

Family business research: The next generation

The question of whether a family firm differs from a non-family firm has been central to the family business literature since the beginning of scholarship investigating how and why family members employ one another in an entrepreneurial venture (Rovelli et al., 2022b). This topic could even be characterized as the first-generation research issue for family business scholars as it was critical to establish that family firms could be and should be distinguished both theoretically and empirically from their non-family counterparts. In the first special issue devoted to the topic of family business research (affiliated with the first Theories of Family Enterprise Research Conference in 2001), Chrisman et al. (2003) outlined as the primary research question: “Are family firms different from nonfamily firms in terms of their resources, behaviors, and decisions? If so, how are they different and why are they different?”

The subsequent 20-plus years of research and debate on the subject offers clear evidence that family firms operate with distinction from non-family firms and differently from one another based on the uniqueness and motivations of their family member owners. These distinctions can provide family firms with the ability to perform differently from other firms impacting their achievement of various goals and objectives (Chua et al., 2018). Further, while the degree of family firm heterogeneity (Chua et al., 2012; Daspit et al., 2021) offered scholars abundant opportunities to explore how these firms distinctly operate; no specific “theory of the family firm” has yet to be proffered specifying exactly *why* family firms are different from non-family firms and other family firms, or *how* these differences uniquely permit them to create competitive advantages that influence their ability to obtain their goals and objectives. Despite this, scholars continue to robustly demonstrate that family firms operate in differentiated ways and utilize numerous approaches to accomplish this task.

Therefore, it seems that at the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, family business researchers have reached a new generation regarding their principal task. They are no longer attempting to define the family firm as a unique organizational form with a unique *theory of its own* that explains specifically *why* and *how* family businesses come into being or operates differently to create advantages to obtain organizational objectives. Instead, family business scholars have adapted their efforts into explaining how family firms operate by accounting for the distinct governing mechanism (i.e., family involvement) within the organization, and how this distinction allows the firm to operate differently from other venture types (either other family firms or nonfamily firms). By making this switch in focus, scholars have been able to utilize scores of explanatory theories derived from the management and entrepreneurship literatures to explain and detail how family firms operate differentially because of the involvement of their family members. This change in perspective in the last few years represents a generational shift in how family business research is conducted and demonstrates how research on this topic has undergone a succession from one generation of scholars to another.

To help illustrate and understand this shift in focus, this special collection includes seven manuscripts developed in part through the feedback process that occurred at the 18th edition of the Theories of Family Enterprise Conference held in Glassboro, New Jersey at Rowan University from April 4th to April 6th, 2024. These articles utilize at least seven different theoretical perspectives, drawing from diverse approaches ranging from property rights theory to identity process theory, to psychological reactance theory to signaling theory to demonstrate how family firms operate. As seen in this collection of research, the emphasis in this next generation of scholarly inquiry is not upon defining a singular theory of the family firm but explaining how

family involvement influences and determines outcomes within (and outside) the family firm that differentiate how the firm reacts and responds.

Further, the articles in this collection collectively articulate the importance of understanding how the family's involvement influences the firm at multiple levels within the organization and across boundaries outside the organization—specifically by looking at how the family *communicates* its influence via the family firm. Traditionally, the emphasis on a holistic theory of the family firm focused on a mostly on a firm-level explanation for family business outcomes (e.g., firm performance). While useful, this approach does not sufficiently account for the individual and group (i.e., top management team) level factors that can also drive critical issues within the family firm. As demonstrated, individual issues such as *expressing* fear of failure impacts the entrepreneurial identity of next generation family members (Bagherian et al., 2025), while family firm CEO *messaging* to shareholders influences the development of organizational-level resilience (Fosse et al., 2025), or a family firm leveraging its image *signals* to potential investors its value as a trustworthy investment for crowdfunding (Allison & Anglin, 2025). Incorporating both the individual and the group level influence of family members for understanding how the family impacts the firm across different levels via multiple approaches (e.g., AI-assisted methods, internationally diverse samples, qualitative case studies) helps to enrich our knowledge of the complexities of family-owned ventures.

Contributions of the Articles

Each article in this special collection provides a unique contribution to understanding the heterogeneity and importance of examining how the family communicates and expresses its involvement in the firm at a different level of analysis within the family firm and in many cases across generations of the family. Specifically, these articles offer knowledge on how non-

financial constructs within the family firm literature communicate the desired goals of families; how family members effectively communicate their legacy to future generations; how parents communicate fear of failure to their children and impact the next generation's entrepreneurial identity; how family firm CEOs communicate sensegiving to shareholders to help create organizational resilience; how family firm reputations communicate trust and are given preferential treatment in rewards-based crowdfunding; how steward private equity investors communicate with minority family owner/managers to enhance ownership competence; and how the origins of ownership communicate different information to different types of family firms thereby altering their motivations to efficiently generate valuable innovations. In the passages below, we detail each article's specific contribution in more detail.

Non-financial constructs in family firms

Bracamonte et al. (2025) provide a theoretically driven process model in their piece, detailing non-financial constructs in the family firm literature. Taking a multi-level perspective, they argue that socioemotional wealth (SEW; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007), which represents the non-financial affective endowments accumulated by family firms and explains their decision-making behavior (Berrone et al., 2012) and helps fulfill familial needs (Swab et al., 2020), can be placed within a framework with other non-economic constructs. This framework uses goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002) to articulate how SEW is derived and influences other factors within the family firm at multiple levels in the firm.

More specifically, they posit that SEW-importance (SEWi), or “the reflection of a family's preference for some affective outcome over others” (Debicki et al., 2016, p. 49), indicates how family firm decision-makers (i.e., individuals in family firms) prioritize various aspects of SEW and implies that different family members will value different aspects of SEW.

Further, the assessment of the significance of SEWi at the individual level (SEWi) should be aggregated to a collective perspective to create a family-oriented understanding of SEWi at the group or collective level (i.e., C-SEWi). C-SEWi reflects the family's commitment to SEW outcomes and guides the pursuit of goals at the organizational level. These specific goals are known as Family-Centered Non-Economic (FCNE; Chrisman et al., 2012) goals and represent collective aspirations of the family which extend beyond financial objectives, usually tied to emotional values extending from family ownership (Astrachan & Jaskiewicz, 2008), such as harmony, social status, and identity. Successful achievement of these goals allows for the accumulation of SEW endowments while failure may cause depletion (Chua et al., 2015).

Bracamonte et al. (2025) employ goal-setting theory to articulate in their model how non-financial constructs operate in the formulation, pursuit, and achievement of goals within family firms. FCNE goals represent specific, challenging, and obtainable objectives for family firm members (Locke & Latham, 2005) and align with the C-SEWi of the family group (as placing importance on SEW represents commitment towards obtainment of goals)—motivating family members to achieve enhanced SEW as their desired performance outcome. According to goal-setting theory, the specificity and difficulty of goals are essential for motivating individuals and groups to guide action that results in desired outcomes (Locke & Latham, 1990). Their model further articulates the time-dependent feedback loop that occurs as a result of the achievement or depletion of SEW. That is, as family firms achieve FCNE goals (or fail to do so) this impacts how individuals view SEWi consistent with feedback mechanisms related to maintaining or adjusting goals over time (Locke & Latham, 2002). Leveraging this microfoundations perspective (Ellen et al., 2024), their model incorporates multiple non-financial constructs salient to the family firm literature and utilizes goal-setting theory to create a framework that spans

multiple levels within the organization to explain how the family influences the firm via individuals, groups, and ultimately the firm itself as a result of how it communicates the importance of the goals it seeks to achieve as a family via the family firm.

Legacy transmission in family firms

Zhang et al. (2025) take a ‘more is not always better’ perspective in their investigation in the effectiveness of narrative transmissions of legacy in family firms in their research, examining communication processes in family firms. Specifically, they look at how the frequency and length of storytelling influences legacy transmission success from one generation to another. Taking both a psychological reactance and self-determination theory approach, they contend an inverted u-shaped (i.e., curvilinear) relationship exists between the frequency of legacy storytelling and transmission success via audience interest; however, length of legacy narrative does not have the same effect. Essentially, legacy is typically communicated by incumbents through narratives that recount the entrepreneurial achievements and resilience of past family members (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015) with the objective of imprinting on future generations of the family (Combs et al., 2020). Prior research has not investigated the efficacy of repetition or length of narratives in successful transmission of legacy.

Their work is some of the first to demonstrate the effectiveness of the form and device utilized to propagate legacy which relies on how well the stories are told—which underscores the value of focusing on creating effective narratives in order to transmit legacy to the next generation. Additionally, their work focuses on the next generation receiver of legacy narratives and understanding their perceptions of the legacy transmission process which underscores that legacy propagation is essentially a co-creation between incumbents and the next-generation (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2024) via a dynamic process (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2025). Additional

probing of their data also allowed them to conclude that concise narratives are more effective for communication, which means that content and meaning derived by future generations can occur if the message is delivered appropriately. Their work emphasizes the importance of examining individuals in family firms (e.g., incumbents and potential successors) to unpack how family members pass on the stories that drive the values which underpin how the family business operates.

Transgenerational impact of parents' fear of failure

Entrepreneurial identity (EI) is crucial for fostering entrepreneurship across generations and maintaining the long-term sustainability of family firms. Bagherian et al. (2025) extends what is known about the development of EI that helps ensure transgenerational entrepreneurship. They examine the impact of parents' emotions on their offspring's entrepreneurial identities (EI) within business families. By considering parental entrepreneurial fear of failure along with the associated perceptions of offspring, the authors help unpack how offspring of family businesses adopt and centralize their EI. Utilizing an identity process theory approach (Breakwell, 2014), they argue that offspring in business families develop their EI in unique ways that are influenced by interactions with their parents who are identity role models (Carr & Sequeira, 2007). Family business owners' emotions regarding entrepreneurship are observed by their children and, in turn, shape children's identity formation specifically related to the extent to which EI is central to the identity of children.

In examining 301 parent-offspring pairs in small and medium enterprises in Iran, the authors found support for the notion that when parents communicate enhanced levels of fear of failure, these signals play a role in identity formation in their offspring. When offspring perceive that EI is less central to their parents, EI will be less central to their own identity. Further, the

authors explore an important boundary condition of these effects by examining how children's degree of involvement in the family business imbues them with critical entrepreneurial knowledge that can alter their attitudes related to family business succession (Barach & Ganitsky, 1995; Istipliler et al., 2023). When offspring have greater experience in the family business, the impact of their parent's fear of failure on their perception of the parent's EI is weakened. These findings enhance the understanding of how next generation EI in family firms takes shape and illuminates the value of exploring the impact of negative factors such as fear of failure that drive the formation of EI. Thus, this work demonstrates how family dynamics and interactions play an important part of shaping future generations in their desire to pursue entrepreneurship (Soleimanof et al., 2019).

Family firm CEO sensegiving and organizational resilience

A great deal of the family business literature has explored the topic of resilience among family firms (e.g., Yilmaz et al., 2024); however, less work has examined how and why this resilience develops. In Fosse et al. (2025, p. 1), the authors believe that family firms are uniquely positioned to provide positive narratives that promote “sunspots” which are “cycles of self-reinforcing, positive expectations” when facing difficult times. Basing their logic in rational expectations equilibrium theory (Muth, 1961) and socioemotional wealth (SEW) perspectives (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2007), they posit family firm CEOs communicate messages that shape expectations of economic outcomes whose positive or negative interpretations can create self-reinforcing cycles that influence economic results. Because family firm leaders emphasize socioemotional perspectives (i.e., SEW), they have a stronger motive to convince their stakeholders that circumstances are less dire (i.e., more positive), than they may otherwise seem during difficult times. Specifically, family firms possess a unique need and capability to activate

a large network of stakeholders and obtain economic and non-economic resources from them.

This is a key factor for both their need for and ability to display resilience. Displaying a positive outlook (if convincing) can potentially generate more needed resources and result in better outcomes during crisis events.

Using AI-driven techniques and human agency, the authors analyzed 198 CEO shareholder letters from Fortune 500 companies during the 2007-2009 global financial crisis to compare family and non-family firms' crisis communication approaches to determine their impact on organizational resilience. This approach helped them identify and operationalize five sensegiving items used by the CEOs in their messages: positive emotional appeal, subjectivity, stakeholder engagement, reframing, and visionary perspective. Using their measure of sensegiving, they conducted a mixed-effect logistic regression model to predict whether a CEO letter was from a family firm or a non-family firm, finding that sensegiving was the key predictor driving the likelihood of a letter being from a family firm. Therefore, CEOs of family firms seem to communicate a more positive interpretation of their circumstances during crisis events helping to forge enhanced resilience in their attempts to maintain SEW. As such, their work builds on the notion that sensegiving is a capability that family firm CEOs can use during adverse conditions and demonstrates that individual-level behaviors (i.e., CEO communications) can have firm-level implications (i.e., organizational resilience). Such cross-level research demonstrates how microfoundations theorizing (Ellen et al., 2024) can enrich family business research.

Family firm image and rewards-based crowdfunding

The study by Allison and Anglin (2025) examines family firm image and its impact on rewards-based crowdfunding, arguing that family firms may be able to tap this resource to maintain control and ensure the continuity of the business for future generations. Since family

firms seek financing that allows them methods to stabilize their ownership without diluting control, reward-based crowdfunding presents a unique opportunity to secure resources. They theorize that projecting a family firm image (i.e., communicating a positive reputation) in a crowdfunding campaign permits the campaign to benefit from the positive perceptions of quality, trust, and authenticity and reduced uncertainty associated with family businesses, offering backers greater confidence that the campaign will fulfill its promises and ultimately leading to enhanced crowdfunding performance. They further theorize that costless signals (i.e., projecting a family firm association) and costly signals (i.e., past funding success) offer backers information that reduces their uncertainty about funding, which means that using such family firm association signals have the potential to substitute for prior funding success (Anglin et al., 2018). This is because both signals offer similar, positive, information, and past funding success should be less important for campaigns that project a family firm image when it comes to enhancing crowdfunding performance.

Using Kickstarter as their sample, they examined all the campaigns launched during 2019 and 2020 that completed their fundraising process. Further, they used computerized content analysis (CATA; Short et al., 2010) to capture all direct mentions of terms and phrases associated with family firms in each campaign. They created a dictionary comprised of linguistic references to family images including “family firm”, “family owned”, and “family business,” and used this to create a dichotomous variable representing the presence or absence of family image in the campaign. Their results demonstrate that family firm image communicates a positive reputational benefit for these ventures and family firms can utilize rewards-based crowdfunding to obtain resources. Further, family firm image is influential enough to overcome the impact of other pieces of information communicated during a crowdfunding campaign (i.e.,

past performance), which implies that image is a strong driver of backer behavior. Finally, their work suggests that consumer-oriented factors (positive image) associated with family firms are potentially more impactful than long term business investment factors (i.e., ownership rights or other goods and services) for backers in a rewards-based crowdfunding environment. Indeed, a key finding of their work is the evidence it provides for the positive associations consumers attach to family firms (Beck & Kenning, 2015; Beck & Prügl, 2018; Binz et al., 2013; Blodgett et al., 2011; Köhr et al., 2021; Zanon et al., 2019). Therefore, it seems advisable for family business-affiliated crowdfunding campaigns to openly and proactively disclose this information to backers. Their work, which combines aspects of reputation theory (Pollock et al., 2019) and signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2024) reveals the potential economic value of communicating family firm image to external stakeholders. In doing so, it advances the literature on how external audiences perceive the image of family firms (Rovelli et al., 2022a) and how such perceptions, in particular, influence access to financial resources (Arzubiaga et al., 2023).

Steward private equity investment in family firms

Taking an embedded single-case study qualitative approach to examine steward private equity (PE) investment in family firms, Khoury et al. (2025) probe the research question: How does joint ownership, and combined ownership competence, evolve between professional external steward PE investors and family members? Their work looks at one steward PE investor that obtained the majority shares of three family firms while each family kept managerial duties and a minority ownership stake in the business. With data collected by conducting 25 interviews with family members and the investor, as well other experts, they identified key elements in their coding such as control hazards, family dysfunctions, reliability, egocentrism, and succession that were critical issues in the synergetic three-step process that

emerged relating to the combination of a steward PE investor and the family for enhanced ownership competence.

Specifically, the joint ownership potential was analyzed in the first step of the process. Step two involved hazard reduction procedures that improved the family's ownership competence. Step three focused on sustained efforts to cultivate the relationship, which generated functional joint ownership competence. The authors further identified specific approaches used by the steward PE investor that enhanced the first two stages of this process, particularly by clearly communicating the family members' desire to maintain aspects of their influence during interactions with the PE investor. Their work makes clear contributions to the family business literature and property rights theory (PRT; Foss et al., 2021; Chrisman et al., 2025) by detailing how ownership competence in family firms is enhanced via joint ownership and the communication mechanisms that take place when a steward PE investor works with a family firm to enhance its competence. Specifically examining a steward PE investor and approaches used in combination with family firms to create successful joint ownership relationships offers a unique perspective on both the PE approach and the benefits of joint ownership for family firms with dynamic, ongoing processes requiring constructive conflict management. Indeed, their results demonstrate that steward PE investors appear to utilize a method that first mitigates the family's control hazards and then combines and strengthens the joint ownership competence of the family firm by blending the strengths of the investor with the family's experiences and relationships to create enhanced value.

Family firm innovation based on origin

Utilizing arguments grounded in the institutional logics perspective (Friedland, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999), Su et al. (2025) develop and test a model that demonstrates how state

owned enterprise (SOE)-transformed family firms are distinct from their “born” family peers regarding innovation behaviors. This approach permits them to explain how the two types of firms use various logics (Greenwood et al., 2011; Thornton, 2012) to focus their attention via cognitive frameworks, orientations, goals, and cognitive patterns to influence organizational practices and specifically innovation outcomes. The tension between state-market oriented logic and family logic drive different decision patterns and firm behaviors within these different types of family businesses.

Testing their ideas with a dataset of 1,755 Chinese family firms from 2009 to 2019, the authors found support for their model showing that family firm origin influences innovation output—that is “born” family firms and transformed family firms utilized different institutional logics to drive, communicate with, and influence firm behavior. As such, they make further advancements to the literature regarding the heterogeneity of family firms by showing that firm origin is a determinant of innovation behavior. Further, their work demonstrates that state-market logic tension within SOE-transformed family firms pressures these firms to be more efficient than born family firms and does not simply minimize their innovation input and output as previous research utilizing institutional logics might suggest (Wang et al., 2022). This adds greater nuance to the institutional logics perspective and provides opportunities for future research with this approach. Additionally, their work adds greater understanding to the “ability-willingness paradox” (Chrisman et al., 2015) by including an institutional logics perspective where certain types of family firms can be motivated to enhance innovation resource utilization to increase efficiencies based on the environmental context. Their work also demonstrates the potential downside of enhanced family involvement in this efficiency creation process for state-market logic driven SOE family firms—highlighting the conflicting nature of multiple logics for

innovation generation and the importance of the influence of family member involvement and communication of family influence on innovation outcomes.

Combined contribution of this special collection

Together, the seven manuscripts within this special collection reveal that family business research conducted at the end of the first quarter of the 21st century has advanced to a new generation of inquiry. For example, this generation utilizes qualitative approaches to build new theory (Khoury et al, 2025) while informing prior perspectives (e.g., PRT), takes micro-level theories (e.g., goal-setting theory) to explain multi-level family firm phenomena (Bracamonte et al., 2025), and uses macro-level theories (e.g., signaling theory) to explain family firm financial success (Allison & Anglin, 2025). In each case, the authors utilize established theoretical perspectives to demonstrate the importance of the family firm and its family members' ability to influence outcomes both internally and externally. Perhaps more importantly, these pieces of work offer robust evidence to the strength of the future of family business research endeavors as this next generation of scholars pursues further efforts to engage in exploration of how family firms function in various ways. In line with this theme of this article, many of the manuscripts in the special issue also reflect the importance of transitioning from one generation to the next within the family firm such as the transmission of legacy narratives from incumbents to successors (Zhang et al., 2025) or the passing on from parents to children the fear of failure that might impact future generations' ability to engage in the entrepreneurial actions required to sustain the family firm (Bagherian et al., 2025). Therefore, the concept of "generations" is salient for both family businesses who pass from one generation to another and the research efforts that examine these organizations.

Generations are often defined by birth cohorts “based on membership in an age group that shares collective memories during formative years of life” (Joshi et al., 2010, p. 395); however, many scholars have come to regard the term “generations” as an artificial clustering of people (Reulecke, 2008) based on age (e.g., Generation X, Millennial; Magrelli et al., 2022). Often, the use of the term in both non-academic settings and in the social sciences has been muddled (Williams, 2020) as the distinction between an age cohort (more accurately defined as a demographic category) and a generation (a social category imbued by shared life experiences and interpretation) is left unclarified. Indeed, Mannheim’s (1952; 1970) original conceptualization of a “generation” was the combination of three aspects (i.e., age, cohort, and period)—this perspective permits the avoidance of “age stereotyping” and encourages a more nuanced approach to the understanding of a generation. Further, Mannheim’s (1952; 1970) perspective argues that a clearly understood generation develops its own worldview and values influenced by the historical and societal context in which that group develops during its formative years, which impact its attitudes and behaviors.

From this point of view, we argue that the second generation of family business scholars has arrived and believe it can be categorized based on Mannheim’s definition. First, the approximate average age of the scholars involved in this special issue is 43.1 years—a testament to the relative youth and vitality of the current family business scholar. Second, the approximate average year of the PhD granted to each author in this special issue is 2014—again demonstrating the cohort effects of education for this particular group and their influence on current family business scholarship. Finally, the timeframe under consideration is the first 25 years of the 21st century—a period marked by significant advances in empirical, methodological, and technological progress for researchers working in the social sciences. As such, this context

has dramatically shaped how scholars from this period are able to conduct work allowing them to explore the nuances of family firms. These advances are also reflected in the next generation's skill at utilizing myriad theories from different fields to explicate how the family exerts its influence on the family firm rather than seeking to define the family firm by a singular theory.

Future research directions

The next generation of family business scholars has ample opportunity to investigate new avenues for future research, and we envision at least four key areas from which they can develop future inquiry. These include enhancing our understanding of the heterogeneity of family firms by developing a greater understanding of cross-level influences of family involvement in family businesses, team-level effects within the firm, the individual-level impact of the family within the family firm, and the impact of networks for influencing family firm actors and outcomes.

First, building on the variety of theoretical frameworks available and the complexities of the heterogeneity of family firms (Daspit et al., 2021), the multi-level nature that is inherent in family member influence (e.g., Bracamonte et al., 2025; Daspit et al., 2024), provides numerous opportunities for scholars to invoke theories examining individuals (Vardaman et al., 2024), groups (e.g., Bettinelli, 2011), and firm-level effects within these organizations. To offer one specific example of research needed to help drive the field forward, we posit the need for more models incorporating micro-level theories into explanations of macro level outcomes that result specifically because of family members and their influence in the firm (e.g., Ellen et al., 2024). Family firms operate at the intersection of many interconnected levels of analysis, and their actions have individual, family, and even societal impact. For example, scholars can utilize theorizing and techniques similar to those invoked by Fosse et al. (2025).

Particularly salient for the future generation of family business inquiry are these cross-level investigations. As the papers in the special collection indicate, context plays a significant role in how family businesses (and the people who inhabit them) behave. The papers in the special collection suggest that decisions made by individual family members are shaped not only by their own personal attributes and proclivities, but also by family dynamics, governance structures, and contexts. Similarly, firm-level strategy and action often cascade onto members of the organization. By examining family businesses and their inhabitants across levels, the next generation of family business scholars can capture the complexity of family businesses more accurately and link micro-level behaviors to macro-level outcomes. Doing so would aid in developing more comprehensive theories. Without these cross-level perspectives, family business scholarship risks adopting incomplete or overly simplistic understandings of how family-owned organizations function and evolve. In this regard, the entrepreneurial family galaxy framework (De Massis & Rondi, 2024) provides a promising avenue for advancing multi-level theorizing. By conceptualizing entrepreneurial families as galaxies of heterogeneous “planets” including organizations, individuals, and resources extending beyond a single-family firm, this perspective enables scholars to explore how activities and identities across multiple “planets” within this galaxy—such as family firms, family offices, foundations, family academies, family museums and family investment vehicles—interact to shape family influence and firm outcomes. Such a lens can illuminate how synergies and tensions across different family-controlled “planets” cascade onto individual and organizational behaviors, while also linking micro-level decisions to broader, ecosystem-level patterns of entrepreneurial activity.

Second, within these levels of analysis, a particular area prime for future exploration includes team-level effects (specifically the “family-team”). This unique form of dominant

coalition (Cyert & March, 1963) within the firm has yet to be fully investigated in the family firm environment (D'Allura, 2019). As teams research offers robust explanations for multiple firm issues (e.g., firm performance, organizational values etc.), the impact of “family-teams” is an area ripe for additional examination (e.g., Minichilli et al., 2010).

Perhaps the area to which the least amount of research has been conducted to date in the family business literature continues to relate to micro (i.e., individual) issues. Specifically, our third area relates to a call for more theoretically grounded research that seeks to understand how and why family members at the individual level influence individual level outcomes within and across family firms (e.g., McLarty et al., 2025). This could include how family involvement issues determine or influence various aspects of job performance by family firm employees (e.g., McLarty et al., 2019; Vardaman et al., 2025) or other salient behavioral outcomes within these entrepreneurial ventures such as knowledge sharing, risk taking, innovation creation, proactive behaviors, turnover, ethical behaviors and other actions which have yet to be fully explored in these environments. We particularly encourage future scholars to investigate the implications of the psychological foundations of management in family firms to examine how the values, biases, heuristics, memories, and experiences of family and nonfamily members affect strategic decision-making and the behaviors and outcomes of individuals and family firms (Humphrey et al., 2021; Picone et al., 2021) and the role played by emotions (De Massis et al., 2023).

Finally, another path for the second generation of inquiry is examining the network of relationships that enmesh family firm actors, and how those relationships shape firm strategy and individual behavior. The papers in this special collection suggest future research on family businesses and their employees from a social network perspective is important because it can

shed light on underexplored dynamics that shape both firm performance and employee experiences. Although prior studies have highlighted the central role of social ties in family firm employee retention (Vardaman et al., 2018), little remains known about how networks of relationships affect collaboration, knowledge sharing, and career opportunities for family and nonfamily employees alike (Yates et al., 2023). Investigating these patterns can reveal how social capital is built, distributed, and sometimes restricted within family firms. Moreover, a network perspective can illuminate how relational structures evolve over time across generational transitions and through periods of organizational change.

Conclusion

In summary, the second generation of family business scholars have a solid foundation to build their work further into the 21st century. The efforts of the first generation have provided a strong starting point for future researchers to explore the intricacies of the family for its influence on the functioning of their ventures. By utilizing robust theoretical frameworks at multiple levels within the firm, opportunities to understand why the family matters across generations continues to be available. We are optimistic about the prospects of what the future holds.

Acknowledgments

The guest editors are grateful to the Roher College of Business at Rowan University for their support and for hosting the 18th Theories of Family Enterprise Conference where these articles were initially presented. We are also grateful to the School of Entrepreneurship at Oklahoma State University, the Department of Management and Information Systems at Mississippi State University, and the Fogelman College of Business & Economics at the University Memphis for their support of the conference. We would also like to thank Jessica Vattima and Andrew Bunoza for their work on local arrangements for the conference. We further

acknowledge the following individuals for sharing their time and expertise in reviewing manuscripts for the special issue:

Naveed	Akhter	Jönköping University
Claudia	Astrachan	Lucerne University
Marc	Betton	University of Bath
Juliana	Binhote	University of Louisville
Virginia	Blanco-Mazagatos	Universidad de Burgos
Mara	Brumana	University of Bergamo
Jeff	Chandler	University of North Texas
Melanie	de Ruiter	Nyenrode Business University
Bart	Debicki	Towson University
Barbara	Del Bosco	University of Milano-Bicocca
Francis	Donbesuur	University of Leicester
Andreas	Kallmuenzer	Excelia Business School
Josip	Kotlar	Politecnico di Milano
Kincy	Madison	Oklahoma State University
Aaron	McKenny	University of Central Florida
Don	Neubaum	Florida Atlantic University
Dustin	Odom	University of Southern Mississippi
Chioma	Okpalaeke	Oklahoma State University
Chris	Penney	University of North Texas
Shane	Reid	Texas State University
Paul	Sanchez-Ruiz	Iowa State University
Susana	Santos	Florida State University
Alvin	Tan	Queensland University of Technology
Erik	Taylor	East Carolina University
Michelle	Theisen	Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf
Lorraine	Uhlaner	Prague University of Economics
Tom	Vanacker	Ghent University
Jake	Waddingham	Texas State University
Marcus	Wolfe	University of North Texas
Forough	Zarea Fazlelahi	Queensland University of Technology

Part of the research that contributed to the development of this paper has been funded with European Union Funds - NextGeneration EU - PNRR M4.C2.1.1 (PRIN Project 2022 - code 2022HZBCEM, CUP I153D23002720008).

References

- Allison, T. H., & Anglin, A. H. (2025). The power of family firm image in rewards-based crowdfunding. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 1-34.
- Anglin, A. H., Wolfe, M. T., Short, J. C., McKenny, A. F., & Pidduck, R. J. (2018). Narcissistic rhetoric and crowdfunding performance: A social role theory perspective. *Journal of Business Venturing*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2018.04.004>
- Arzubiaga U., De Massis A., Maseda A., & Iturralde T. (2023). The influence of family firm image on access to financial resources in family SMEs: A signaling theory perspective. *Review of Managerial Science*, 17, 233-258.
- Astrachan, J. H., & Jaskiewicz, P. (2008). Emotional returns and emotional costs in privately held family businesses: Advancing traditional business valuation. *Family Business Review*, 21(2), 139-149. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.2008.00115.x>
- Bagherian, S. S., Strano, S. M., Soleimanof, S., Carr, J., & Feyzbakhsh, A. (2025). Entrepreneurial identity formation in family firms: the transgenerational impact of parents' fear of failure. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 1-36.
- Barach, J. A., & Ganitsky, J. B. (1995). Successful succession in family business. *Family Business Review*, 8(2), 131-155. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.1995.00131.x>
- Beck, S., & Kenning, P. (2015). The influence of retailers' family firm image on new product acceptance: An empirical investigation in the German FMCG market. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 43(12), 1126-1143.
- Beck, S., & Prügl, R. (2018). Family firm reputation and humanization: Consumers and the trust advantage of family firms under different conditions of brand familiarity. *Family Business Review*, 31(4), 460-482.
- Berrone, P., Cruz, C., & Gómez-Mejía, L. R. (2012). Socioemotional wealth in family firms: Theoretical dimensions, assessment approaches, and agenda for future research. *Family Business Review*, 25(3), 258-279. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486511435355>
- Bettinelli, C. (2011). Boards of directors in family firms: An exploratory study of structure and group process. *Family Business Review*, 24(2), 151-169.
- Binz, C., Hair Jr, J. F., Pieper, T. M., & Baldauf, A. (2013). Exploring the effect of distinct family firm reputation on consumers' preferences. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 4(1), 3-11.
- Blodgett, M. S., Dumas, C., & Zanzi, A. (2011). Emerging trends in global ethics: A comparative study of US and international family business values. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 99, 29-38.

- Bracamonte, M., Melancon, M., Markin, E., Burch, T., Bevacqua, A., & Orr, D. (2025). Untangling the threads: Exploring the non-financial constructs in family firms. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 1-34.
- Breakwell, G. M. (2014). Identity process theory: Clarifications and elaborations. In R. Jaspal & G. M. Breakwell (Eds.), *Identity process theory: Identity, social action and social change* (pp. 20–37). Cambridge University Press.
- Carr, J. C., & Sequeira, J. M. (2007). Prior family business exposure as intergenerational influence and entrepreneurial intent: A theory of planned behavior approach. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(10), 1090–1098. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2006.12.016>
- Chua, J. H., Chrisman, J. J., & De Massis, A. (2015). A closer look at socioemotional wealth: Its flows, stocks, and prospects for moving forward. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 39(2), 173-182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104225879902300402>
- Chua, J. H., Chrisman, J. J., Steier, L. P., & Rau, S. B. (2012). Sources of heterogeneity in family firms: An introduction. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 36(6), 1103-1113.
- Chrisman, J. J., Chua, J. H., De Massis, A., Frattini, F., & Wright, M. (2015). The ability and willingness paradox in family firm innovation. *The Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 32(3), 310-318.
- Chrisman, J. J., Chua, J. H., & Steier, L. P. (2003). An introduction to theories of family business. *Journal of business venturing*, 18(4), 441-448.
- Chrisman, J. J., Chua, J. H., Pearson, A. W., & Barnett, T. (2012). Family involvement, family influence, and family-centered non-economic goals in small firms. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 36(2), 267-293. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00407.x>
- Chrisman, J. J., Fang, H. “Chevy”, & Skorodzyevskiy, V. (2025). Toward a Property Rights Theory of the Family Firm. *Journal of Management*, in press. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063251355258>
- Chua, J.H., Chrisman, J.J., De Massis, A., & Wang, H. (2018). Reflections on family firm goals and the assessment of performance. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 9(2), 107-113
- Combs, J. G., Shanine, K. K., Burrows, S., Allen, J. S., & Pounds, T. W. (2020). What do we know about business families? Setting the stage for leveraging family science theories. *Family Business Review*, 33(1), 38–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486519863508>
- Connelly, B. L., Certo, S. T., Reutzel, C. R., DesJardine, M. R., & Zhou, Y. S. (2024). Signaling Theory: State of the Theory and Its Future. *Journal of Management*, 51(1), 24-61.

- Cyert, R. M., & March, J. G. (1963). *A behavioral theory of the firm*. Prentice Hall/Pearson Education.
- D'Allura, G. M. (2019). The leading role of the top management team in understanding family firms: Past research and future directions. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 10(2), 87-104.
- Daspit, J. J., Chrisman, J. J., Ashton, T., & Evangelopoulos, N. (2021). Family firm heterogeneity: A definition, common themes, scholarly progress, and directions forward. *Family Business Review*, 34(3), 296-322.
- Daspit, J. J., Madison, K., Nordqvist, M., & Sieger, P. (2024). Advancing family firm research: The importance of multilevel considerations. *Family Business Review*, 37(1), 4-17.
- De Massis A., Eddleston K. A., Hatak I., Humphrey R. H., & Tang Y. (2023). Emotions in the strategic management of family business organizations: Opening up the black box. *Long Range Planning*, 56(5), 1-10.
- De Massis A. & Rondi E. (2024). *The Family Business Book. A roadmap for entrepreneurial families to prosper across generations*. Pearson FT (Financial Times Series), Harlow, United Kingdom. 978-1-292-72560-4.
- Debicki, B. J., Kellermanns, F. W., Chrisman, J. J., Pearson, A. W., & Spencer, B. A. (2016). Development of a socioemotional wealth importance (SEWi) scale for family firm research. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 7(1), 47-57.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfbs.2016.01.002>
- Ellen III, B. P., McLarty, B. D., Medina-Craven, M. N., & Bracamonte, M. (2024). Microfoundations in family firm research: A review and agenda for theoretically driven future inquiry. *Family Business Review*, 37(1), 186-238.
- Friedland, R. (1991). Bringing society back in: Symbols, practices, and institutional contradictions. *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*, 232-263.
- Foss, N. J., Klein, P. G., Lien, L. B., Zellweger, T., & Zenger, T. (2021). Ownership competence. *Strategic Management Journal*, 42(2), 302-328.
- Fosse, S. M., Kock, C. J., Gomez-Mejia, L. R., & Makri, M. (2025). Family firms and sensegiving in a global crisis: Nudging toward a sunspot. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 1-25.
- Greenwood, R., Raynard, M., Kodeih, F., Micelotta, E. R., & Lounsbury, M. (2011). Institutional complexity and organizational responses. *Academy of Management Annals*, 5(1), 317-371.
- Gómez-Mejía, L. R., Haynes, K. T., Núñez-Nickel, M., Jacobson, K. J., & Moyano-Fuentes, J.

- (2007). Socioemotional wealth and business risks in family-controlled firms: Evidence from Spanish olive oil mills. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 52(1), 106-137. <https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.52.1.106>
- Humphrey R. H., De Massis A., Picone P. M., Tang Y., & Piccolo R. F. (2021). The psychological foundations of management in family firms: Emotions, memories, and experiences. *Family Business Review*, 34(2), 122-131.
- Istipliler, B., Ahrens, J. P., Bort, S., & Isaak, A. (2023). Is exposure to the family firm always good for the next CEO? How successor pre-succession firm experience affects postsuccession performance in family firms. *Journal of Business Research*, 167, 114179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114179>
- Khoury, C., Michael-Tsabari, N., & Kammerlander, N. (2025). Joint ownership between family and steward private equity investors: an ownership-competence view. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 1-40.
- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (1990). *A theory of goal setting & task performance*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2002). Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation: A 35-year odyssey. *American Psychologist*, 57(9), 705. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.57.9.705>
- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2005). Goal setting theory: Theory building by induction. *Great Minds in Management: The Process of Theory Development*, 128-150. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199276813.003.0007>
- Jaskiewicz, P., Combs, J. G., & Rau, S. B. (2015). Entrepreneurial legacy: Toward a theory of how some family firms nurture transgenerational entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 30(1), 29-49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2014.07.001>
- Joshi, A., Dencker, J. C., Franz, G., & Martocchio, J. J. (2010). Unpacking generational identities in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(3), 392-414.
- Köhr, C. K., Corsi, A. M., Capitello, R., & Malorgio, G. (2021). Decoding the chain of effects of family firm image on consumer behaviour. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 20(5), 1228-1242.
- Mannheim, K. (1952). *The problem of generations. Essays on the sociology of knowledge* (pp. 276-322). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Mannheim, K. (1970). The problem of generations. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 57(3), 378-404.
- Magrelli, V., Rovelli, P., Benedetti, C., Überbacher, R., & De Massis, A. (2022). Generations in

- family business: A multifield review and future research agenda. *Family Business Review*, 35(1), 15-44.
- McLarty, B. D., Medina-Craven, M. N., Bracamonte, M., Ellen III, B. P., & Liguori, E. (2025). Personality and succession: A call for future inquiry. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 1-22.
- McLarty, B. D., Vardaman, J. M., & Barnett, T. (2019). Congruence in exchange: The influence of supervisors on employee performance in family firms. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 43(2), 302-321.
- Minichilli, A., Corbetta, G., & MacMillan, I. C. (2010). Top management teams in family-controlled companies: 'familiness', 'faultlines', and their impact on financial performance. *Journal of Management studies*, 47(2), 205-222.
- Muth, J. F. (1961). Rational expectations and the theory of price movements. *Econometrica*, 29(3), 315-335. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1909635>
- Picone P. M., De Massis A., Tang Y., & Piccolo R. F. (2021). The psychological foundations of management in family firms: Values, biases, and heuristics. *Family Business Review*, 34(1), 12-32.
- Pollock, T. G., Lashley, K., Rindova, V. P., & Han, J.-H. (2019). Which of These Things Are Not Like the Others? Comparing the Rational, Emotional, and Moral Aspects of Reputation, Status, Celebrity, and Stigma. *Academy of Management Annals* 13(2).
- Radu-Lefebvre, M., Davis, J. H., & Gartner, W. B. (2024). Legacy in family business: A systematic literature review and future research agenda. *Family Business Review*, 37(1), 18-59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08944865231224506>
- Radu-Lefebvre M., Davis J.H., De Massis A., Gartner G.B., Jack S., & Markman G. (2025). Legacy management in theory and practice. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, in press.
- Reulecke, J. (2008). Generation/generationality, generativity, and memory. In A. Erll & A. Nünning (Eds.), *Cultural memory studies: An international and interdisciplinary handbook* (pp. 119-124). Walter de Gruyter GmbH.
- Rovelli P., Benedetti C., Fronzetti Colladon A., & De Massis A. (2022a). As long as you talk about me: The importance of family firm brands and the contingent role of family-firm identity. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 692-700.
- Rovelli P., Ferasso M., De Massis A., & Kraus S. (2022b). Thirty years of research in family business journals: Status quo and future directions. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 13(3), 100422.
- Short, J. C., Broberg, J. C., Coglisier, C. C., & Brigham, K. H. (2010). Construct validation

- using computer-aided text analysis (CATA) an illustration using entrepreneurial orientation. *Organizational Research Methods*, 13(2), 320-347.
- Soleimanof, S., Singh, K., & Holt, D. T. (2019). Micro-foundations of corporate entrepreneurship in family firms: An institution-based perspective. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 43(2), 274-281.
- Su, S., Zhu, F., Zhou, H., & Zhu, Z. (2025). Family Firm Heterogeneity and Innovation: The Role of Firm Origin and Family Involvement, *Journal of Small Business Management*, 1-40.
- Swab, R. G., Sherlock, C., Markin, E., & Dibrell, C. (2020). “SEW” what do we know and where do we go? A review of socioemotional wealth and a way forward. *Family Business Review*, 33(4), 424-445. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486520961938>
- Thornton, P. H. (2012). *The institutional logics perspective : A new approach to culture, structure.* Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Thornton, P. H., & Ocasio, W. (1999). Institutional logics and the historical contingency of power in organizations: executive succession in the higher education publishing industry, 1958–1990. *The American journal of sociology*, 105(3), 801-843.
- Vardaman, J. M., Allen, D. G., & Rogers, B. L. (2018). We are friends but are we family? Organizational identification and nonfamily employee turnover. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 42(2), 290-309.
- Vardaman, J. M., McLarty, B. D., & Carter, M. Z. (2025). All is well until it isn't: Socioemotional wealth congruence and employee behavior in family firms. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 49(2), 435-460.
- Vardaman, J. M., McLarty, B. D., Memili, E., Kotlar, J., & Liguori, E. (2024). The power of people in family firms. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 1-14.
- Wang, J. C., Yi, J., Zhang, X., & Peng, M. W. (2022). Pyramidal ownership and SOE innovation. *Journal of Management Studies*, 59(7), 1839-1868.
- Williams, G. (2020). Management millennialism: Designing the new generation of employee. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(3), 371–387.
- Yates, V. A., Vardaman, J. M., & Chrisman, J. J. (2023). Social network research in the family business literature: A review and integration. *Small Business Economics*, 60(4), 1323-1345.
- Yilmaz, Y., Raetze, S., Groote, J. de, & Kammerlander, N. (2024). Resilience in Family Businesses: A Systematic Literature Review. *Family Business Review*, 37(1), 60-88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08944865231223372>

Zanon, J., Scholl-Grissemann, U., Kallmuenzer, A., Kleinhansl, N., & Peters, M. (2019). How promoting a family firm image affects customer perception in the age of social media. *Journal of Family Business Strategy*, 10(1), 28-37.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfbs.2019.01.007>

Zhang, Y., Arteaga-Fonseca, J., Rutherford, M. W., & Edwards, B. D. (2025). More is not always better: a psychological reactance perspective on legacy stories. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 1-35.