History-Informed Family Business Research: The Promise of History and Memory Work

Roy Suddaby

Brian S. Silverman

Peter Jaskiewicz

Alfredo De Massis

Evelyn R. Micelotta

Families are constituted by shared memories and a common history. Research shows that talk about the past constitutes between 25% and 33% of the dinner conversation around the family table (Beals & Snow, 2002; Blum-Kulka, 1993, 1994; Perlman, 1984). Much of this conversation involves sharing experiences of the recent (i.e., "what did you do today?") or distant past (i.e., "remember our vacation to Niagara Falls?"). More critical to family constitution, however, are those conversations in which family members recount events outside the lived experience of any of the individuals at the table. These vicarious memories are the foundational elements of collective memory. Shared vicarious memories define the family as a distinct social entity with coherence and continuity over time and space (Pratt & Fiese, 2004).

Family business researchers are only beginning to appreciate the theoretical and empirical value of viewing the family business through the lens of family memory and history. We gain considerable insight into the nature and constitution of family businesses by systematically analyzing what, and how, families remember and forget. The collection of papers that comprise this special issue on *History-Informed Family Business Research* is premised on this assumption. From these papers we see a broad range of historical methodologies applied to a diverse array of family businesses. We also see how intractable issues that have troubled family business research over the years achieve a new clarity when viewed through the lens of the past and how it is remembered. The intent of this essay is to elaborate the value of history-informed family business research and demonstrate how it can address persistently thorny issues in our discipline.

We organize the essay in three sections, drawing on the studies in this special issue to illustrate points in each section. In the first section, we demonstrate how adopting a historical perspective can help us address the recurring definitional question, *what is a family business?* Our answer rests on the recursive relationship between historical memory as a practice and the family as a social entity. Like all social entities, families are a product of, and shaped by, their history. However, as active authors of their history, families have a higher degree of agency over how their history is told. It is the dynamic interaction of family practices of remembering and how remembering shapes the sense of family that defines a family business. Defining family businesses as a process of historical re-construction rather than as a set of static properties (e.g., Chrisman et al., 2012) offers a different ontological perspective that defines a family business by how its members reconstruct family boundaries in ongoing acts of remembering. We elaborate on this recursive dynamic between the past and the family's construction of the present and future in the first section.

In the second section, we show how history and memory can help us address the recurring question of *how family businesses balance the demands of being a business, on one hand, and the demands of being a family, on the other.* To answer this question, we focus on the processes by which informal memories become formal history in family businesses. The distinction between memories and history reflects the historical process by which humanity moved from societies defined by an oral tradition to societies defined by formal history. Adopting this historical perspective, again, allows us to see the family business not as a static social structure, but rather as a dynamic social process in which the economically rational and the socio-emotional elements of the entity exist in a continuum and are in ongoing conversation with each other. This process needs not be restricted to just the owning family, but may diffuse to, and be influenced by, longstanding employees who embrace, revive, or revise the family firm's traditions.

In the third section, we explore the key constructs underlying *memory work* and *history* described in the studies that comprise this special issue. Specifically, we review and describe the role of reminiscing, belonging, and historical consciousness, and elaborate how these constructs can help address the recurring question of *why some family businesses fail to endure, while others enjoy organizational longevity that surpasses that of most other companies*. We observe how reminiscing, belonging and historical consciousness are key elements of rhetorical history strategies used by family businesses to engage with different audiences – the family itself; non-family employees within the firm; and external stakeholders.

Adopting a historical lens, thus, offers unique insight into key questions that inform family business research – what is a family business, how do they reconcile competing demands between economics and family, and how do we explain the longevity of successful family businesses. Historically informed family business research can also contribute to answering key questions in management scholarship more broadly, offering valuable insights that extend beyond the context of family business. In our fourth section, we offer a brief discussion of the potential for history-informed family business research to inform relevant debates in management scholarship.

What is a Family Business? The Mutual Constitution of History and Family

What is a family business? This question was posed in the inaugural issue of *Family Business Review* (Lansberg, Perrow & Rogolsky, 1988) and has occupied the attention of family business scholars for decades. Despite best efforts, however, scholars have failed to place precise boundary conditions around the construct because their definitions tend to focus on identifying universal traits common to all family businesses (see Handler, 1989; Litz, 1995; Chua, Chrisman & Sharma, 1999; Astrachan, Klein, & Smyrnios, 2002; Harms, 2014). Notably, the efforts to find a shared definition have failed even when scholars creatively treat the concept of family business as a continuous (Astrachan et al., 2002), a configurational (Handler, 1989), or a behavioral (Chua et al., 1999) variable or as an intentional (Litz, 1995) orientation.

The difficulty in defining family business rests in the incredible variation in the meaning of the term "family". In their review of over 250 family business papers, Chua, Chrisman and Sharma (1999: 22) observe that the only characteristic that all papers agreed on in defining family business was that the business must be "owned and managed by a nuclear family". Indeed, most prior definitions of family business in management theory rely, directly or implicitly, on an essentialist notion of the family as a construct defined by consanguinity (blood and genetics). These definitions, however, overlook decades of sociological, historical, and anthropological evidence that the family is a social construct that can also be based on affinity (marriage or other relationship). Affinity relationships can include adoption, sharing food (Ensel, 2002), shared accommodation (Baskin, 1982), economic relationships (Gillespie, 2014) or choice, i.e., a "found family" (Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013).

One key insight from the papers that comprise this volume is that a focus on memory and history encourages researchers to move beyond theorizing the family as a largely static set of properties and, instead, see it as a *process of social construction*. Considered as such, the family is not exclusively defined by blood or genetics. Nor is it defined exclusively by roles or structural relationships. Rather, the family is defined by the sense of identity and belonging that family members experience through processes of collective remembering. The notion that our sense of familial belonging arises out of processes of collective remembering is well established in family counselling research. Family reminiscing, for example, is a critical element of how children develop a sense of identity and security through "a constantly evolving dialectic between our self and others in the telling and retelling of who we are through what we remember" (Fivush, 2008: 56). Reminiscing is a formal practice of family therapy used to overcome grief over loss of a family member (Rosenblatt & Elde, 1990) or a family trauma (Lawson, Valentino, Speidel, McDonnell & Cummings, 2020) and to regain family well-being (Fivush, 2019).

In addition to overcoming individual or collective trauma, shared memories also play a critical role in developing a sense of common identity in families, organizations and at their intersection – in family businesses (Ge et al., 2021; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Suddaby, Foster & Quinn-Trank, 2016; Suddaby & Jaskiewicz, 2020). As Olick (1999: 342) observes, "the act of remembering collective history is thus a mutual production of the individual and the collective and, by participating in the rituals, retelling of myths, ceremonies etc., the individual reaffirms his or her membership in the collective." Because practices of remembering are so deeply embedded in the fabric of family routines, we gain additional insight into the complex role played by processes of remembering as a mechanism of the mutual production of the individual and collective in family businesses. A great example of this is the case study of Green Harvester, a German agricultural business presented by Brinkmann, Hoon and Baluch (2023) in this volume. The analysis demonstrates the critical role of the founding story in constructing a sense of family identity across multiple generations and across a wide variety of social relations (i.e., defined both by affinity and consanguinity). The authors find that the continuity of family is managed largely by the plasticity of the story. Critically, some elements of the story must endure across generations, so the story is told on two levels, one that changes to address the demands of the present by including some elements of memory and neglecting others, and another that remains constant in order to bind the various participants to a social entity – the family – that endures through time and space.

The Green Harvester case presents a form of endogenous family memory in which the elements of the founding story and its narration are all generated by family members. The external environment only imposes on the family history by influencing what elements of the story must be present in a given narration in order to address current issues faced by the family business. In the case study of Karl Anderson & Sons, a long-lived Swedish family firm engaged in furniture manufacturing, Haag, Achtenhagen and Grimm (2023) offer an alternative example of how family business coherence and continuity is determined exogenously, rather than by the internal narrative of the family. In this case, the determination of what elements of the family business should stay the same was determined, largely, by the need to remain consistent with a culturally determined category of Scandinavian Design furniture. This broader narrative helped family decision-makers with key decisions for production, including price, design, materials, and methods of manufacture. Critically, it was the definition of the family that exhibited elements of plasticity as the firm adapted to changes in the furniture industry over a hundred and twenty years. The authors identify three phases of family change – preparing, adapting, and recapturing – in which the once tight connection between family and business in the founding years became loosely coupled and recoupled over time.

Considered together, the two papers illustrate the recursive relationship between history and memory, on one hand, and the construct of family business, on the other. Both describe an ongoing dynamic between the past and the family business. The family business is created and maintained by its active engagement with its history and memories but, reciprocally, the selection of memories and the elaboration of family history is determined by what is deemed necessary for the good of the family business. This dynamic engagement between the firm and its past occurs through an ongoing conversation between past and present. The conversation occurs as a diegetic narrative (Suddaby, Israelsen, Mitchell & Lim, 2021) or a story told simultaneously on two levels that permits some elements of the story to change but requires some elements to remain the same (Suddaby & Jaskiewicz, 2020).

In the Green Harvest case, the family was the narrator. Here the family business was held constant, and the past was adapted to create a sense of continuity of the business over time and space. The dynamic was the reversed in the Anderson & Sons case, where the historical tradition of Scandinavian Design was the constant, and the constitution of the family business construct adapted to create a similar sense of continuity. In both cases the narrative was the primary dynamic for manipulating continuity and change. Elements of the narrative that acquire the status of sacred myth – the tradition of design in the Anderson case and the founding story of the agribusiness in the Green Harvest case – are less malleable. Everything else is open to revision and reinterpretation, in line with strategies of rhetorical history (Sinha et al., 2020; Suddaby, Israelsen, Saylors, Bastien & Coraiola, 2022). This includes the interpretation of family obligations by non-family employees. In the Green Harvest case, non-family members subscribe to notions of "intergenerational reciprocity", whereby the owning family is expected to adhere to "a set of unwritten expectations" deriving from the reinterpretation of family lore, and non-family employees are "visibly upset" when they believe that these expectations have not been honored.

Balancing Socioemotional and Economic Considerations in Family Business through the Mnemonic Constitution of Family and Business

Another persistent issue in family business research is the question of how family businesses achieve a productive balance between the sentimental-emotional interests of family and the rational-efficiency elements of business. Often this issue is embedded in an assumption that the family firm is a sub-optimal form for organizing economic activity as compared to the modern corporation. The family firm is often depicted as a primitive precursor to the modern corporation, deficient in its governance practices (Morck & Yeung, 2003), prone to invest less in innovation – unless threatened to go bankrupt (Chrisman & Patel, 2012) – and, plagued by dysfunctional family dynamic (Levinson, 1971), all of which lead to the expectation that it will be short-lived (Ward, 2011). Relatedly, family business research has traditionally been marginalized in pedagogy in business schools, which tend to focus on large multinational corporations as the exemplar of modern business practice (Hoy, 2017). Family firms are, unfortunately, too often assumed to be the antithesis of the rational organization, described as being burdened by nepotism and lacking a professional management and common standards of corporate governance (Morck & Yeung, 2003).

Family business scholars have mounted a powerful defence to this critique, noting that family businesses are both more prevalent than non-family businesses in the global economy and account for the majority of contribution to annual global GDP (De Massis, Frattini, Majocchi & Piscitello, 2018). Others observe that the distinction between the family business and the corporation is ideological, based on ideal types that rarely occur in pure form and, instead, obscure a messy empirical combination of family control and corporate structure as exemplified in *chaebols, kieritsus, grupos economicos*, and other hybrid manifestations of family-controlled corporations (Suddaby, Jaskiewicz, Israelsen & Chittoor, 2023).

A more theoretical response to the critique arises out of the construct of *socioemotional wealth* (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007) which is used to explain the often non-economically rational behaviors of family businesses (e.g., forgoing non-family talent in management or company growth) as efforts to maximize both economic and socio-emotional returns to family owners as well as other stakeholders. While the construct seems to usefully offer a post-hoc explanation of why a family firm may engage in non-economically rational actions, it is largely silent in explaining how firms rationalize socio-emotional and economic considerations when making these decisions. One of the key insights from the papers in this special issue is that enduring family businesses use the tension between memory and history to make sense of, and guide, decisions that threaten the often-tenuous balance between family and business interests in the firm. Indeed, as these articles indicate, family firms appear to focus more directly on collective memory work rather than engage in the more rational and formal process of history work. Before describing the relevant results in this special issue, let us first elaborate the distinction between collective memory work and history work.

Perhaps the best articulation of the difference between memory and history is offered by the French historian Pierre Nora whose work Lieux de Memoire (Sites of Memory) is credited with legitimating social memory studies as a distinct discipline of social science. Nora characterizes memory as a much more traditional mechanism of knowing the past than is historical recollection. Memory, according to Nora, tends to be more informal, and is largely oral in presentation. The site of memory is the community, however defined, and memory is constructed collectively. As a result, memory is 'alive', "borne by living societies…in permanent evolution…vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived" (Nora, 1989: 8). Memory, thus, is largely a conversation about the past, in the present.

History, by contrast, is a way of rationally and scientifically organizing the past conducted by institutionally powerful actors. History, according to Nora (1989: 8), is "the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer…history is a representation of the past". History, thus, is an effort to remove the ambiguity and plasticity of memory and fix it in time as a scientifically "true" account of the past. As a result, the only effective way of changing history is to broaden the basis of collective memory. Nora's description of the rational and scientific approach to preserving memory evokes the description of organizational memory first described by Walsh and Ungson (1991) in which the primary task is to acquire the memory contained by individuals in the organization, summate it and organize it in various sites in the organization that will allow the organization to retrieve it. Viewed in the light of Nora's distinction between collective memory and history, Walsh and Ungson's (1991) model of acquisition, retention and retrieval can be seen as a model of managing organizational history rather than a form of collecting organizational memory.

Drawing from Nora's description of the differences between informal memory and formal history, we use the term *memory work* to describe the process by which family firms use the past to achieve the right balance between family and business interests in strategic decisions. We see powerful examples of memory work in two papers in this special issue. In McAdam, Clinton, Hamilton, and Gardner (2023), we observe how a strategic error borne from an emotional decision in one family firm is transformed from an embarrassing and painful memory to a historical cautionary tale across generations. In Schweiger, Gusenbauer, Matzler and Hautz's (2023), family firms, bound by tradition, engage in memory work to unearth and repurpose technological knowledge embedded in old patents. In both cases, we see how family businesses rely on memory and history to resolve the seemingly intractable tension between being simultaneously true to the family and to the business.

In their case study of the union of two prominent family businesses in Ireland, McAdam et al. (2023) reveal how family businesses learn from the process of sharing memories through intermarriage. The authors term the newly blended family a mnemonic community and describe the influence of the memories of a “legendary family feud” between key members of an Irish family business. The feud was highly emotional and economically damaging for the firm when it occurred, and it diffused to a second firm through marital ties. As the memories were recounted and revised across generations, however, they transformed from painful memories focused on the difficulty in managing “soft” family issues to a more positive lesson about adopting good governance practices and professional advice. To use Nora’s terms, the primarily emotional memory transformed into a cautionary tale and ultimately became a rational statement of best practices. As it moved through the next generation, it transformed into a statement of formal firm history. McAdam et al.’s (2023) study reinforces Nora’s notion of memory as an affective resource of organizations that uses the dynamic between memory and history to convert socioemotional challenges into rational best practices. Moreover, the study demonstrates how the repetition and revision of the cautionary tale changed as it spread across time and across the increasingly dispersed set of family members, which the authors term a “community of cousins”. The observation that later generations were actively engaged with revising memories demonstrates the value of memory work in strengthening the new integrated family. It also demonstrates the critical role of the dynamic between memory and history over multiple repetitions, as an effective tool for managing the tension between the socio-emotional and the rationally economic aspects of family business.

A reciprocal form of memory work is presented in Schweiger et al.’s (2023) quantitative analysis of how family firms identify and recombine old knowledge to innovate. Focusing on the global wine industry, the study finds that between 1956 and 2013 family firms were more likely than non-family firms to use old ideas (“mature knowledge”) to innovate than non-family firms. Following De Massis, Frattini, Kotlar, Petruzzelli and Wright (2016), they consider this observation an instance of “innovation through tradition”. The authors conclude that family firms may be more sensitive to old knowledge because they have a heightened sensitivity to the past and view it as a living source of information rather than seeing it as “dead” history. Again, Schweiger et al.’s (2023) study illustrates Nora’s distinction between memory as an active engagement with the past in the present, and history as a relegation of the past to a reserve of memory with little to no present value. Indeed, a fundamental idea in the innovation literature is that innovation requires recombination of extant ideas (Henderson & Clark, 1990; Hargadon & Sutton, 1997; Fleming, 2001), which echoes Nora’s view of memory as active engagement with the past. Because family businesses see the past as useful in the present, they are more likely to engage in memory work. In this case, memory work involved not simply viewing old patents as useful sources of new ideas, but actively analyzing them for innovative opportunities in the present. Without such vigilant memory work, and in the absence of an understanding of the present value of the past, old knowledge would be relegated to the status of mere nostalgia preserved as history.

Explaining Family Business Longevity and Success through Reminiscing and Historical Consciousness

Management scholars are increasingly interested in understanding how memory and history contribute to organizational longevity and success. Prior theory viewed history and tradition as constraints to organizational agency and change (Stinchcombe, 1965; Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). Today, however, management scholars are deeply engaged in research that demonstrates how organizations use memory and history to gain competitive advantage (Suddaby et al., 2016), manage change (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Sinha et al., 2020), and gain legitimacy (Suddaby et al., 2021) and status (Sasaki, Ravasi & Micelotta, 2019). The capacity to manage history is seen as a dynamic capability of corporations (Suddaby, Coraiola, Harvey & Foster, 2020).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, much of the empirical research in this subject area is occurring in studies of family business. As the papers in this special issue indicate, family businesses offer a unique empirical context to advance our understanding of the role of history and memory in processes of organizational longevity and success. Families, as we note above, are more actively engaged with their history and memories than publicly traded corporations. Because of their hybrid nature – somewhere between clan and corporation – family businesses are more intimately connected to the dynamic process by which memories become history (e.g., Sasaki, Kotlar, Ravasi & Vaara, 2020). Moreover, as we have argued above, family businesses are less bureaucratic, rationalized, and structured than corporations and, as a result, are more closely engaged in the ongoing aspects of memory work – collating individual memories into collective memory, reinterpreting memories from the past to hold meaning in the present, celebrating anniversaries, memorializing, performing eulogies and so on. In short, family businesses have a more acute historical consciousness or awareness of the degree of fluidity between past, present, and future (Suddaby, 2016) than corporations.

As such, the family business is a unique site of memory, history, and engagement with the past. Scattered throughout the papers that comprise this special issue, we can see an emerging set of constructs and dynamics that may help guide future research in this area. Some of these constructs appear to be somewhat familiar to existing constructs, but as we demonstrate below, are quite distinct. Here we refer to the construct of "belonging" as a socio-emotional construct that is similar to identity but somehow felt deeper by family members. We also include here the construct of "reminiscing", a common practice in any organization but that acquires surplus meaning in the context of a family firm. Specifically, increasingly diffused responsibilities among an ever larger, yet less connected, group of members in later generations fuels more diverse versions of memory. This creates an opportunity for adapting the collective identity or developing different co-existing collective memories – e.g., divided across family branches or generations. The value of reminiscing across generations in family firms has received comparatively little attention in the literature; yet it is an essential construct that captures a dynamic of increasing historical reflexivity and consciousness that help family firms to succeed and endure in the long-term (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). We elaborate each of these constructs – reminiscing and belonging, and historical reflexivity and historical consciousness – and their associated dynamics in the balance of this section. Table 1 summarizes the papers in the Special Issue, their core constructs, and the two key dynamics described in this essay.

Insert Table 1 here

Reminiscing is a well-established construct in family counseling research and a rigorous clinical practice in family therapy. The term refers to the practice of collective remembering, the sense of communal solidarity that social units achieve when they regularly share memories. Social strength is derived from ritualized practices of remembering together. By tying our autobiographical memories to the memory of our family, tribe, or community, we achieve a sense of belonging, a socio-emotional construct that is much deeper and more profound than identity or identification but that has not yet permeated the lexicon of managerial constructs.

It is particularly regretful that we have little empirical understanding of *belonging* in management theory as this construct speaks directly to one of the most pressing challenges of modernity – the growing sense of detachment individuals feel from our communities, organizations, and societal institutions (Putnam, 2015; Block, 2018). Both constructs, reminiscing and belonging, appear in at least four of the papers in this special issue (Brinkmann et al., 2023; Haag et al., 2023; Lubinski & Gartner, 2023; Manelli, Magrelli, Messeni Petruzzelli and Frattini, 2023). The case studies in each of these papers sketch out the beginnings of an important yet unexplored dynamic that holds high potential for broader application in organization studies. Family business research is uniquely positioned to explore such dynamic because family businesses might be particularly successful at fostering a feeling of belonging not only of family members, but of non-family members as well (Hsueh et al., 2022).

The concept of *historical reflexivity* appears explicitly in only one paper in the special issue (i.e., Maura et al., 2023). Historical reflexivity "recognises the everyday practice of histories." "[It] is an iterative process of reflection in which people create nonchronological narratives of their past, present and future practices." (p.2) Historical reflexivity is a core component of a larger, umbrella construct termed *historical consciousness* defined as an "understanding of the temporality of historical experience or how past, present and future are thought to be connected" (Glencross, 2015: 413). The awareness that past, present, and future are connected and somewhat fungible is more pronounced in family firms than in other social entities. More critically, historical consciousness in firms seems to correlate with the ability to creatively recombine elements of memory within the firm in a way that enhances firm survival. Each paper speaks to the heightened awareness or sensitivity that family businesses have to the role that memory and history play in firm survival and longevity. Historical consciousness is a recurrent explanatory theme of family business success in four of the papers that constitute this special issue.

In both the Haag et al. (2023) and the McAdam et al. (2023) studies, it was a recombinant memory structure in the family firm – a "sibling consortium" in the former and a "community of cousins" in the latter – that generated a hyper-awareness of the significance of the past and a rational response that generated a positive outcome for each firm. These insights align with the well-established view that owner-managed firms transition to 'sibling partnership' before becoming 'cousin consortiums' (Gersick et al., 1996). However, these insights simultaneously challenge the prevailing view that sibling partnership and cousin consortiums tend to reduce their efforts to maintain a collective identity or reduce the number of family members connected to the business (e.g., via 'pruning' the family tree; Lambrechts & Lievens, 2008).

In the papers by Lubinski & Gartner (2023) and Manelli et al. (2023) instead, it is the crafting of historical narratives that elucidates the heightened historical consciousness of the family businesses. In their analysis of a collection of historical narratives of the seventh-generation family firm Bagel in the German printing and publishing business, Lubinski and Gartner reveal that historical narratives about the past can be used to give a coherent sense of self to families in business, allowing an understanding of how past, present and future are connected. Yet, to avoid becoming trapped in established historical narratives, they point to the importance of increasing the awareness of family members for the role that historical reflexivity plays. The authors specifically reveal how understanding the diverse uses of 'generation' in historical narratives allows family business members to establish continuity or change in how they talk about themselves and foreground family dynamics or their roles in societal developments. Moreover, the authors show how the variegated meanings of the term generation shapes storytelling processes, giving storytellers freedom to connect generational narratives to their own identity stories. In that sense, generational narratives are an invitation to re-narrate one's own story in the context of the legacies of the family and society. Thus, four uses of generation emerged from this study. They are connected to the notion of legacy and suggest that legacies can be continued, changed, or dropped over time.

Similarly, Manelli et al. (2023) illuminate three distinct narrative practices that are performed directly by family business foundations to communicate the social legacy of the family business to external stakeholders. Importantly, the three narratives – founder foreshadowing, emplacing the legacy within the broader community, and weaving family history with macro-history – reveal how rhetorical history strategies that resonate with key community stakeholders are powerful tools to ensure the continuity and the legacy of family businesses.

In summary, these papers show that families and family businesses are comprised of individuals who interact frequently and fatefully with each other. Moreover, their memories are not didactic, but are interpretive. They remember together and, in the process, reinterpret the memories in an intersubjective manner. Rather than simply acquiring, storing, and retrieving information, the case studies presented in these papers reveal how organizational memory more closely reflects a process of sense-making (Weick, 1995) – i.e., bracketing experience, selecting meanings, and retaining interpretations that make sense in the present and the anticipated future (Sinha et al., 2020). These insights support two fundamental dynamics. First, the existence of a recursive relationship between family memory and family history on one hand, and the family's role in constructing the history of the family and its business on the other. Second, the insights suggest that history and memory are two mediators in between the family and the business, enabling families to (1) attenuate or nurture tensions between the business and the family and (2) adapt to the everchanging environment in which they and their business are embedded or isolate themselves and their business from any environmental change.

Future Directions for Family Business Research that Informs Management Research

We have highlighted in this essay how history-informed research, supported by the six exemplary studies in this special issue, can help us better understand family firms. In the following, we build upon these insights to discuss how history-informed family business research offers meaningful contributions to management research more generally (Jaskiewicz et al., 2020).

We started this essay by describing how family businesses face an ongoing tension between family memory and family history, on the one hand, and the family's role in authoring that history, on the other hand. We elaborated on this recursive dynamic between the past and the family's construction of the present and future in the first section. This line of research offers important insights beyond the family and the family firm. Although most management research treats employees as disconnected and anonymous actors who need to fit the prescriptions of Weber's bureaucratic organization, we propose to view employees as permanently re-constructing their work – whether at family or non-family firms – based on their family memory and family history, which has twofold implication.

First, employees can transcend the boundaries of consanguinity. For instance, employees in family and non-family firms often feel as a part of a family, despite a lack of any kin ties with co-workers or owners (Hsueh et al., 2022). The usage of family memory and family history in family firms might help explain when and why employees develop a sense of family belonging.

Second, employees can construct family businesses even when blood ties are absent. For instance, Hofstede, Van Deusen, Mueller, and Charles (2002) find that in countries with a history of strong family norms and ties, it is common for employees to see their employer as a family firm and transfer resources from that firm to benefit their own families. They conclude, "the unique traditions of each country have been maintained in their institutions like families […], patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting that differentiate one country from another and continue to be transferred from generation to generation" and to business organizations (p. 800). Indeed, any business organization can introduce family symbols (e.g., "founded by the Smith family in 1900") and work-family policies (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2016; Hammer et al., 2005; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). We speculate that organizational leaders' family memory and family history can play an important role in nurturing such decisions. Management researchers should therefore shed light on how organizational leaders' family memory and history influence the introduction of family-based symbols and policies across organization and when family memory and history might drive organizational leaders to socially construct family businesses in organizations that are not being controlled by families.

In the second section, we described how work on memory and history sheds substantial light on the balance of economics and family logics in family businesses. More generally, it also points to opportunities to inform the broader management literature in at least two ways. There exists a substantial literature on diffusion of practices through interfirm connections such as board interlocks (e.g., Shropshire, 2010). Yet the bulk of these studies focus on the transplantation of identical policies, such as poison pills (Davis, 1991), acquisitions (Haunschild, 1993), or decision-making mechanisms (Westphal, Seidel, & Stewart, 2001), across firms. McAdam et al.'s (2023) study shows how the board role of a family member by marriage at one family firm led to deep knowledge transfer to a second firm, and further points to the transformation of this knowledge into a different set of practices. Such detail speaks both to the process of diffusion and reinterpretation of experiences, and to the interorganizational family tie that facilitates this.

Second, the prevailing view of innovation in the management literature conceives innovation as a recombination of knowledge (Henderson & Clark 1990; Fleming & Sorenson 2004). Yet the management literature is somewhat underspecified in considering the precise ways in which recombination occurs. Nora's conception of history vs. memory offers trenchant points for thinking more deeply about this, and Schweiger et al.'s (2023) study points in one possible direction by viewing family and business history as a source of ideas, and memory work as a mechanism to recombine past and present knowledge sources.

In the third section, we explored key constructs underlying *memory work* and *history* described in the special issue's papers, namely *reminiscing*, *belonging*, and *historical consciousness*, and elaborated how these constructs can help address the recurring question of *why some family businesses fail to endure, while others enjoy organizational longevity that surpasses that of most other companies*. We discussed how *reminiscing* is essential to develop a collective memory and thus foster *belonging*, and how historical consciousness, a key construct in the theory of historical reflexivity (Durepos & Vince, 2020), is an important resource for families to reinterpret their history and adjust to an ever-changing present. Indeed, historical consciousness, reminiscing, and memory work are essential for effective rhetorical history strategies that fuel family firms' agility (Sinha et al., 2020) and transgenerational entrepreneurship (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). The historical accounts offered by Lubinski and Gartner (2023) and Manelli et al. (2023) illuminates this concept particularly well. However, this stream of research also carries ample opportunities for management research, more generally. For instance, prior research indicated that, compared to non-family firms, family firms have better reputations (Deephouse & Jaskiewicz, 2013) and are more trusted to 'walk their talk' (Combs et al., 2022), which we believe might help explain why family businesses and family leaders' memory work is often effective. However, management researchers have not yet embraced whether and how non-family firms and non-family leaders can successfully emulate such family firms and leaders. For instance, how can non-family firms engage in memory work to leverage the founder family's past and develop a competitive advantage in the present? Or, does the reminiscing of non-family CEOs about their upbringing in their own family's business increase their legitimacy and tenure in the family firms that employs them? Finally, how can non-family businesses engage in reminiscing to foster employees' belonging independent of family ties and common ancestors? Without a doubt, key constructs underlying memory work and history are not only common in family businesses but also essential to motivate subsequent generations to preserve and advance the family business legacy (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015) and successfully reposition the family business in an ever-changing environment (Sinha et al., 2020). The holy grail of some family business's longevity might thus not be their unique or compelling history but their ability to engage in memory work to create meaning for the family and legitimacy for the business. Accordingly, the legacies of family and their businesses, commonly defined as the enduring impact of the past, might not be as much be some antiquated gems of the past but the continuous ability to construct what is needed in the present and anticipated future.

Conclusion

Management scholars have a renewed interest in understanding how temporality, history, and memory impact organizations. The turn to history has been particularly vibrant in such fields as organization studies (Wadhwani et al., 2018), strategic management (Argyres et al., 2020) and organization theory (Shipp & Jansen, 2021). As this essay highlights, the field of family business is uniquely positioned to generate key insights into this line of research. We have suggested that family businesses are perhaps more intimately connected to their histories and memories than more bureaucratic or formal organizations. As a result, family businesses offer a vibrant context within which researchers can understand the varied ways in which history and memory is used in everyday practices to make families and their businesses more resilient, enduring, and successful. Family business researchers, therefore, have an incredible opportunity to advance our understanding of how history-informed research can extend our understanding of organizations, both family businesses as well as corporations. More critically, family business researchers also have an opportunity to advance our methodological understanding of how best we might study the use of memory and history in organizations.

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Table 1: Summary of papers in the Special Issue

Title	**Authors**	**Type of study**	**Key dynamics**	**Core constructs**
Innovation through tradition: How family firms draw on past knowledge for successful inventions	Schweiger et al.	Quantitative analysis in the global wine industry (1956-2013)	Memory work is used to unearth and repurpose technological knowledge embedded in old patents	History vs memory work: Memory work is active engagement to recombine past and present knowledge sources
Narrative memory work of employees in family businesses: How performative aspects of founding stories shape identification	Brinkmann et al.	Qualitative case study of Green Harvester, a German agricultural business	Role of the founding story in constructing a sense of family identity across multiple generations	Mutual constitution of history and family: endogenous elements drive continuity
An exploration of how practices are created, maintained, and transformed in a family business	McAdam et al.	Qualitative case study of an Irish family business	Memory work transforms a painful memory into a historical cautionary tale across generations	Memory as an affective resource of organizations that enables learning through recombinant memory structure Reminiscing and belonging
Towards a corporate co-evolution perspective on niche development – the history of a 4th generation family firm and its highly specialized product niche	Haag et al.	Qualitative case study of Karl Anderson & Sons, a long-lived Swedish family firm in furniture manufacturing	The definition of the family exhibits plasticity as the firm adapts to changes, while being consistent with cultural external category	Mutual constitution of history and family: exogenous elements drive continuity Reminiscing and belonging
The evolution of entrepreneurial legacy as a "generational saga" in a family business	Lubinski & Gartner	Historical analysis of the seventh-generation family firm Bagel in the German printing and publishing business	The past is used to give a coherent sense of self to families in business, allowing an understanding of how past, present, and future are connected	Rhetorical history: Historical reflexivity reflected in the diverse meanings and use of the concept of 'generation'
Building an outward-oriented social family legacy: Rhetorical history in family business foundations	Manelli et al.	12- months field study of three family business foundations in Italy	Family firms engage in rhetorical history to transfer their social family legacy to external stakeholders	Rhetorical history: Historical reflexivity used to craft historical narratives