
Research Articles

A Strategic Framework for Succession Planning and Resilience in Esports and Entertainment SMEs

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Abstract

This research aimed to examine the organizational structure and management characteristics of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and to identify the core components of successor development in the Esports and Entertainment industries. The study addressed the need for systematic successor development to support organizational continuity, competitiveness, and sustainable business growth in rapidly changing industries. A mixed-method research approach was employed. The study population consisted of executives and entrepreneurs of SMEs in the Esports and Entertainment industries, with a sample of 400 respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to assess organizational structure, management characteristics, and factors related to successor development. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), while qualitative information was used to support the interpretation of the findings.

The findings indicated that successor development consists of four critical components: Innovation and Technology, Cooperation Networks, Knowledge Management, and Business Transfer. Innovation and Technology emphasized the adoption of new technologies and innovative approaches to strengthen organizational competitiveness. Cooperation Networks highlighted the importance of organizational policies and collaboration among relevant stakeholders. Knowledge Management focused on establishing systematic mechanisms and dedicated units for knowledge sharing and transfer. Business Transfer involved appropriate methods and processes for preparing future leaders to assume managerial and ownership responsibilities. Statistical analysis demonstrated that entrepreneurs placed significant importance on all four components at the 0.05 significance level. The findings provide a framework for developing successor development strategies that can strengthen organizational continuity and support sustainable growth among SMEs in the Esports and Entertainment industries.

Keywords: Strategic Guidelines, Successor Development, Esports and Entertainment Industries

Introduction

The rapid expansion of the esports and entertainment industries has created new opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Thailand, including a growing number of family-owned businesses. These enterprises contribute substantially to employment, innovation, and economic development; however, their long-term sustainability is frequently challenged by difficulties associated with leadership succession and intergenerational transition. Research on family businesses indicates that only a proportion successfully survive beyond the founding generation, highlighting the limitations of conventional approaches to leadership transfer and successor preparation. In Thailand, family-owned SMEs similarly face increasing competitive pressures, changing consumer behavior, and organizational challenges that may affect their continuity and growth.

The succession challenge is particularly significant in esports and entertainment because these industries operate within highly dynamic environments characterized by rapid technological development, changing digital platforms, evolving consumer preferences, and

continuous innovation. Organizations therefore require leaders who can combine managerial capabilities with digital competencies, adaptability, innovation, and an understanding of audience engagement. Magno and Cassia (2021) emphasize the importance of responding to technological and market changes, while Allal-Chérif et al. (2024) highlight the role of structured successor development in strengthening organizational continuity and adaptability. Consequently, succession planning should extend beyond the transfer of ownership and incorporate systematic development of the knowledge, skills, competencies, and leadership capabilities required by future business leaders.

Family-owned SMEs may also experience internal barriers to effective succession. Strong attachment to established traditions, centralized decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and resistance to organizational change can constrain innovation and business performance (Abbu & Gopalakrishna, 2021). At the same time, increasing competition requires family businesses to recognize new opportunities, adopt innovative practices, and respond effectively to environmental changes (Cannavacciuolo et al., 2022). In digital-intensive industries, these challenges may be further intensified by platform transformation, technological disruption, and the need for continuous strategic adaptation (Miele et al., 2023). Effective succession planning is therefore important for reducing transition-related risks and strengthening organizational continuity (Colovic, 2022).

Despite growing research on family business succession and SME development, limited attention has been given to successor development specifically within Thai SMEs operating in the esports and entertainment industries. Existing studies provide valuable insights into succession, innovation, and organizational adaptation, but an integrated framework that connects family dynamics, leadership development, digital competency, innovation, and organizational resilience remains insufficiently developed for this context. This gap underscores the need for context-specific strategic guidelines.

Accordingly, this research aims to establish Strategic Guidelines for Successor Development in SMEs within the Esports and Entertainment Industries. The study seeks to identify organizational and successor-development factors that can support effective

leadership transition, enhance adaptability and innovation, and strengthen the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of family-owned SMEs in Thailand.

Objective

1. Examine the Organizational Structure and Management Characteristics of SMEs.
2. Identify the Core Components of Successor Development.

Literature Review

The concepts and theories on Successor Development in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the researcher has distilled four essential components integral to this process: Innovation and Technology, Collaboration Network, Knowledge Management, and Business Transfer. These components form the foundation for the development of research hypotheses as outlined below.

1. Innovation and Technology are essential for the future of SMEs in fast-evolving sectors like Esports and entertainment. (Coskun-Setirek, A., & Tanrikulu, Z., 2021) emphasizes that innovation in products, services, and processes provides a competitive advantage necessary for success in these industries. Technological advancements such as cloud gaming, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) have transformed consumer experiences, pushing SMEs to adopt innovative solutions (Secundo et al., 2021). For effective successor development, understanding and integrating emerging technologies is vital. Successors should be trained not only in current applications but also in fostering an innovative mindset to adapt to disruptions. Integrating these technologies into operations enables successors to lead their businesses toward growth and sustainability in competitive markets (Blocker, 2011).

2. Collaboration Network. play a crucial role in the success of SMEs, facilitating knowledge exchange and resource access that small businesses often lack In the Esports and entertainment industries, these networks encompass partnerships with sponsors, event organizers, and streaming platforms, fostering opportunities for growth (Chowdhury, Budhwar,

Dey, Joel-Edgar, & Abadie, 2022). For successors, developing skills to build and maintain these relationships is essential to accessing industry resources such as talent and innovation partners (De, Pandey, & Pal, 2020). Leveraging collaboration networks can significantly influence long-term business continuity and enable strategic partnerships that support future expansions or transfers.

3. Knowledge Management, involves systematically managing knowledge within an organization, including its creation, storage, sharing, and application. For SMEs in the Esports and entertainment industries, effective KM is crucial for business continuity, especially in creative processes, technological skills, and operational expertise. Anugerah, Muttaqin, and Trinarningsih (2022) emphasize that knowledge transfer is vital for successor development. To facilitate smooth transitions, SMEs must implement mechanisms for codifying and transferring both explicit and tacit knowledge to future leaders. Access to accumulated knowledge enables successors to maintain operational efficiency and make strategic decisions. Knowledge management systems, mentorship programs, and documentation of core processes empower successors to effectively lead in dynamic environments.

4. Business Transfer, refers to the process through which ownership and management responsibilities are passed from one leader to the next, particularly in family-owned or closely-held SMEs (Arvate & Story, 2021). This process is especially challenging in creative and competitive industries like Esports and entertainment, where maintaining the brand identity and strategic direction is crucial. According to Ip and (Sandeep et al., 2022) a well-structured succession plan is essential for smooth business transfer. Successor grooming in these industries requires not only business acumen but also an understanding of the unique cultural and operational contexts of Esports and entertainment. Ensuring that successors are prepared to take over key roles and responsibilities ensures that the business can continue to grow without disruption after the transfer (Ashiru, Whitfield, & Warwick, 2022).

Research Methodology

This study employed an inductive mixed-methods research design to generate new knowledge and develop strategic guidelines for successor development in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the esports and entertainment industries. The research was conducted in three sequential phases: qualitative research through in-depth interviews, quantitative research through a structured questionnaire survey, and qualitative research through focus group discussion. The integration of these methods enabled comprehensive examination and validation of the proposed successor development model.

Population and Sample. In the qualitative phase, nine experts were purposively selected based on their knowledge and experience in the esports and entertainment industries. The experts comprised three entrepreneurs or executives, three representatives from relevant government agencies, and three academics. Their perspectives were used to identify key factors and formulate strategic guidelines for successor development. In the quantitative phase, the study targeted medium-sized SMEs identified in accordance with classifications provided by the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion. A sample of 400 participants was determined to provide sufficient observations for exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM). Participants were selected using a multi-stage cluster sampling technique based on probability sampling.

Research Instruments and Procedures. Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interview protocols, focus group discussion guidelines, and a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was validated using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), with values ranging from 0.80 to 1.00, demonstrating acceptable content validity. Item discrimination was assessed using standard deviation values ranging from 0.76 to 2.73, while corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.31 to 0.88. The questionnaire demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.98. The qualitative data were analyzed through thematic interpretation, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive

statistics, factor analysis, and structural equation modeling. The findings from all phases were subsequently integrated to develop and validate the proposed strategic guidelines.

Results

Analysis of the Importance of Components in the Strategic Guidelines for Successor Development in SMEs within the Esports and Entertainment Industries

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Importance of Components in the Strategic Guidelines for Successor Development in SMEs within the Esports and Entertainment Industries

Components of Successor Development Guidelines	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level of Importance
Overall Level of Importance of Elements	4.12	0.50	High
Innovation and Technology	4.14	0.50	High
Collaboration Network	4.13	0.58	High
Knowledge Management	4.12	0.53	High
Business Transfer	4.12	0.58	High

Based on the findings presented in Table 1, the analysis of the importance levels of the components in the formulation of Strategic Guidelines for Successor Development in SMEs within the Esports and Entertainment Industries indicates an overall high level of importance, with an average rating of 4.12. Further exploration into the importance levels of each component revealed that all aspects were regarded as highly important, ranked in order of significance as follows: Innovation and Technology, with an average rating of 4.14, reflects the crucial role of adopting new technologies in enhancing operational effectiveness and competitive advantage. Collaboration Network, averaging 4.13, emphasizes the importance of building partnerships and networks to foster innovation and support business growth. Knowledge Management, maintaining a mean value of 4.12 (SD = 0.53), highlights the necessity of capturing and utilizing knowledge to inform decision-making and ensure continuity. Business Transfer, with a mean of 4.12 (SD = 0.58), indicates the significance of effectively transferring ownership and leadership

to ensure sustainable operations.

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of the Importance Levels of Components in the Strategic Guidelines for Successor Development in SMEs within the Esports and Entertainment Industries, Classified by Enterprise Size

Components of Successor Development Guidelines	Small Size, $\bar{x}$	SD	Level	Medium Size, $\bar{x}$	SD	Level
Overall	4.09	0.55	High	4.16	0.44	High
1. Innovation and Technology	4.12	0.53	High	4.16	0.47	High
2. Collaboration Network	4.09	0.58	High	4.15	0.47	High
3. Knowledge Management	4.08	0.65	High	4.17	0.50	High
4. Business Transfer	4.08	0.63	High	4.15	0.53	High

In Table 2, the analysis reveals the importance levels of the Strategic Guidelines for Successor Development in SMEs within the Esports and Entertainment Industries, categorized by enterprise size. For small enterprises, the overall importance is high, with an average value of 4.09. Upon examining the significance of each component, it is clear that all elements hold high importance, ranked from highest to lowest as follows: Innovation and Technology (average: 4.12), Collaboration Network (average: 4.09), Business Transfer (average: 4.08), Knowledge Management (average: 4.08)

For medium-sized enterprises, the overall importance is also high, with an average value of 4.16. Analyzing the importance level of each component indicates that all elements are highly significant, ranked as follows: Knowledge Management (average: 4.17), Innovation and Technology (average: 4.16), Collaboration Network (average: 4.15), Business Transfer (average: 4.15, SD = 0.53)

These findings underscore the consistent high importance of these components across both small and medium-sized enterprises, emphasizing their critical role in effective succession planning within the esports and entertainment sectors.

The results of the analysis of the structural equation model for Successor's Grooming Guidelines for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) after improving the model. The results of the analysis of the structural equation model for Successor's Grooming Guidelines for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the Standardized Estimate mode after improving the model.

Table 3 Summary of Hypothesized Relationships and Findings

Hypothesis	Path	S.E. (β)	p-value	Result
H1	Innovation and Technology → Knowledge Management	0.35	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Innovation and Technology → Collaboration Network	0.38	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Knowledge Management → Collaboration Network	0.80	< 0.001	Supported
H4	Knowledge Management → Business Transfer	0.63	< 0.001	Supported
H5	Collaboration Network → Business Transfer	0.52	< 0.001	Supported

The analysis confirms that each component within the Successor's Grooming Guidelines for SMEs is interrelated, with significant effects on each other. This reinforces the importance of fostering innovation and technology, managing knowledge effectively, and building collaborative networks to ensure successful business transfer and succession planning in SMEs within the esports and entertainment industries.

The analysis of the structural equation model for the Successor's Grooming Guidelines for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This model encompasses four latent variables: one external latent variable, Innovation and Technology, and three internal latent variables: Collaboration Network, Knowledge Management, and Business Transfer. Key findings include. The squared multiple correlation value (R^2) for the model is 0.87, indicating that a significant portion of variance in the model is explained. The Innovation and Technology component directly influences the Collaboration Network with a standardized regression weight of 0.38, which is statistically significant at the 0.001 level ($R^2 = 0.73$, variance = 0.08). The Collaboration Network directly impacts Business Transfer, with a standardized regression weight of 0.80, also significant at the 0.001 level ($R^2 = 0.64$, variance = 0.14). Additionally, Business Transfer has a direct influence on Knowledge Management with a standardized regression weight of 0.63 and statistical significance at the 0.001 level.

Discussion

Organizational Structure and Management Characteristics of SMEs

The findings demonstrate that Innovation and Technology constitute an important component influencing SME performance. In particular, the business transfer element recorded the highest standardized regression weight ($\beta = 0.80$), indicating the importance of transferring knowledge, practices, and capabilities across organizational members and generations. This finding is consistent with the characteristics of SMEs, where organizational knowledge is frequently embedded in managerial experience, interpersonal relationships, and operational practices. Effective knowledge transfer can therefore strengthen organizational continuity while reducing the risks associated with dependence on individual owners or managers. The findings further reveal that technological innovation (TI) and business model design (BMD) significantly contribute to the innovation capabilities of SMEs. This result is consistent with Baabdullah et al. (2021), who emphasized the strategic role of digital technologies in SMEs and their implications for business practices and organizational outcomes. Similarly, Bouwman et al. (2019) found that digitalization can support business model innovation and improve the performance of SMEs. These findings are particularly relevant to the Esports and entertainment industries, where rapidly changing technologies, digital platforms, and consumer preferences require organizations to continuously adapt their business models. Leadership and organizational flexibility are also important characteristics of SMEs operating in dynamic environments. Colovic (2022) demonstrated the relationship between leadership and business model innovation in SMEs, suggesting that managerial leadership can facilitate organizational adaptation and innovation. In addition, Abbu and Gopalakrishna (2021) highlighted the importance of market orientation and its relationship with firm performance. Accordingly, SMEs in Esports and entertainment require management structures that facilitate communication, responsiveness, innovation, and the effective use of market and technological information.

The findings also show that Innovation and Technology have a strong influence on knowledge management, with a standardized regression weight of $\beta = 0.85$. This result suggests that technology is not merely an operational resource but also an important mechanism for creating, storing, sharing, and applying organizational knowledge. Consistent with this finding, Chowdhury et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of integrating technological capabilities with organizational knowledge and employee collaboration. Coskun-Setirek and Tanrikulu (2021) likewise described digital innovation as a process through which organizations can regenerate their business models in response to changing environments. Therefore, the organizational structure of SMEs should support technology-enabled knowledge sharing while maintaining sufficient flexibility for rapid decision-making.

Core Components of Successor Development

The findings indicate that successor development is a critical mechanism for ensuring continuity in family-owned SMEs. Effective succession involves more than identifying a family member to assume leadership; it requires systematic development of knowledge, skills, experience, leadership capabilities, and organizational understanding. In this context, business transfer represents a particularly important component because successors need to acquire both explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge accumulated through the experience of existing owners and managers. The importance of knowledge transfer is consistent with the broader findings on innovation and technology. Digital tools can provide mechanisms for documenting organizational knowledge, facilitating communication, and supporting learning between current leaders and successors. Fantke et al. (2021) highlighted the role of digitalization in supporting knowledge and learning processes, while Secundo et al. (2021) demonstrated how digital technologies can reshape entrepreneurship education and learning. These perspectives support the finding that technology-enabled learning can contribute to preparing successors for future managerial responsibilities. Succession development should also involve clear communication and structured preparation among family members and organizational personnel. In family SMEs, uncertainty concerning leadership transition can affect organizational

stability and employee confidence. Consequently, succession planning should establish clear responsibilities, development pathways, and mechanisms for transferring managerial knowledge before the transition occurs. The findings suggest that successor development is most effective when it is integrated with organizational learning rather than treated as an isolated human-resource activity.

Finally, the findings are particularly relevant to Esports and entertainment SMEs because these industries are characterized by technological change, innovation, and rapidly evolving markets. Allal-Chérif et al. (2024) identified resourcefulness, innovation, knowledge transmission, and resilience as important characteristics of sustainable esports entrepreneurship. These dimensions correspond closely with the present findings, particularly the importance of innovation, knowledge transfer, and successor preparation. Thus, developing successors who can preserve organizational knowledge while simultaneously adapting it to emerging technologies may enhance the capacity of family SMEs to maintain continuity and respond to future industry changes.

Overall, the findings indicate that organizational structure, technological innovation, knowledge management, and successor development are interconnected rather than independent dimensions. SMEs in the Esports and entertainment industries require flexible management structures that support innovation and knowledge sharing, together with systematic succession processes that transfer organizational capabilities to the next generation. Such integration can provide a foundation for organizational continuity and long-term adaptation in a rapidly changing digital business environment.

Conclusion

This study achieved its objectives by examining the organizational structure and management characteristics of SMEs and identifying the core components of successor development in the Esports and Entertainment industries. The findings indicate that effective successor development comprises four key components: Innovation and Technology, Cooperation Networks, Knowledge Management, and Business Transfer. These components

reflect the importance of technological adaptation, stakeholder collaboration, systematic knowledge transfer, and structured leadership transition in sustaining SME operations.

The findings further demonstrate that all four components were considered significant by entrepreneurs, highlighting their collective importance in preparing future leaders and ensuring organizational continuity. The study contributes a practical framework for SMEs to strengthen succession processes, preserve organizational knowledge, enhance competitiveness, and support sustainable growth. In particular, the framework is relevant to the rapidly changing Esports and Entertainment industries, where innovation, collaboration, knowledge, and effective leadership transition are essential for long-term organizational development.

Suggestions

The findings provide a new Body of Knowledge for successor development in SMEs within the Esports and Entertainment industries by integrating four interconnected dimensions: Innovation and Technology, Cooperation Networks, Knowledge Management, and Business Transfer. This framework highlights that successful succession requires not only leadership preparation but also technological capability, collaborative networks, systematic knowledge sharing, and structured business-transfer processes.

For SME entrepreneurs and managers, organizations should establish systematic successor development programs, including technology and innovation training, knowledge-sharing mechanisms, mentoring, stakeholder collaboration, and clearly defined business-transfer procedures. Public and private organizations supporting SMEs should also provide training, consultancy, and networking opportunities to strengthen entrepreneurs' succession capabilities and organizational sustainability.

For future research, studies should examine the proposed framework across different industries, regions, and SME sizes to assess its generalizability. Longitudinal research is also recommended to investigate how successor development influences organizational performance and business continuity over time. Future studies may further employ qualitative

case studies or comparative research to explore differences in succession practices among family-owned and non-family-owned SMEs.

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