors described, involved a time aspect, either reflecting upon the past or anticipating possible future events. For example, in using different scenarios to plan future farm developments, the succession process, or their upcoming retirement, predecessors anticipated the future. Moreover, successful predecessors talked about the timing of the succession and reflected upon it as a lengthy process.

In addition of comparing the codes with the mindset construct, they were also regrouped to develop a prototypic mindset of the successful predecessors (figure 3). According to the joint results of the analysis of both the interviews and the group discussions, successful predecessors are characterized by a positive mood towards succession, efforts to get the business ready for succession, planning thinking, awareness of the successor's situation, and the creation of information flows between family, consultants, and colleagues. Moreover, successful predecessors share responsibility on the farm, are self-reflected, and aware of their impending retirement life.



**Figure 3.** Mindset prototype of successful predecessors in the context of intra-familial farm transfer.

## 4.2 Mindset Prototype of Successful Successors

Many successors explained their context of the succession situation by referring to their socialization in the family business, using the business area as a place to play or to get involved in the work on the farm. Further describing the context of the succession, several successors emphasized the economic situation of the farm and how it related to the succession process in either a positive or a negative way. Bringing their personal life-world into play, successful successors referred to their innovative ideas or projects as future opportunities for their family businesses. Many successors expressed a passion for their profession and described their motivation to take on the family business. Several passages of the transcripts emphasized the successors' valuation for the freedom of decision making and acting self-directed. The successful successors described how they gained knowledge and experience during professional training and education and while working away from their parents' farm. Several successors experienced a situation in which they weighed different possibilities for their journey of life. Furthermore, successful successors explained how they still kept acquiring knowledge, be it either with regard to business operations in general or for the succession process specifically.

When it comes to their behavior, successful successors, similar to what the predecessors described, planned future events and formulated aims for the farm. They also shared insights about the development of their family business. In addition, they explained how they organized the work on the family farm between themselves and their predecessors.

Regarding the succession process, many successors expressed concern and awareness of change and development processes of the family business, sometimes as a necessity for the farm to evolve and persist throughout the generations. Beyond that, successful successors referred to intra-familial conflicts or the potential of conflicts, thereby showing their awareness regarding the possibility or presence of tension among family members. Furthermore, successful successors in the interviews and group discussions showed their sense of responsibility for the farm and family. Similar to the successful predecessors, the successors estimated situations in operating the business or within the succession process as being perceived differently by their predecessor. Knowing this, they also expressed their sympathy for the predecessor.

On the other hand, the successful successors referred to topics, which were not part of the initial mindset construct. These topics were summarized in the inductive categories familial stakeholders, information flows, and time. This is similar to what was identified for the successful predecessors.

Similar to the predecessors, familial stakeholders in the farm succession process, like the family, the predecessor, and the own partner played an important role for the successors. This became visible in their references to their partner and their siblings in relation to the business and the succession process. They also referred to bonds within the family and described their predecessor or their parents as advisors or supporters. The exchange of information also had relevance for many successors, who pointed to the involvement of consultants to inform decisions and developments in the family business, but also to the information flow between themselves and family members, especially the predecessor. The time aspect, identified for successful predecessors, also applies to successful successors. During the interviews and group discussions, they raised the timing of the succession, anticipated future developments or reflected upon decisions and actions from the past.

Again, in addition of comparing the codes with the mindset construct, they were regrouped to develop a prototypic mindset of successful successors (figure 4). According to the joint results of the analysis of both the interviews and the group discussions, successful successors are characterized by being socialized in the family business, had time and space for personal development, and apply planning thinking. Successful successors share insights in interpersonal aspects of the succession process, create information flows between family, their predecessors, and consultants. They are motivated to take on the family business and value the freedom of decision making.

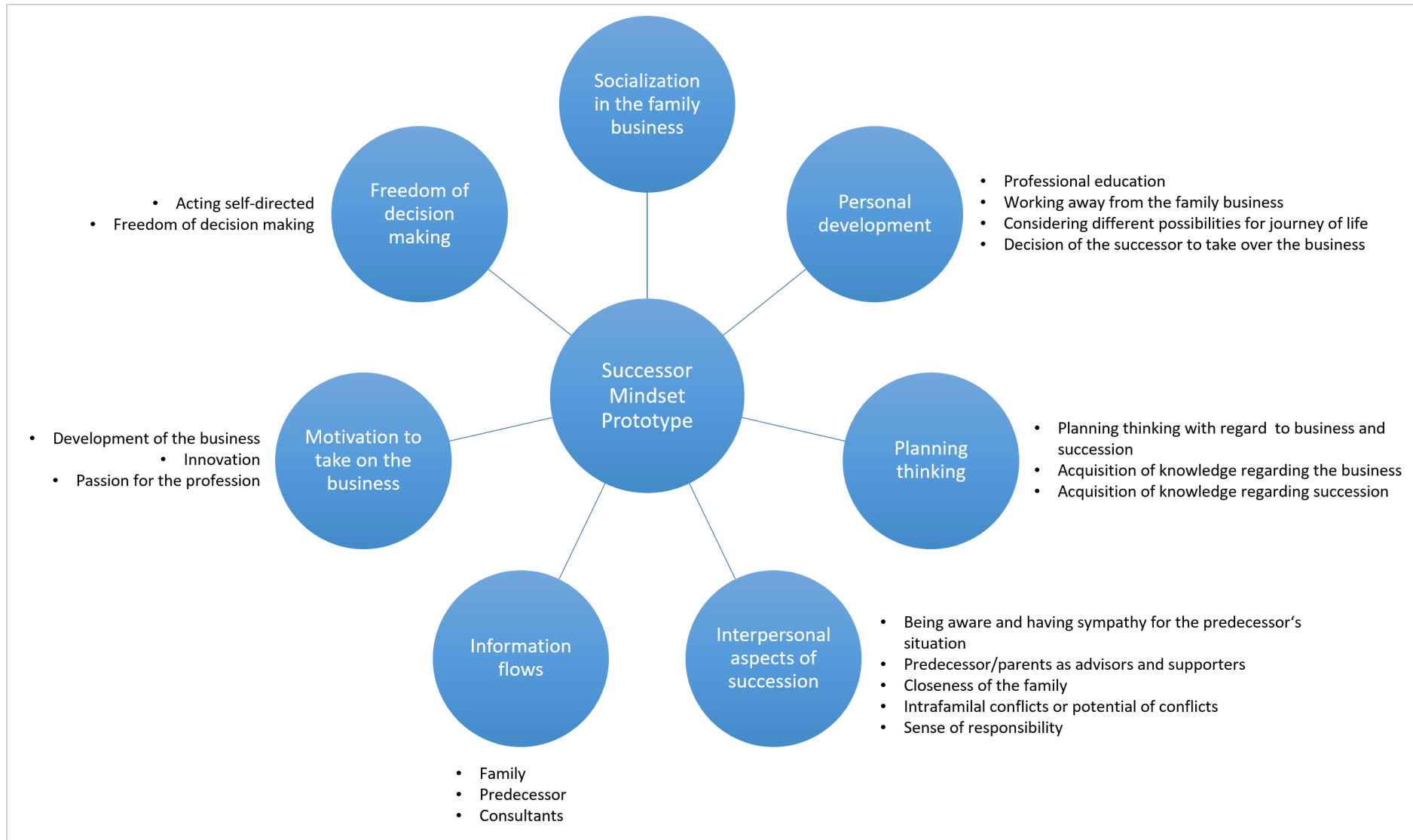


Figure 4. Mindset prototype of successful successors in the context of intra-familial farm transfer.

### 4.3 Comparison between Predecessor and Successor Mindset Prototypes

When comparing the mindset prototypes of successful predecessors and successors, similarities, complementary aspects as well as differing aspects became visible (table 6). As far as similarities are concerned, successful predecessors and successors both are characterized by using planning thinking when they explore future developments of the family businesses. Moreover, predecessors as well as successors create information flows between each other, within their own family, and with consultants and colleagues.

In other aspects of the mindset prototypes, the predecessors and successors seem to complement each other. Where the predecessors have the successors' situation in mind and are aware of the needs of the successors, the successors show awareness of interpersonal relations within the succession context in the family in general, but also for the specific situation of the predecessors. Thereby, both predecessors and successors show insights and awareness of the extraordinary situation for individuals in the context of the farm succession. The fact that successful predecessors share responsibilities on the farm with their successors complements that successors value the freedom of decision making and to act self-directed. Additionally, the categories self-reflection of predecessors and personal development of successors indicate that both undergo learning experiences and develop together throughout the succession phase.

Furthermore, other categories of the mindset prototypes refer to differing aspects of successful predecessors and successors in the succession context. Because of their own experiences and expectations, predecessors may engage in the succession process with a positive mood and are active to make the business attractive for the transfer to the next generation. The anticipation of their retirement life distinguishes predecessors from successors. On the other hand, the socialization in the family business and motivation to take it on play a role for successors in the farm transfer process.

**Table 6.**

Comparison of the mindset prototypes of successful predecessors and successors in the context of intra-familial farm transfer.

	Aspects of the mindset prototype of successful predecessors	Aspects of the mindset prototype of successful successors
Similarities	Planning thinking Information flows	Planning thinking Information flows
Complementary aspects	Awareness of successor's situation Share responsibility Self-reflection	Interpersonal aspects of succession Freedom of decision making Personal development
Individual aspects	Positive mood towards succession Making business attractive for succession Awareness of impending retirement life	Socialization Motivation to take on business

## 5 Discussion

The preceding analysis of individual interviews and interactional group discussions about intra-familial farm succession processes in this study highlighted the importance of the individual as well as the familial-interactional perspective in family business succession. The inclusion of successors who already have taken over all managerial control of their family farms as well as prospective successors followed the advice of Chiswell (2014) to pay more attention to the view of potential successors in the context of succession research. The current study led to the development of individual mindset prototypes of successful predecessors and successors, and also includes both the individual and the familial perspective to further refine the mindset construct.

Comparing the mindset prototypes developed to prior research in the context of successful family business and farm succession, general support for the aspects of the prototypical mindsets of successful predecessors and successors was found. Business-related and emotional factors as well as social factors (Engelhart et al., 2018) contribute to the success of intra-familial farm transfer. In the present study, business-related factors identified, include making the business attractive and ready for succession in case of the successful predecessors, and business-related motivations of the successors. In fact, Calus et al. (2008) could show that higher asset farms in terms of total farm assets have better succession perspectives than farms with less assets for the case of Belgian farmers. Social factors identified, include the awareness of predecessors of their successors' situation during the succession process, the successors' socialization in the family business, and the successors' concern for interpersonal relations within the succession process. The positive mood towards succession as far as the predecessors are concerned and the reference to the closeness of the family, and interpersonal relations as far as the successors are concerned, refer to emotional factors.



For a successful succession, predecessors and successors require organizational, analytical, and personal skills as well as skills in communication, management, finance, and law (Mair and Rombach, 2020). The organizational and analytical skills of the successful predecessors and successors in the present study are represented by planning thinking in the mindset prototypes. Information flows, the gain in expertise during the personal development of the successor, and the wish of the predecessor for education and training of the successor illustrate knowledge-based skills of successful predecessors and successors in the present study. Both predecessors and successors were interested in the (in-)formal acquisition of subject matter knowledge and information regarding the farm transfer process. Communication within the family kept the different family members involved in this study informed, which is of great importance in farm succession processes (Mair and Bitsch, 2018).

Furthermore, Mair and Rombach (2020) named physical distance, role definition, acknowledgement of the successor's experience by the predecessor, and the use of consultants as sources of support throughout the succession process. In the present study, predecessors and successors sought physical distance by separating work areas in their daily life on the farm and predecessors acknowledged their successor's experience by sharing responsibilities in farm work. Both successful predecessors and successors wanted to involve or already had involved consultants in their succession processes. Successful predecessors often reported their efforts to show a good work-life balance to their children in general. That a good work-life balance helps a positive outcome of the farm transfer process, is supported by the study of Mair and Bitsch (2018) who showed that successors noticed when their parents actively participated in the family life despite tight schedules in the family business.

Even if predecessors in the present study were described as a source of advice and help by their successors, and expressed willingness to help on the farm after the transfer, they were not specifically referred to as guides and mentors, as the study of Mair and Rombach (2020) suggested for a successful succession process. However, the exchange of information, and the collaboration between successor and predecessor are part of the mindset prototypes. These aspects were also identified as prerequisites of a successful intra-familial farm transfer in prior research (Engelhart et al. 2018) and refer to the transfer of intangible aspects, like site or farm-specific knowledge (Lobley, 2010). Solomon et al. (2011) stated that openness and curiosity of predecessors upon the notion of their retirement life facilitates the succession process, whereas fear of and dreading retirement are constraints. Even if the predecessors in this study did not directly express curiosity about their retirement, they reflected on aims and plans for the period of retirement. This anticipation of the retirement life matches the findings of Sottomayor et al. (2011) who saw their German study participants with an identified successor more likely to anticipate their retirement earlier than the normal retirement age.

The mindset prototype of successful successors contains motivational aspects including farm development and innovation. Breuer (2012) assigned the pursuit of ambitions to personalize the object of the transfer, in this case the family farm, independent of the predecessor to a prototypical successor. He added that contrary to the successor, prototypical predecessors would aim for the preservation of the characteristics of the object they have shaped. The mindset prototype of the present study, however, showed that successful predecessors rather share responsibility with the successor and appreciate his or her opinion and experience. This behavior goes along with the findings from Fischer and Burton (2014) who identified the successor's progression on the farm ladder as crucial in the succession process. During this process, the successor becomes progressively involved in farm work and decision-making tasks which in turn reaffirms his or her identity as the successor (Fischer and Burton, 2014). The predecessors in the current study obviously foster this process by actively sharing the responsibilities on their farms with the identified successors.

Both the mindset prototypes of successful successors and predecessors draw attention to their individual characteristics during the succession process. In their study about key steps and dynamics in family farm succession, Bertolozzi-Caredio et al. (2020) found the individual dimension central to the succession process, especially as it influences the potentiality and willingness stage of the succession. In these stages, the child or potential successor has to develop relevant attributes and experiences and get involved in farming (Bertolozzi-Caredio et al., 2020). In the mindset prototypes, it can be seen that the successful successors undergo these experiences and the successful predecessors foster this development. In a recent broad study with the aim of deeper understanding of farm generational renewal and its influencing factors, in-depth interviews on 85 farms in different phases of the succession process in eleven European regions were conducted (Coopmans et al. 2021). The researchers identified fourteen factors, which influence the three conceptual phases of succession, namely the formation of successor identity, the farm succession process, and farm development. The influential factors were categorized into four spheres of influence based on their type of effect onto the succession process. These spheres of influence refer to societal effects, agricultural resources, farm and family, and personal effects. Especially the factors included in the personal sphere of influence can be found in the mindset prototype of the successor

identified in the current study, again highlighting the individual dimension of family farm succession. Coopmans et al. (2021) listed early involvement and socialization on the farm, the perception of farming as an opportunity to be your own boss, the exploratory behavior, education, and experiences on the career path, as well as personality, consisting of motivations, values, norms, and emotions, as factors influencing the succession process. In the successor's mindset prototype, these factors are mirrored in the socialization in the family business, the personal development, motivation to take on the business, and the freedom of decision making.

The four spheres of influence identified by Coopmans et al. (2021) are also found in the mindset-shaping aspects of the mindset construct (figure 1). The farm and family sphere of influence (Coopmans et al. 2021) becomes more emphasized in the mindset construct when considering the additionally identified aspects of stakeholders and information flow as these aspects deal with the relations and interactions between people involved in the succession process. From the point of view of the successors, stakeholders in the farm succession process are the predecessor, siblings, the family in general, and their own partners. From the point of view of the predecessor, the own partner, the successor, the successor's partner, and the other children play a role as familial stakeholders in the succession process. In support of adding stakeholders to the mindset construct, Breuer (2012) highlighted the role of the context and its actors – the protagonists, but also other actors with roles in the succession context – in transfer processes, emphasizing the relevance of attitudes and identifications in relation to the object of transfer. Mair and Bitsch (2018) identified the influence of successors' partners as a decisive factor in farm succession processes. The importance of other persons for an individual's socialization, learning, and experiences already implies their influence on an individual's mindset.

Approaching the topic mindset from a medical background, the study of Crum, Leibowitz, and Verghese (2017) found that the mindsets of patients were also shaped by the social context. They concluded that what others – in their case doctors – told the patients mattered or potentially shaped the mindset of the patients and significantly affected therapy outcomes (Crum et al. 2017). Also, the quality of the relationship between the patient and the doctor could make a difference for the mindset of the patient (Crum et al. 2017). However, it is questionable if stakeholders should be assigned to the context of the succession as a mindset-shaping factor rather than standing for themselves in the mindset construct because they belong to the social environment of an individual. Familial stakeholders in the succession process of a family business, on the other hand, are among the closest relatives of an individual and therefore deserve a more prominent role in their influence on an individual's mindset (figure 5).

By the addition of information flows to the mindset construct, the importance of learning for raising awareness of one's mindset and behavior, and thereby the ability to change are strengthened. Gupta and Govindajaran (2002) and Bosmann and Fernhaber (2018) highlighted the influence of knowledge gain and experiences to achieve awareness of one's mindset. Learning, gaining knowledge and experiences depend on flows of information. The role of information flows identified in the present study calls for emphasizing their influence and strengthening their place in the mindset construct (figure 5).

Similar to the present study, Breuer (2012) referred to the role of time in transfer processes when he pointed to the importance of different perceptions, interpretations, and representations of transfer processes from different temporal distances as well as from different perspectives, e.g., participants or observers. Because of different levels of awareness of participating actors regarding the succession situation or temporal phases within it, these actors have differing chances of anticipating events and planning their actions (Breuer, 2012). Breuer's (2012) view supports time as an important aspect of mindsets because the awareness of time aspects can influence the behavior of actors. As time is a rather abstract theme with a possible impact on all factors of the mindset construct, it is depicted as a circle around the mindset construct (figure 5).

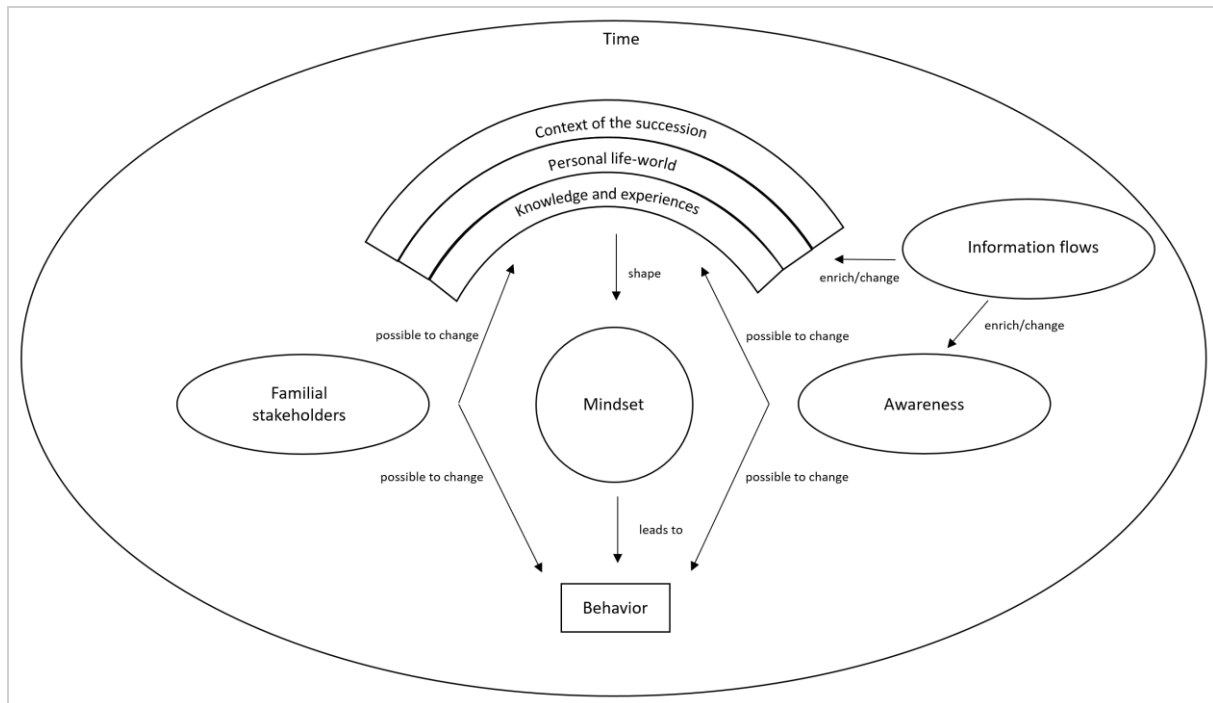


Figure 5. Revised definition of the mindset construct in the context of intra-familial farm transfer.

## 6 Conclusions

The findings of the present study, rooting in in-depth interviews and group discussions, served to gain additional insights into the mindsets in intra-familial farm succession processes; and introduced the mindset construct into the research on intra-familial farm succession. The data collected led to a further refinement of the initially developed, literature-based mindset construct by adding the aspects stakeholders, information flows, and time. It further served to highlight the interaction of the individual and social dimension within family farm successions. The mindset prototypes of successful predecessors and successors show that these protagonists of the succession process share the characteristic of planning thinking and the creation of information flows between themselves and other stakeholders of the succession. In other characteristics, they complement each other mutually, e.g., when successors seek self-directed actions and predecessors share responsibilities on the farm with their successors or when both reflect upon each other's situation in the succession context.

While literature analysis and the empirical findings in this study support the expanded definition of the mindset construct presented above (figure 5), future research should test the expanded mindset construct with additional data sets. Potentially, additional factors can be identified in the future. The mindset approach offers a supplementary and valuable perspective on succession processes. The resulting knowledge gain on how behavior of especially predecessors and successors in the succession process is shaped and changeable is valuable for socio-economic consultants involved in farm transfer processes, but also for the respective families themselves. Especially the newly identified aspects adding to the mindset construct can help predecessors and successors, but also other stakeholders in farm transfer processes to identify and overcome problems during this phase, as well as prevent problems from happening. The prototypic mindsets of successful predecessors and successors identified offer possibilities for (very) early interventions to increase the likelihood of successful farm transfer processes. Through raising the awareness of these (very) early processes laying the foundations for successful succession, families can increase the likelihood of accomplishing successful and agreeable (farm) business transfers.

The present study was not able to fully integrate the perspectives of female predecessors and successors. The agricultural sector in Germany still is a traditional field of work, where less women than men can be found, especially in the positions of farm owner-managers or successors of farm owner-managers. Succession of farms often follows the traditional patriarchal system of male succession. This issue will also make it difficult in the future to realize the integration of the female farm owner-manager and successor perspective.

Apart from that, no light could be shed on potential differences in perspective from failed succession processes in the present study. Further research in this area could be valuable, but will be difficult to realize. Psychological aspects like cognitive dissonance make it stressful for people involved to talk about their experiences with a failed succession process or may distort the recollection of events in relation to it. Stakeholders can be reluctant to further deal with the experience of the failed succession and to share their story with a researcher.

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