Contemporary Journal of Management | *ISSN 2766-1431*
Published by AIR JOURNALS | *https://airjournal.org/cjm*
12011 WestBrae Pkwy, Houston, TX 77031, United States
airjournals@gmail.com; enquiry@airjournal.org

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Nexus of Tradition and Transition: Hybrid Governance and Succession in Igbo Family-Owned Businesses

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Abstract

In Southeast Nigeria, where family-owned businesses (FOBs) serve as pillars of local economies, succession often unfolds not as a managerial handover but as a culturally charged negotiation between legacy and leadership. This study interrogates why many Igbo FOBs struggle to transition beyond the first generation, identifying how kinship norms, patriarchal authority, and institutional voids inhibit formal governance. Drawing on Institutional Theory and Stewardship Theory, and using a qualitative-dominant, mixed-method case study of 25 firms across commerce, manufacturing, and agriculture, the research reveals three central challenges: symbolic resistance from "retired" founders, primogeniture-driven leadership selection, and fragmented ownership structures. In response, the study introduces the Family Governance Charter—a hybrid model that integrates Igbo kinship protocols with modern governance tools, including digital oversight, dual council-board structures, and staged succession. Findings show that firms adopting such hybrid mechanisms demonstrate higher intergenerational continuity. By conceptualizing succession as institutional labour rather than a discrete managerial event, the paper advances African business theory and proposes a framework of institutional bilingualism—where cultural legitimacy and formal accountability co-exist. Policy recommendations include two-tiered regulatory frameworks and family business academies tailored to African governance realities.

Keywords: *Family-Owned Business; Hybrid Governance; Igbo*

Introduction

Family-owned businesses (FOBs) are the economic lifeblood of Nigeria's private sector, comprising over 60% of enterprises and accounting for nearly half of the nation's non-oil GDP (PwC Nigeria, 2022). In Southeast Nigeria, Igbo family firms—rooted in intergenerational entrepreneurship, communal trust, and informal accountability—form dense economic networks across trade, manufacturing, and agriculture (Uche, 2020). Yet despite their ubiquity, most of these businesses rarely survive the founder's generation. This paradox of ubiquity without durability invites closer examination.

Succession in Igbo FOBs unfolds not through institutionalized governance structures but through webs of kinship, patriarchy, and ritualized leadership expectations. The eldest son often inherits authority irrespective of managerial readiness, and founders frequently delay retirement under the guise of ancestral custodianship. Formal mechanisms such as boards, constitutions, or succession protocols are rare. These realities defy universalist models of succession planning, which presume nuclear families, meritocratic norms, and institutional enforcement (Zellweger et al., 2010; Adegbite & Ojeka, 2021).

This study addresses the cultural-institutional gap in FOB scholarship by examining how Igbo family firms navigate the tensions between ancestral continuity and modern governance demands. Anchored in Institutional Theory and Stewardship Theory, it analyses how informal power structures, symbolic legitimacy, and familial obligations shape succession as more than a managerial task. Instead, it is conceptualized as a process of *institutional labour*—the symbolic, political, and technical work of orchestrating leadership transition in kinship-embedded enterprises. Based on qualitative evidence from 25 Igbo FOBs, this paper introduces the *Family Governance Charter* (FGC)—a hybrid governance tool that integrates traditional kinship logic with formal corporate structures. Through mechanisms like dual council-board systems, digital kinship oversight, and staged leadership transitions, the study illustrates how some firms achieve intergenerational resilience not by rejecting indigenous governance but by recalibrating it. By foregrounding the concepts of *institutional bricolage* and *ancestral stewardship*, this research contributes a contextually grounded framework to African business theory. It invites scholars to reconsider succession not as a discrete managerial event but as a socially negotiated process within competing regimes of legitimacy.

Literature Review

Revisiting Governance, Kinship, and Continuity: Toward a Pluralistic Understanding of Family-Owned Businesses in Africa

Global Perspectives on Family Business Governance

Family business governance literature has evolved considerably over the past three decades. Foundational models such as the "three-circle model" (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996) and "four-room model" (Gersick et al., 1997) conceptualize family firms through the intersection of family, ownership, and business systems. In this framework, governance challenges—especially those relating to succession—are typically framed as technical problems solvable through formal mechanisms such as shareholder agreements, advisory boards, and leadership training (Sharma et al., 2021; De Massis et al., 2018). These models largely presuppose nuclear family arrangements, robust legal institutions, and individualistic decision-making logics.

Recent literature has expanded this view by acknowledging emotional and symbolic dimensions of governance. The *socioemotional wealth* (SEW) perspective (Berrone et al., 2012) emphasizes non-economic goals such as reputation, family legacy, and intergenerational continuity. Simultaneously, identity-based scholarship has shown how founders imprint their values onto governance structures and succession expectations (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). However, these frameworks remain anchored in institutional contexts that support formal contract enforcement and shareholder rights.

Such assumptions falter when applied to family businesses in weak institutional environments, particularly in the Global South, where legitimacy often stems not from codified law but from customary authority, kinship, and spirituality (Zoogah, 2020). As scholars increasingly call for indigenous theorizing (Etemad, 2021), the challenge becomes not merely adapting Western models but reimagining governance from within non-Western institutional logics.

Familial Capitalism and Informal Governance in African Contexts

In many African societies, family businesses function as *communal enterprises*—sites of moral obligation, ancestral accountability, and socio-economic redistribution (Uduji & Okolo-Obasi, 2021; Nwagbara, 2022). This model, often referred to as *familial capitalism*, prioritizes kinship welfare over shareholder returns and embeds business continuity within lineage preservation. Unlike the shareholder-centric paradigm of Western firms, ownership in African family enterprises is often collective, diffused across generations, and infused with symbolic meanings tied to ancestry and divine providence (Uche, 2020).

This communal logic has profound implications for governance. Decision-making is often mediated through extended family councils (e.g., *Umunna*), succession follows primogeniture norms irrespective of managerial competence, and the founder is perceived less as a CEO and more as a spiritual custodian. These systems defy traditional governance metrics and require alternative evaluative frames.

Yet the informal nature of these arrangements carries costs. Kinship-based decision-making can generate resource leakage, nepotism, and intra-family conflict. Studies by Adegbite and Nakajima (2012) highlight how these informal norms often create a “parallel institutional order” that competes with formal regulatory expectations. In such settings, the governance vacuum is not a void but a cultural space structured by obligations, myths, and elder arbitration.

The Igbo Case: Entrepreneurial Energy, Patriarchal Authority, and Ritualized Succession

Among the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria, entrepreneurship is a historical and cultural identity marker, often transmitted across generations through apprenticeship systems like *Igba Boi* (Meagher, 2022). However, this entrepreneurial dynamism is bounded by patriarchal authority and spiritualized succession norms. Cultural idioms such as *Iwu Odi Na Nma* (the father’s moral authority) and symbolic practices like libation rituals during leadership handovers underscore the sacred character of business ownership and transfer.

Governance mechanisms in Igbo family businesses are rarely formalized. Boards are replaced by family councils; shareholder agreements give way to oral understandings; and conflict resolution is often handled by elders rather than courts. Primogeniture is the default succession norm, regardless of capability or interest. Yet these customs are not static. Firms increasingly experiment with hybrid models—merging ancestral rituals with formal structures like succession charts and performance evaluations.

This tension between tradition and transition is at the heart of governance challenges in Igbo FOBs. As Uduji & Okolo-Obasi (2021) observe, family firms oscillate between “ancestral legitimacy” and “operational efficiency,” often struggling to institutionalize both simultaneously. These tensions are not anomalies; they are constitutive of a unique institutional grammar that requires deeper theoretical articulation.

Institutional Bricolage: Recombining Logics for Governance Innovation

To make sense of governance adaptations in weak institutional contexts, scholars have increasingly turned to the concept of *institutional bricolage*—the creative recombination of available cultural, symbolic, and technical resources to build new institutional arrangements (Cleaver, 2002; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In contrast to institutional voids, bricolage recognizes that actors operate within rich, if fragmented, normative landscapes where formal and informal logics coexist.

In African family businesses, institutional bricolage manifests in dual governance structures (e.g., family councils coexisting with advisory boards), symbolic succession rituals codified into legal documents, and digital tools like WhatsApp being used for kinship deliberations. These are not half-measures but contextually rational strategies of *institutional entrepreneurship* (Battilana et al., 2009)—aimed at bridging legitimacy across competing institutional orders.

Yet the literature lacks a systematic theory of how such bricolage processes unfold in family firms. What gets recombined, what is resisted, and what forms of legitimacy emerge from these hybrids remain underexplored. This paper contributes to that lacuna by theorizing bricolage not as ad hoc patchwork but as *intentional institutional labour*—an effort to maintain ancestral coherence while navigating contemporary complexity.

Ancestral Stewardship: A Culturally Embedded Governance Logic

Stewardship Theory posits that family firm leaders act as stewards—guided by long-term commitment, psychological ownership, and collective interests (Davis et al., 1997). However, in Igbo FOBs, stewardship is not just psychological—it is ontological. Founders and successors see themselves as caretakers of ancestral legacies, answerable not only to shareholders but to the spirits of forebears and unborn descendants.

This study introduces the concept of *ancestral stewardship* to capture this deeper moral ecology. Rooted in indigenous African philosophies such as *Onye aghana nwanne ya* ("let no sibling be left behind"), this logic emphasizes communal reciprocity, moral custodianship, and spiritual continuity. While resonant with SEW literature, ancestral stewardship adds a cosmological dimension to governance—where succession is not merely about capability but about ritual readiness and lineage alignment.

This worldview complicates efforts to impose meritocratic or technocratic governance reforms. Any reform that disregards ancestral legitimacy is likely to be rejected, regardless of its economic rationale. Thus, governance innovation in such contexts must be *bilingual*—fluent in both global standards and indigenous logics.

Toward a Theoretical Convergence

This literature review highlights the limitations of universalist governance models when applied to African family firms. It also surfaces the rich indigenous logics—familial capitalism, ancestral legitimacy, spiritual stewardship—that shape governance in Igbo FOBs. The central tension is not the absence of governance but the coexistence of dual legitimacy regimes: one formal, rule-based, and economic; the other informal, ancestral, and moral.

This study advances the field by proposing a hybrid governance framework grounded in *institutional bricolage* and *ancestral stewardship*. It contributes to African business theory by foregrounding the symbolic and moral work involved in succession planning, offering a theoretically robust, empirically grounded, and culturally resonant pathway for understanding governance in family-owned enterprises.

Theoretical Framework

Toward a Culturally Bilingual Governance Model: Integrating Institutional and Stewardship Logics in African Family Firms

This study proposes a hybrid theoretical framework that fuses Institutional Theory and Stewardship Theory to explain the governance and succession dynamics within Igbo family-owned businesses (FOBs). Rather than treating these theories as standalone, we theorize them in dialogue, foregrounding how competing legitimacy regimes—formal institutional expectations and informal kinship mandates—shape leadership transitions in culturally embedded enterprises.

Institutional Theory: Governance Under Dual Legitimacy

Institutional theory explains how organizational behavior is shaped by societal rules, norms, and belief systems, often categorized into three pillars: regulative (laws and rules), normative (social obligations), and cultural-cognitive (shared understandings) (Scott, 1995). In strong institutional contexts, firms align with formal codes enforced by state and market actors. In weaker contexts—such as Nigeria—governance often operates under institutional pluralism, where traditional and formal systems coexist, conflict, or collude (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Greenwood et al., 2011). In Igbo FOBs, succession and governance are regulated not merely by corporate law but also by customary expectations such as *Iwu Odi Na Nma*, where the founder's symbolic authority persists long after legal retirement. Legitimacy flows through ancestral lineage, and decisions are often mediated through kinship councils (*Umunna*) rather than boards or courts. These firms, therefore, inhabit institutionally bifurcated spaces, navigating overlapping and often contradictory systems of accountability.

Stewardship Theory: Legacy as Ontology

Stewardship Theory posits that family business leaders act not as self-interested agents but as stewards, motivated by non-financial goals, psychological ownership, and collective well-being (Davis et al., 1997). In Igbo FOBs, however, stewardship extends beyond psychological commitment to ontological obligation—where leadership is viewed as a sacred responsibility to one's ancestors and descendants. We conceptualize this as ancestral stewardship: a moral and spiritual orientation that frames the business as an intergenerational trust, not a commercial asset. While this logic fosters resilience and long-termism, it can also entrench power within patriarchal hierarchies, resist external expertise, and delay necessary reforms. This ambivalence echoes emerging critiques of stewardship theory, which warn against romanticizing founders as inherently benevolent (Hernández, 2012; Chrisman et al., 2017).

Institutional-Stewardship Synthesis: Hybrid Governance in Action

We propose an Institutional-Stewardship Model of Hybrid Governance, wherein effective FOB governance emerges not from choosing between formal and informal systems, but from strategically integrating both. This synthesis is grounded in three propositions:

i. **Cultural Embeddedness Principle**: Governance reforms must be contextually anchored. Imported models that ignore indigenous authority systems often face symbolic resistance and functional failure (Cleaver, 2002; Etemad, 2021).
ii. **Bifurcated Governance Thesis**: Sustainable FOBs maintain dual structures: (1) a *Family Council* to uphold kinship legitimacy and (2) a *Professional Board* to ensure strategic oversight. This dualism enables simultaneous fidelity to tradition and responsiveness to modern demands.
iii. **Succession Continuum Hypothesis**: Succession is not a discrete event but a process of institutional labour involving symbolic negotiations (e.g., founder retirement rituals), political arbitration (e.g., sibling rivalries), and technical transitions (e.g., equity transfer, board reconfiguration).

This model builds on *institutional bricolage* theory (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), positioning African family firms as institutional entrepreneurs who creatively recombine elements from multiple systems to construct new forms of legitimacy.

Methodology

Interpreting Governance in Context: A Culturally-Grounded Case Study Approach

1. Research Design and Epistemological Foundation

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant, comparative case study design, situated within an interpretivist paradigm that views organizational behavior as socially constructed, contextually embedded, and historically informed (Schwandt, 1994). The interpretive approach is particularly suited to exploring succession and governance in Igbo family-owned businesses (FOBs), where legitimacy, power, and authority are enacted through kinship, ritual, and oral norms—realities often invisible to positivist methods.

Rather than seeking general laws, the study prioritizes depth of understanding and cultural intelligibility, interpreting how actors make meaning of governance processes within complex institutional ecologies. The design reflects institutional pluralism and moral embeddedness—two ontological premises underpinning the study's theoretical framework.

2. Case Selection and Sampling Strategy

Using purposive and reputational sampling, 25 family-owned businesses were selected across five states in Southeast Nigeria. Inclusion criteria were:

i. Minimum 20 years of operation (to capture generational transition dynamics);
ii. Majority family ownership with active kinship participation in management;
iii. Turnover ≥ ₦500 million, to ensure organizational complexity and visibility;
iv. Evidence of ongoing or imminent succession events.

This strategy privileges information-rich cases capable of illuminating the interplay between institutional bricolage and ancestral stewardship.

Sampling proceeded via a multi-actor matrix, identifying stakeholders with differentiated access to governance processes:

Participant Category	Sample Size	Sampling Method
Founders (1st Gen)	15	Reputational / Snowball
Successors (2nd/3rd Gen)	20	Founder-nominated Purposive
Family Council Members	10	Organizational Sampling
External Advisors	5	Expert Sampling

The sample spans key sectors—manufacturing (32%), commerce (28%), agriculture (20%), services (15%), and technology (5%)—to enhance theoretical diversity.

3. Data Collection

A triangulated data collection strategy was used:

i. **Semi-Structured Interviews** (n=50): Interviews lasting 60–90 minutes were conducted in English and Igbo, focusing on themes such as succession readiness, founder legacy, kinship accountability, and hybrid governance strategies. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and pseudonymized.
ii. **Participant Observation**: Researchers attended eight Umunna (family council) sessions and directly observed three succession handovers, capturing non-verbal rituals, symbolic authority enactments, and informal governance deliberations. Observations were recorded in field journals and reflexive memos.
iii. **Archival Document Analysis**: Internal materials (family constitutions, shareholder agreements, legal petitions, financial statements) were analyzed to trace governance evolution, inheritance patterns, and conflict management strategies.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), augmented with theory-driven coding. Analysis proceeded in three iterative phases:

1. **First-Cycle Coding**: Applied descriptive and process codes (e.g., “founder dominance,” “ritual succession,” “council resolution”).

2. **Second-Cycle Coding**: Pattern codes were developed around theoretical constructs such as *institutional legitimacy*, *ancestral stewardship*, and *institutional bricolage*.

3. **Cross-Case Synthesis**: Comparative matrices were built to identify similarities and divergences across firm type, succession phase, and governance form.

NVivo 14 software was used for data management and theme consolidation.
Validity strategies included:

i. Member Checking with 8 participants;
ii. Peer Debriefing with 3 African business scholars;
iii. Negative Case Analysis to test interpretive boundaries;
iv. Audit Trail documentation for analytical transparency.

5. Researcher Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

The primary researcher shares ethnic and linguistic ties with participants but maintained a reflexive journal to critically examine positionality, mitigate biases, and navigate insider-outsider dynamics. The researcher’s role as a Catholic priest was both a trust-builder and a boundary marker, necessitating cultural diplomacy and ethical caution.

Ethical approval was secured from [REDACTED] University Research Ethics Board. Protocols included:

i. Informed consent (oral and written);
ii. Linguistic translation support for elder participants;
iii. Pseudonymization and data encryption;
iv. Non-disclosure agreements for legal documents.

6. Limitations and Transferability

The sample is gender-skewed (82% male), limiting insights into female leadership. Survivorship bias may exist, as collapsed FOBs were harder to track.

While not statistically generalizable, the findings are analytically transferable to similar family business environments marked by weak formal institutions and strong kinship governance. Future research could extend this work through quantitative hybrid designs, diaspora-focused studies, and gender-informed frameworks.

Findings

Succession at the Crossroads of Tradition and Transformation: Four Patterns of Governance in Igbo Family Firms

This section presents the empirical findings derived from 25 family-owned businesses in Southeast Nigeria. Through thematic coding and cross-case synthesis, four interrelated governance dynamics were identified. Each is interpreted through the lenses of Institutional Theory and Stewardship Theory, revealing how cultural legacies and strategic improvisations shape intergenerational continuity.

1. The "Living Founder" Paradox: Symbolic Authority and Shadow Control

Although 18 of the 25 founders had formally declared retirement, 89% retained decisive influence over high-stakes decisions—particularly in finance, recruitment, and succession endorsement. This persistent control reflects what we term the "Living Founder Paradox": a tension between symbolic succession and actual operational authority.

In institutional terms, founder legitimacy is embedded not in legal retirement but in cultural-cognitive scripts that equate business leadership with ancestral custodianship. As one successor noted:

"My father retired on paper, but he still signs every major cheque. People say I'm MD, but I don't decide." — Second-gen successor, Enugu (Manufacturing)

This phenomenon illustrates a *conflict between symbolic and procedural legitimacy*. Stewardship logic compounds this entrenchment: founders see themselves not merely as owners but as moral stewards of lineage continuity, rendering full withdrawal a breach of intergenerational duty.

Yet paradoxically, this extended stewardship often undermines successor autonomy, delays innovation, and risks creating organizational liminality, where power is ambiguously located.

2. Primogeniture vs. Meritocracy: Navigating Status and Competence

In 63% of firms, firstborn male heirs were designated successors, regardless of managerial preparedness. However, in 58% of those cases, these heirs lacked formal business training or operational experience. In contrast, younger siblings—often with MBAs or external work histories—were quietly assigned "technical" roles or bypassed entirely.

"Everyone assumed my brother would lead, but I handled finance, logistics, and staff. He was the face; I did the work." — Third son, Agro-processing, Owerri

This disjuncture reflects a normative-institutional clash between birth-order entitlement and performance legitimacy. Some families practiced "stealth meritocracy": informally grooming capable successors without public designation, to avoid intra-family backlash.

This adaptation exemplifies institutional bricolage—a selective blending of primogeniture with tacit merit norms, producing hybrid pathways to leadership that are culturally acceptable yet operationally effective.

Still, the practice remains unstable. Hidden leadership creates ambiguity in accountability and frequently sparks inter-sibling resentment—especially when formal titles lag behind functional authority.

3. Informal Governance and the Cost of Kinship Generosity

Across firms, informal governance—defined by absence of constitutions, boards, or policy manuals—resulted in decision bottlenecks, resource leakage, and financial opacity.

i. Average capital project approval took 11.6 weeks;
ii. 61% lacked formal dividend policies;
iii. 34% maintained inflated payrolls due to kinship employment.

"Our Lagos branch became an ATM for cousins—₦20 million vanished before we instituted dual signatories." — Family Council Chair, Aba (Textiles)

These practices reflect normative pressures to uphold communal redistribution, often at the cost of efficiency and clarity. The moral economy of "family first" overrides performance metrics, creating blurred boundaries between household obligations and firm resources.

Institutionally, this signals a regulative-normative gap, where formal accountability tools are resisted as "un-African," yet informal mechanisms (e.g., Umunna mediation) prove insufficient for strategic coordination. The stewardship impulse to protect kin morphs into organizational dysfunction when informal generosity is not bounded by institutional structure.

4. Hybrid Governance Innovations: Recombining Kinship and Modernity

Despite the challenges above, 28% of firms exhibited intentional governance bricolage—constructing hybrid models that merged traditional authority with modern accountability.

These innovations included:

i. Council-Board Dualism: Firms created dual structures where Umunna councils managed cultural legitimacy and professional boards oversaw strategy. These boards typically included 2 family members and 3 non-family professionals.
ii. Staged Succession: Leadership transition was not a one-time event but a multi-year process involving dual mentorship (founders and external advisors), progressive equity transfer, and symbolic rites.
iii. Digital Kinship Oversight: WhatsApp was used for family resolutions; one firm adopted blockchain for share registry transparency—the fusion of ancestral trust with modern technology.

"We codified our family values into a charter—withdrawals without approval now trigger 20% share forfeiture." — Legal Advisor, Tech Firm, Awka

Firms using these hybrid models showed notably higher five-year continuity rates (68%), compared to traditional (42%) and Westernized (31%) firms. These outcomes suggest that institutional entrepreneurship from within culture—not its rejection—is key to sustainable governance.

Discussion

Institutional Labour, Cultural Legitimacy, and the Reconfiguration of Governance in African Family Firms

This section interprets the findings through the integrated lens of Institutional Theory and Stewardship Theory, proposing original theoretical contributions that challenge dominant governance assumptions in family business literature. The analysis unfolds across four core insights, culminating in a contextualized governance model for family-owned businesses in Africa.

1. The Patriarch's Dilemma: Between Legacy Preservation and Leadership Obstruction

The enduring presence of retired founders as de facto leaders embodies what we term the Patriarch's Dilemma: a paradox in which legacy stewardship becomes a barrier to renewal. In contrast to the stewardship literature, which valorizes founder continuity (Davis et al., 1997), our findings suggest that unresolved symbolic authority leads to organizational liminality—where successors lack real control, and the firm becomes suspended between generational intentions. This insight refines stewardship theory by introducing the concept of ontological overreach—a form of psychological ownership so deeply rooted in ancestral accountability that it precludes functional handover. The dilemma is not merely behavioral but institutional, embedded in cultural-cognitive scripts of succession as spiritual mandate rather than managerial transition.

2. Institutional Bricolage and the Architecture of Hybrid Legitimacy

The emergence of council-board dualism, staged succession, and digital kinship governance reveals that Igbo FOBs do not reject formality; rather, they practice institutional bricolage—selectively recombining elements of indigenous authority and modern protocols to construct hybrid legitimacy.

These challenges prevailing narratives of "institutional voids" (Khanna & Palepu, 2010), offering instead a constructive re-reading: governance failure in these contexts is not due to absence, but to contested institutional pluralism. As actors engage in bricolage, they become institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana et al., 2009), crafting new forms of authority that speak to both ancestral expectations and regulatory requirements. Our contribution here is to theorize bricolage not merely as improvisation, but as intentional institutional labour—a normative, symbolic, and technical act of innovation within constrained legitimacy regimes.

3. Succession as Institutional Labour: From Managerial Act to Moral Craft

Succession in Igbo family firms cannot be understood as a discrete event. It is better conceptualized as institutional labour: the ongoing, negotiated process through which kinship legitimacy is reconciled with corporate rationality. This labour manifests on three intertwined levels:

- i. **Symbolic labour**: Managing founder identity, lineage continuity, and ritual legitimacy;
- ii. **Political labour**: Negotiating sibling rivalries, status hierarchies, and generational tension;
- iii. **Technical labour**: Formalizing boards, codifying charters, and structuring equity transfer.

By framing succession in this way, we move beyond the procedural fixation of mainstream literature (Sharma et al., 2003), and contribute to an **embodied, processual, and culturally situated** understanding of generational transition.

4. Toward a Contextual Theory of Hybrid Governance in African FOBs

Synthesizing these insights, we propose a **Contextual Theory of Hybrid Governance**, anchored in two key constructs:

1. **Ancestral Stewardship**: Leadership as a spiritual obligation to forebears and descendants, extending stewardship theory beyond psychological commitment to ontological duty;
2. **Institutional Bilingualism**: The capacity to fluently navigate dual legitimacy regimes—traditional authority and modern accountability—through governance structures that satisfy both.

This model contributes to the growing movement for indigenous theorizing in African business research (Zoogah, 2020; Etemad, 2021), offering a framework that is both culturally congruent and analytically rigorous.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

For Policy Makers:

i. Design tiered regulatory frameworks recognizing lifecycle and structure of FOBs;
ii. Offer incentives for formalizing family governance charters, not just tax compliance.

For Practitioners:

i. Encourage graduated succession protocols using external mediation;
ii. Support development of Family Business Charters that encode both cultural and operational norms;
iii. Invest in board mentoring systems that pair elders with next-gen leaders.

For Family Business Associations:

i. Launch intergenerational peer-learning platforms for knowledge exchange;
ii. Provide toolkits for digital kinship governance and hybrid institutional innovation.

For Researchers:

i. Explore how gendered exclusions are enacted and resisted in patriarchal succession models;
ii. Examine diaspora influence on governance reform among transnational FOBs;
iii. Investigate the temporal rhythms of institutional labour—when bricolage stabilizes or collapses.

Cross-Cultural Relevance: Lessons Beyond Nigeria

Though grounded in the Igbo context, this study speaks to broader questions of governance in plural institutional environments. From Ghanaian matrilineal enterprises to Indian joint-family firms and Latin American dynastic businesses, the insight that succession is a culturally negotiated act has wide resonance.

We echo calls for **contextual pluralism** in family business research, not as token inclusion, but as epistemological necessity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From Ancestral Mandates to Institutional Hybridity: Rethinking Governance in African Family Enterprises

This study set out to explore how Igbo family-owned businesses in Southeast Nigeria navigate the complexities of governance and succession in the absence of formal institutional scaffolds. Anchored in Institutional and Stewardship Theory, and informed by rich empirical engagement with 25 family firms, the research revealed that these enterprises do not simply lack governance—they improvise it, negotiating dual legitimacy systems through symbolic, political, and technical work. At the heart of this negotiation is the Patriarch's Dilemma: the tension between the founder's ontological sense of stewardship and the successor's need for authority and renewal. Governance challenges—ranging from primogeniture bias to resource leakage—are not merely managerial defects, but reflections of institutional pluralism embedded in kinship norms, ritual obligations, and communal expectations.

Yet even in this complexity, innovation abounds. Through institutional bricolage, firms are constructing hybrid structures that respect ancestral legitimacy while adopting modern accountability mechanisms. This convergence gives rise to a contextual theory of hybrid governance, grounded in the dual logics of ancestral stewardship and institutional bilingualism.

Key Contributions

1. Theoretically, the study redefines succession as *institutional labour*—a dynamic interplay of cultural authority and procedural rationality.
2. Empirically, it surfaces novel governance configurations such as *council-board dualism* and *digital kinship oversight*.
3. Methodologically, it demonstrates how interpretive inquiry, when contextually embedded, can uncover the moral ecologies underpinning organizational life.

Limitations and Reflexive Notes

While the study offers deep insights, it remains bounded by certain limitations:

i. **Gendered Silences**: The male dominance in sample composition leaves the dynamics of female leadership underexplored.
ii. **Survivorship Bias**: Collapsed FOBs were less accessible, skewing the sample toward relative success stories.
iii. **Researcher Positionality**: As an insider-researcher with religious and cultural authority, my presence may have both opened and constrained participant disclosures.

These caveats do not diminish the study's value but signal opportunities for more intersectional, longitudinal, and comparative investigations.

Recommendations

1. Policy Recommendations: Institutional Flexibility over Uniformity

Regulatory bodies such as the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) should avoid one-size-fits-all frameworks. Instead, they should:

i. Develop tiered governance recognition models that acknowledge informal structures like family councils and customary succession codes.
ii. Incentivize the formalization of Family Governance Charters that integrate indigenous and corporate protocols.

2. Practice Recommendations: Participatory Chartering and Peer Succession Clinics

Family business networks and associations should:

i. Facilitate Participatory Chartering Workshops to help families co-create governance rules that reflect both ancestral values and organizational needs.
ii. Launch Peer Succession Clinics, where outgoing founders mentor one another and share techniques for symbolic disengagement and gradual authority transfer.

3. Research Recommendations: Comparative and Temporal Expansions

Future scholars should:

i. Conduct cross-ethnic comparative studies across Africa to trace how different kinship systems shape governance logics (e.g., matrilineal vs. patrilineal).
ii. Investigate the temporal dynamics of institutional bricolage—when do hybrid systems stabilize, collapse, or calcify?
iii. Examine how diaspora returnees impact governance reform through imported ideas, digital tools, and exposure to plural institutional orders.

Final Thought

Governance in African family enterprises cannot be imported whole from Euro-American models, nor can it be romanticized through cultural essentialism. This study offers a middle path: a locally grounded, theoretically generative approach that affirms the agency of actors navigating plural institutions. It invites scholars and practitioners alike to recognize that the future of African enterprise lies not in mimicry, but in moral innovation, hybrid legitimacy, and intergenerational stewardship.

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