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# Guest editorial: From family entrepreneurship to family entrepreneuring

For several decades, entrepreneurship and family business scholarship developed as separate knowledge domains (Holt *et al.*, 2018; Zahra and Sharma, 2004). Rather recently, the family entrepreneurship field emerged at the intersection of family science, entrepreneurship and family business (Neubaum, 2018; Payne, 2018; Short *et al.*, 2016) and gained increasing traction and legitimacy in both the scholarly and practitioner worlds. However, while there has been increasing interest in combining these distinct academic arenas to investigate entrepreneurial behaviors, identities and projects in the context of business families and family firms (e.g. Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Anderson *et al.*, 2005), the *early stages* of creation and emergence of business families and family firms are still underdeveloped areas of inquiry (Alsos *et al.*, 2014).

Moreover, much of the current conceptualization of the constructs of family and entrepreneurship relies on a positivist agenda taking them for granted and either essentializing them as nouns or reifying their existence as stable, discrete realities, separated from those who produce them through their daily, ongoing, collective practices of “doing family” and “doing entrepreneurship.” Although we do acknowledge the benefits of positivistic accounts of family entrepreneurship as they enable scholars to assess characteristics and compare performance based on clear-cut indicators, we are also cognizant of the risk of essentializing and reifying the social objects we’re studying and, in so doing, obscuring and silencing the intersubjective construction of reality in a family business context.

This special issue invites a different exploration of the domain of family entrepreneurship to reveal how business families and family firms engage with entrepreneuring as an active doing. Following Steyaert (2007), we frame entrepreneuring as a process of becoming, always in the making, uncertain and unpredictable for individuals, families and firms. Theoretically and methodologically, the papers in this special issue embrace process and practice approaches as a promising avenue to investigate and conceptualize (1) the *emergence and becoming* of family businesses; (2) draw attention to the *actualizing* of entrepreneurial behaviors, identities and projects in already existing family businesses to maintain into existence the business as a family firm and (3) make it possible to understand the processes and the practices through which family members, couples and families *do* entrepreneurship while also doing family.

## Becoming a business family and a family firm

Entrepreneuring is a processual, material and relational phenomenon (Champenois *et al.*, 2019; Helin, 2011; Helin and Jabri, 2015; Hjorth, 2014; Hjorth and Reay, 2018), leading to the creation of new organizations (Gartner, 1993; Johannisson, 2011) and activities in multigenerational family firms (Girma Aragaw *et al.*, 2024; Minola *et al.*, 2021).

What can a family entrepreneuring perspective bring to our understanding of the beginnings in family firms? This perspective might, for instance, help us deconstruct the monolithic conceptualization of business families as a “thing” that preexists the family firm. A look at the underlying mechanisms of creating family firms could reveal the multi-level processes, leading to the parallel and interconnected emergence of the business family and the family firm as co-constructed and intertwined realities. In this perspective, “familiness” might be approached as a doing that does not always preexist entrepreneurial practices but emerges through entrepreneuring (Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2022). In this special issue, 23 scholars collectively explore and theorize family entrepreneuring from varying



disciplinary lenses in the article “A multi-voiced account of family entrepreneuring research: expanding the agenda of family entrepreneurship” (Al-Dajani et al., 2024). This article offers a compilation of perspectives highlighting theoretical and methodological issues such as agency, processualism and context, helping advance research on family entrepreneuring. Developed as an open dialog among 23 entrepreneurship and family business scholars, this vibrant article orchestrates an inspiring collective reflection about future research on family entrepreneuring, suggesting a wide range of stimulating ideas and insights.

Embracing a family entrepreneuring perspective might enable the exploration of everyday conversations, meetings and encounters to reveal the doings that make up familiness in the unfolding of organization creation. Familiness arises from family practices, constantly tested, introduced, arranged and repeated during interactions among family members and others. These practices may be reversed, replaced or challenged in the family sphere and beyond. As illustrated in this special issue, in the article “*Entrepreneuring and family firms cofounders’ familiness at work through rhetoric appeals*” by Anderson et al. (2024), familiness practices can be approached through a rhetorical lens. In this study of Romanian IT entrepreneurs, the authors show how varying appeals to ethos, logos and pathos legitimize the family business by helping cofounders leverage unique family strengths and resources while engaging with entrepreneuring.

In this perspective, business families and family firms are seen as arising not only through constitutive practices but also as an ephemeral product of processes and practices because familiness might be, at times, diminished or even absent in the daily life of the family and the organization. Moreover, at times, organizational practices might go against business family practices. We can’t exclude the possibility that an organization might develop organizational practices that go against family values and characteristics. Periods of succession or external transfer might trigger such disconnections and invite a reinvention of the business family and the family firm.

Moreover, a family entrepreneuring perspective might also help investigate the emergence of a family business as a hybrid organization at the intersection of family and business-related logics. This perspective could reveal the initial tensions and paradoxes, which may be the driving force behind entrepreneurial action in family businesses. We know that it is methodologically challenging to separate the dancer from the dance (Gartner, 2016) and to isolate the “doing of the family” from the “doing of the business.” The point is not to untangle this spaghetti but to approach the emergence of a business family and of a family firm within a pluralistic context in which family practices, places of family presence or absence and entrepreneurial practices that emerge within and outside the family are all intertwined. A processual and practice perspective might help identify the temporary and local flows that may or may not bring about organization creation. By highlighting the arrangement of complex sub-processes in the family-entrepreneurial process, such studies might be able to point out the complexity of what makes up family entrepreneuring. In this special issue, the conceptual article “*Process tracing: a methodological proposal for a practice approach to family entrepreneurship*” (Ruzzene et al., 2024) offers an insightful, novel research methodology to investigate family entrepreneuring through a practice lens, namely process tracing, which can help scholars to infer social mechanisms from empirical data by connecting praxis, practices and practitioners.

It is certainly a challenge to identify when the family happens to the business. A practice-based perspective invites us to look at the traces of materiality in which familiness is lodged during the creation of a business. Creating a family organization means making and unmaking relationships conveyed by the objects, words, symbols and artifacts that make up the family dynamic. Words, objects and traces of materiality talk for and through the family. By solely focusing on the actors of entrepreneurship, we might overlook that the agentivity of familiness is dispersed in the materiality of organizing. Family happens indirectly to the business creation: the organization is created through acts of family ventriloquism, and the family is, in

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turn, “ventriloquized” by the business venture and ventriloquism objects (Cooren, 2010; Nathues *et al.*, 2021). The business is a co-constructed social object. A family talks and acts, and organizations emerge and become communicative and relational objects generated in the entrepreneurial process that unfolds over time (Ge *et al.*, 2024). A family entrepreneuring perspective may thus facilitate an in-depth understanding of the communicative constitution of business families and family firms.

### **Maintaining the business family and the family firm**

A family entrepreneuring perspective might also help better understand how family businesses are maintained or lost due to processes and practices. A business family and a family business do not exist apart from their practices (McAdam *et al.*, 2024). A processual ontology of familiness invites an exploration of how families and businesses are brought into life and maintained into existence through everyday actions and interactions. By studying practices, we could explore how familiness is socialized and organized beyond the family circle, enabling and constraining entrepreneurial practices such as intrapreneuring to understand how and why entrepreneurial behavior can sustain or jeopardize family firm longevity (Aldrich *et al.*, 2023).

Longevity is a central issue in family business research, approached from different angles. Most studies focus on families as proactive agents engaged in a dynamic of exploration and exploitation (Gouédard *et al.*, 2023) or the organizational arrangements that leverage dynamic capabilities and competitive advantage by maintaining them through effective strategic management strategies (Pecis *et al.*, 2024). A family entrepreneuring perspective might bring temporal dynamics into play and help reveal the multi-level processes and practices involved in family and business change over time. A practice approach can help articulate multi-level practices and multiple agencies in understanding business families and family firms. A practice approach might help us see that strategies are enacted to maintain their existence as an ongoing, fragile and unfinished process involving continuity and change. Practices are social, familial, gendered, entrepreneurial and organizational. Moreover, practices are inherently historical, leveraging upon the memory of the family and the business. Studying transitional moments or dramatic events can help grasp the complex unfolding of family entrepreneuring at specific points in time. In this special issue, the article “*L’instant Taittinger: a champagne family house in its chronotype*” (Riot *et al.*, 2024) reveals how the Taittinger family strived to redefine the business as a family before and after its sale and buyback. By taking a processual, longitudinal approach, the authors use the construct of chronotype to make sense of the fictional dimension of most narrated events and show the emergence of shared stories around family entrepreneuring at the intersection of family relations. The business family is revealed here as being involved in a collective sense-making practice to maintain the business as a family business.

Maintaining or regenerating family identity might also be an avenue that deserves further exploration. Identity work concerns family entrepreneurs (Sentuti and Cesaroni, 2024) and businesses aiming to maintain their legitimacy over time (Kavas *et al.*, 2024). At the level of the family firm, organizational identity work might consist of continuously maintaining, modifying, repairing or changing the intertwined identities of the family and the business that considers legitimacy and reputational expectations regarding what is seen as a desirable family business in its specific context. At the level of the business family, identity work might refer to the challenging interplay of family and business lives. Understanding the tensions and struggles of identities within business families and family firms through a family entrepreneuring perspective could offer a novel avenue for connecting time, space and multiple stakeholders while studying the lives of individuals, couples, families and organizations not as a set of discrete, isolated doings but as a co-occurrence of intertwined doings, where each life is affected and affects other lives in a socio-material setting embedded in a larger historical arena.

### Doing and undoing business families and family businesses

The field of family entrepreneurship struggles to shake off a rather conservative understanding of what a family is, seen through Western eyes as a mono-nuclear family structured following a patriarchal subtext (Randerson *et al.*, 2021). It is also difficult to avoid a moralistic approach to family firms, focusing on their comparative advantages over non-family firms. The prosaic study of practices might help us challenge assumptions taken for granted and simply observe the practices that make and unmake the family and the business in various contexts. Practice-based approaches may be an invitation to suggest other ways to problematize families in business. Specifically, interweaving a process and practice-based approach with socio-constructivist or post-structuralist contextual perspectives might support unveiling a wide range of family configurations and practices in organization creation and maintenance.

Indeed, recent studies of different family forms (e.g. monoparental families, LGBTQ + families, racialized families, etc.) are exploring their enactment of entrepreneuring with a fresh eye. The study of practices in non-mainstream business families and family firms, such as those enacted by immigrants (Chavan *et al.*, 2023; Vershinina *et al.*, 2019) or ethnic minorities (Haq *et al.*, 2023; Moro *et al.*, 2023) can highlight mechanisms of power and symbolic violence in relation to dominant social norms and values and also reveal tactics of resistance and empowerment, enabling business families to enact alternative ways of entrepreneuring. Investigating the social and cultural construction of business families at the margins can shed light on how familiness emerges and is maintained outside of a dominant narrative of what makes a family and a family firm in various cultural settings.

A practice and process perspective might also enable a closer look at the multiple cultural, social and economic contexts in which family entrepreneuring happens. To do so, we should avoid perpetuating an essentialist lens when studying family entrepreneuring in countries and regions such as those belonging to the Global South because essentialization obscures the diversity of family entrepreneuring and constructs homogeneity where variety is the rule (Welter *et al.*, 2017). To reveal family entrepreneuring as embodied practice embedded in context, we might leverage an understanding of context as socially constructed and not only as a cultural space in which families and entrepreneurs must adapt. Contexts translate into social practices in the interplay of “doing entrepreneurship” and “doing family” (Baker and Welter, 2019). Through their entrepreneurial practices, families enact, produce and undo the contexts that constrain and enable the unfolding of entrepreneurial projects. In this special issue, the article “*Women, polygamy and family entrepreneuring in Southwest Benin: the role of endogenous knowledge*” (Dagoudo *et al.*, 2024) insightfully illustrates this perspective by challenging the monolithic understanding of family firms and patriarchy in the Global South. The authors reveal the complex socio-cultural context of the “Adja” community in Benin and show how women in polygamous families become the center of family entrepreneuring efforts and activities. This study goes against the traditional view of men as breadwinners and of women as victims of patriarchy in such family structures.

A family entrepreneuring perspective may disclose critical issues in making family businesses. Supposed moral concerns are to be denaturalized, and we should stop assuming that moral values are a natural characteristic of family firms. In that case, we need to examine the everyday, embedded practices of business families and family businesses to understand how ethical and unethical behaviors emerge. We are institutionalized in the flow of collective action. This perspective might help address ethical concerns as a range of tests that entrepreneurs and others experience in concrete situations in the family firm. Such studies would no longer position the family business in terms of an ideology for or against the virtues of family capitalism. Rather, a family entrepreneuring approach could reveal (un)ethical practice in business families and family businesses as a collective doing accomplished in the ongoing flow of actions and interactions. This approach might call attention to the role of individual and collective responsibilities, thereby acknowledging the importance of

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freedom and choice at every moment throughout the life of individuals, families and organizations.

### How best to summarize this special issue on family entrepreneuring?

If things seem simple, if your actors seem single-minded, you're not paying attention. (Weick, 2007, p. 17).

All the articles in this special issue convey what Weick (2007) would describe as "richness," that is, an appreciation that the study of family entrepreneuring is complex, multi-dimensional, contextual, temporal and [ . . . ] (add the variety of perspectives that the authors in this special issue offer). Merely by changing the vocabulary of what we pay attention to from the noun "family entrepreneurship" to the verb "family entrepreneuring," we open ourselves up to a wider variety of questions, theories, perspectives and methodologies that can offer insights into the how and why families (in their different configurations and contexts) act entrepreneurially (or not).

It is an argument for detail, for thoroughness, for prototypical narratives, and an argument against formulations that strip out most of what matters. It is an argument that the power of richness lies in the fact that it feeds on itself in ways that enlarge our understanding of the human condition. (Weick, 2007, p. 18)

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