

Small businesses are critically important employers in the current US economy. In 2010 small businesses in Vermont represented 96.3% of all employers while employing approximately 60% of the private sector workforce (SBA, 2013). Entrepreneurs are drawn to Vermont for quality of life, progressive atmosphere, and distinction in the business world as being home to companies with socially, ethically and environmentally driven missions (Morse et al., n.d.). This study builds off the work of Ip and Jacobs (2006) to investigate if there is an additional aspect being taken into account at any stage of the succession planning process, namely mission orientation or values retention. This study attempted to identify if and how small business owners in Vermont are incorporating intentional socially, environmentally, or sustainability (SES) value retention into their succession planning efforts. The goal of our interviews was twofold: (1) understand owners' opinions, definitions, and attitudes towards social responsibility and sustainability as it applies in a business context; (2) thoroughly understand at what stage of business succession planning (BSP) the interviewees are in, their strategy in dealing with all aspects of BSP, specifically if/how they are planning for the continuity of their social, environmental, or sustainability oriented values in the BSP process. Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with small business owners, CEO's or managers from September – December, 2013. The interview sample was intentionally biased towards business owners and/or managers who are known for being SES oriented, due to their expected ability to speak more knowledgeably about their SES orientation and its implications for their business. Preliminary findings indicate there is a lack of consensus in defining SES values / orientation. It was found that most owners/managers interviewed are thinking about succession planning and how their value-orientation might fit into that process, however approximately 75% have yet to reach that stage.