

The case study in family business: current perspectives and suggestions for the future

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THE CASE STUDY IN FAMILY BUSINESS: CURRENT APPROACHES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Leppäaho, T., Plakoyiannaki, E., Kampouri, K. and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, E. (2020)

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ABSTRACT

Despite the potential of qualitative case research (QCR) to embrace novel research questions and practices, it is frequently reduced to a single methodological template, namely that of qualitative positivism. We review and analyse case study practices in family business (FB), drawing insights from 88 articles published across various academic outlets. Our results indicate the impact of the positivistic template as the most commonly used one with 75 articles, but, interestingly, identify alternatives captured by interpretivist and critical realist approaches. We conclude with discussion by problematising the use of templates in FB case research. We contribute in four ways: First, we discuss, deconstruct and codify case study practices drawing on exemplars from FB literature. Second, we discuss common practices among the scholars of the qualitative positivist template and explain its potential for FB scholarship. Third, we discuss and outline the potential of alternative case study perspectives of interpretivism and critical realism. Fourth, we discuss the potential of multimethod and pluralist approaches for enriching all the case study approaches currently used.

Keywords: templates, qualitative positivism, interpretivism, critical realism, family business

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative case studies have been used in family business (FB) research since the emergence of the field and the method still offers a great deal of potential to enrich the field, in relation to FB-specific processes in particular (Leppäaho et al., 2016). The widespread adoption of case studies in FB scholarship can be attributed to the complexity of FB, the dynamism and embeddedness of family ties and the invisibility and tacit nature of FB phenomena, which allow for naturalistic inquiry and appreciation of the uniqueness of each FB and its context (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Nordqvist et al., 2009). De Massis and Foss (2018, p. 1) underline that *'many of the mechanisms driving family business phenomena involve the micro-level of*

analysis, and family business researchers have yet to fully embrace this level of analysis in order to build more sophisticated and more robust theory'. Qualitative research might be especially informative, as FB scholars are advised not to stay too close to FB theories alone, but to discuss them in concert with other disciplines. Neubaum (2018, p. 261) states that *'the most interesting work in family business may only be found when a researcher begins his or her exploration from a different view, perspective, or paradigm'*.

Qualitative case studies are based on a range of different epistemological and ontological assumptions which have important implications for the way in which data are interpreted, the theoretical products generated by the analysis, and what kind of language is used in the manuscript (see, for example, Langley & Abdallah, 2011). Based on the above, qualitative case study research and its practice are the focus of enquiry in this chapter. As the field of FB is expanding, one must take stock of and reflect on its methodological approaches and advances, as well as consider the directions to pursue in the future, to investigate phenomena of interest (Sharma, 2004). In order to keep pace with this growing demand for enhancing the merits of qualitative case study research, it is important to provide an understanding of current practices and illuminate the versatility of this methodological approach. Inspired by Langley and Abdallah (2011), we look for and problematise templates typical of FB case studies, posing the question: *How are different case study approaches used in qualitative FB research?* On the basis of 88 case studies on family business published between 2000 and 2017, we discovered that qualitative positivism (see Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2018) is the most commonly used approach, with 75 articles. In addition, two other approaches emerged. The interpretative approach (see, for example, Corley & Gioia, 2004; Dyer & Wilkins, 1991; Stake, 1995; Burawoy, 1998) was represented by 12 studies and the critical realist approach (see Bhaskar, 1998; Sayer, 1992; Easton, 2010) by one study. In our view, FB is an eclectic field which embraces different

theoretical approaches and levels of analysis, yet this diversity is yet to be reflected in its methodological choices. Therefore, we conclude with discussion on the opportunities of (i) multimethod and pluralist approaches to enrich all the case study approaches currently used; and (ii) a more extensive application of interpretivist and critical realist case studies to deepen the understanding of family business discipline, as well as scientific pluralism in relation to these two approaches.

The contributions of this study are fourfold. First, we discuss, deconstruct and codify case study practices drawing on exemplars from FB literature. Such discussions are useful and relevant for FB scholars who wish to enhance their methodological practices for gaining a richer understanding of FB phenomena. Second, we outline common practices inspired by the qualitative positivist template and explain its potential for FB scholarship. Third, we suggest the alternative perspectives of interpretivism and critical realism, outline their key elements and explain how they can inform the field by achieving deeper and more comprehensive theorising of the specific features of FB. The interpretive and critical realist designs would permit greater sensitivity to individual voices (e.g., those of family owners) and their contexts (e.g., FB organisational idiosyncrasies) within the FB literature (see also Dawson & Hjorth, 2012; Leppäaho et al., 2016; Nordqvist et al., 2009). Fourth, we discuss multimethod and pluralist approaches to enrich all the case study approaches currently used.

This chapter is organised as follows: we first discuss three alternative templates of the case study method which have evolved in other fields: qualitative positivist, interpretivist and critical realist templates. This is followed by a description of our analytical approach. Thereafter, we present our findings. In a concluding section, we discuss the potential of alternative approaches to family business case studies.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Qualitative Positivist Template

The most prominent methodology authors within the group of qualitative positivists are Eisenhardt (1989), Yin (2018) and Bonoma (1985) (see also Table 1). Kathleen Eisenhardt's (1989) article, 'Building Theories from Case Study Research', is now a classic methodological reference both within the field of management and beyond, with almost 50 000 citations on Google Scholar at the end of 2018 (for Eisenhardt's impact, see also Ravenswood, 2011). The methodological treatments by Eisenhardt and Yin are prescriptive in nature, advocating particular approaches to design, data collection and analysis. Eisenhardt focusses on case research for the purposes of theory building in management research, whereas Yin is more concerned with practical applications for policymaking and consulting. The emphasis in Eisenhardt's (1989) thinking is on the potential of case studies to induce new theory from empirical data and to generate theoretical propositions upon which large-scale quantitative testing can be based. Hence, case studies can lead to inductive theories which form 'bridges from rich evidence to mainstream deductive research' (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25). Eisenhardt's approach to case research is oriented towards regularities (manifested in her preference for multiple case studies) rather than the reasons behind them (Welch et al., 2011). She does not regard generalisation¹ as a problem; indeed, she welcomes it, on the grounds of believing that observations closely mirror reality and hence form a robust basis for theory, and thus the function of observation is to confirm or disprove the generalisations involved in a previous theory.

Yin also demonstrates positivistic leanings in his perspective on case study. His view is related to the deductive logic of testing propositions, revising existing theories and establishing causal relationships. Yin (2018) divides cases into three categories according to

¹ Generalization differentiates Eisenhardt's approach from qualitative traditions that avoid generalizability and universal claims in favor of "rich, complex description" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 547).

their theoretical purposes. Thus, there are (i) descriptive case studies which illustrate interventions in processes, (ii) exploratory case studies which investigate situations in which there is no single outcome, and (iii) explanatory case studies which explain causal relationships. Yin (2018) endorses the use of both single and multiple case study design and views cases as vehicles not only for theory discovery but also for theory verification. Yin (2018) sees the possible contribution of case studies very differently from Eisenhardt (1989). According to Yin, case studies share many features with laboratory experiments. This being so, features such as replication logic, pattern matching and time series analysis are important in conducting case studies.

Authors subscribing to qualitative positivism (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989) adhere to clear guidelines, aimed at ensuring that case studies are written up in a deductive manner and that propositions are arrived at with generalisable implications. As authors, those following Eisenhardt (1989) would tend to refer to themselves in the third person as a marker of their commitment to objectivity. According to Pratt (2009), the dangers in qualitative positivist case studies are related to the rhetorical tactic of making qualitative data seem quantitative and to the likelihood of mixing inductive and deductive strategies. Dubois and Gadde (2002) regard case study papers within this school of thought as deductive in their approach, tending to impose a priori concepts and to disregard the processes of iteration and abduction which are fruitful for theorising in case study research.

In relation to quality criteria, qualitative positivists tend to import the criteria of positivistic research in evaluating the merits of case studies. Positivism still dominates science, and it is unsurprising that the evaluation criteria relevant to positivism have gained the status of common-sense benchmarks (Johnson et al., 2006). Positivists have tried to ensure adequate rigour by deploying the traditional concepts of validity and reliability. Qualitative positivists rely upon an array of qualitative methods to develop inductively thick descriptions of the

patterns (Prasad & Prasad, 2002). As indicated above, they often use the third-person perspective to separate themselves from the descriptions provided (Schwandt, 1996). Guba & Lincoln (1994) developed a number of distinct criteria to be applied in qualitative positivist case studies. Their general principles replace the traditional positivist criteria (applied to quantitative studies) as follows: *credibility* (denoting the authenticity of representations) replaces internal validity; *transferability* (denoting the scope of application) replaces external validity; *dependability* (denoting the minimisation of researcher idiosyncrasies) replaces reliability; and *confirmability* (involving the researcher’s self-criticism) replaces objectivity. Altogether, under this orientation, it is central to demonstrate how concepts were derived and applied and to show how alternative explanations have been considered but rejected (Adler & Adler, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In working on data, the researcher aims at achieving a relatively high level of accuracy and consensus by means of revisiting facts, feelings, experiences and values or beliefs bound up with the collection and interpretation of the data (Cho & Trent, 2006). It is seen as important that authors use member checks, rich archives and causality-based triangulation in their case study praxis (Cho & Trent, 2006). As exemplary qualitative positivist studies from our review, see, for example, Cater et al. (2016), Miller et al. (2003) and Zellweger and Sieger (2012).

	Qualitative Positivism	Interpretivism	Critical Realism
Key methodological Authorities	Eisenhardt (1989); Yin (2018)	Corley & Gioia (2004); Dyer & Wilkins (1991); Stake (1995); Burawoy (1998)	Bhaskar (1998); Sayer (1992); Easton (2010)
Epistemological foundations and purposes	Qualitative positivist assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Purpose: to develop theory in the form of testable propositions – Search for facts (e.g., emphasis on courtroom-style interviewing) – Product: nomothetic theory 	Interpretivist assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Purpose: capturing and modelling of informant meanings – Search for informants’ understandings of organisational events. – Product: process model/novel concept 	Critical realist assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purpose: to identify causal mechanisms, emphasising the explanatory power of case studies - Search for explanations - Product: model with causal mechanisms

<p>Sampling Logic</p>	<p>Eisenhardt: Multiple cases (4–10) chosen based on theoretical or literal replication</p> <p>Yin: Open to both single and multiple case design. A single-case study is analogous to a single experiment or represents a <i>critical case</i> which tests a well formulated theory. Cases can be descriptive, explanatory or exploratory.</p>	<p>Single Cases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stake: Intrinsic (a specific case is of particular interest), instrumental (a case is a medium for understanding phenomena outside the case), and collective case (the use of several cases to study a topic). - Burawoy: In the constructivist/interpretive tradition, case studies should be rich, single-site investigations in order to produce novel findings; researchers cannot be detached from research settings. 	<p>Open to both single and multiple case study designs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of cases depends on the richness of explanations the case/cases can offer.
<p>Logic of the method</p>	<p>Design to maximise credible novelty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Interview data with diverse informants – Identify elements which distinguish high- and low-performing cases building on cross-case comparison 	<p>Design for revelation, richness and trustworthiness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Single case chosen for its revelatory potential and richness of data – Real-time interviews and observation – Build ‘data structure’ by progressive abstraction starting with informant first-order codes and building to second-order themes and aggregate dimensions 	<p>Design combining causal (matching the positivist view) and interpretive approaches (matching the constructivist/interpretive view)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single or multiple cases
<p>Rhetoric of the Writing</p>	<p>Establishing novelty: Contrasting findings with previous research;</p> <p>Providing evidence: Data presentation in two steps: (a) data tables; (b) narrative examples of high and low cases.</p> <p>Offering explanation: Ask ‘why’ for every proposition. Reasons offered building on data and literature;</p> <p>Integrating contribution: Link separate propositions together to build theory</p>	<p>Establishing the gap: Show how this study fills a major gap</p> <p>Distilling the essence: Present the data structure emphasising second-order themes and overarching dimensions</p> <p>Elaborating the story: Elaborate the model in two ways: (a) present the narrative; (b) additional quotes in tables</p> <p>Reaffirm contribution: Return to opening gap to show novel insight.</p>	<p>Establishing explanations: Presenting mechanisms and procedures, creating explanations</p> <p>Use of <i>retroduction</i>, defined by Sayer (1992, p. 107) as a ‘mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating (and identifying) mechanisms which are capable of producing them’.</p>
<p>Quality criteria</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Validity and reliability from multiple researchers, triangulation of data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Trustworthiness from insider/outsider roles, member checks, triangulation 	<p>Criteria for (i) ontological appropriateness, (ii) contingent validity, (iii)</p>

			multiple perceptions, (iv) methodological trustworthiness, (v) analytic generalisation, and (vi) construct validity
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Table 1. Different Case Study Approaches; Source: The Authors.

The Interpretivist Template

The purpose of interpretive scholarship is to delve into complex social, economic and political phenomena and seek shared interpretation, meaning and understanding (*verstehen*) of these phenomena among participants (Nordqvist et al., 2009). Epistemologically, individuals are active knowledgeable actors who (re)produce their realities. Corley and Gioia (2004), Dyer and Wilkins (1991) and Burawoy (1998) are strong authorities of the interpretivist approach. From a methodological perspective, Stake (1995) represents the *constructivist/interpretive* side of case study research. This alternative case study approach seeks to develop an understanding of the case by appreciating the uniqueness, intrinsic value and complexity of the case and its embeddedness and interaction with contexts (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995, p. 38) insists on ‘the difference between case studies seeking to identify cause and effect relationships and those seeking to understand the human experience’. In contrast to researchers aiming to ‘nullify the context’ and to ‘eliminate the merely situational’, researchers in the interpretative tradition embrace context, narratives and personal engagement on the part of the researcher (Stake, 2005, p. 449). According to Stake (1995), particularisation² is the aim of case studies rather than generalisation.

Scholars adhering to interpretivism tend to write highly personal accounts. The concept of exploration can be reinterpreted as a means of gaining in-depth understanding of local, emic

² Particularization is related to the understanding of the actor’s subjective experiences and the uniqueness of the case in its entirety.

meanings and remaining open to alternative perspectives. Objectivity is not a quest either in the research process or in their representations of the field; interpretivists do assume that other researchers would end up with similar findings. They make no apology for their personal involvement in the field, or for the role of the researcher as a research instrument in the data collection and analysis. These researchers are likely to use the case study to understand what is going on in a socially constructed world, without using a single template in reporting evidence (Stake, 1995). For instance, the theory and the findings can be presented in the same section of the article, thus challenging the traditional *theoretical background – methodology – findings* format of academic papers.

Concerning quality criteria, interpretivists tend to be sceptical about objectivity as a quality criterion. As they see it, what we take to be reality is an output of human cognitive processes (Johnson et al., 2006). Interpretivists may well regard the evaluation criteria themselves as unstable, being socially constructed. Overall, objectivity is not viewed by them as a valid criterion. Their evaluation criteria are set up in terms of heteroglossia, meaning that they give voice to previously silenced textual domains and articulate the incommensurable plurality of discourses, narratives and so on, all of which de-centre the author through multivocality (Johnson et al., 2006). According to Cho and Trent (2006), the authors in this school of thought use progressive induction in their truth-seeking; such a process involves holistic and prolonged engagement for the purposes of providing thick description, with a categorical back-and-forth technique which seeks to capture the developmental issues of the organisation in question. Trustworthiness and credibility depend on transparency in the research process, writing up and presenting empirical evidence; in other words, researchers must demonstrate their understanding of the final results as well as how these results were reached (Nordqvist et al., 2009). In the dataset we analysed (e.g., Strike and Rerup ([2016]), Watson (2009) and Hamilton (2006) used an interpretative perspective of case studies.

The Critical Realist Perspective

The *critical realist* paradigm is an emerging entity in case study research. Due to its infancy and limited application so far, we label it as a perspective instead of a template. Bhaskar (1998) regards the explanation of social phenomena as being both causal (matching the positivist view) and interpretive (matching the constructivist/interpretive view). Hence, Bhaskar (1998) emphasises the importance of both understanding (*verstehen*) and explanation (*erklären*) in the conduct of research. Critical realist case studies do indeed seek to identify causal mechanisms and explain causality. However, the causal explanations do not function on a general level, focussing rather on deep descriptions, unlike the explanatory case studies conducted by Yin (2018). Enquiries into causes (as opposed to regularities), typified by questions such as ‘What produces a certain change?’, are thought to require an ‘intensive’ research strategy, typically involving a qualitative, in-depth study of ‘individual agents in their causal contexts’ (Sayer, 1992, p. 243). Hence, the identification of causation does not primarily involve a search for event regularities. Scholars ‘need to go beyond the events to understand the nature of objects, and cause-effect relationships do not consistently produce regularities in an open system’ (Welch et al., 2011, p. 17). This kind of research process thus involves a subjective search for causes, with the outcome of the study being explanation in the form of causal mechanisms (Welch et al., 2011). Generalisations may indeed emerge, but these generalisations are contingent and limited, formed via the specification of causal mechanisms and the contextual conditions under which they operate.

Critical realists use the cases they present for theory building, but also for theory testing, in the course of highlighting the explanatory potential of cases. They also implicitly endorse a dynamic view, through revealing their research processes, the events embedded therein and the relationships between them. According to Easton (2010), critical realists consciously use causal language to present mechanisms and procedures in their writing up of events, creating

explanations as they do so. Critical realist accounts employ *retroduction*, defined by Sayer (1992, p. 107) as a ‘mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating (and identifying) mechanisms which are capable of producing them’. Thus, *retroduction* is thought to be not only appropriate for the research process but also a desirable way to report research evidence. It facilitates case researchers in moving from a conception of some phenomenon of interest to a conception of a different kind of thing (power, mechanism) which could have generated the given phenomenon.

In relation to quality criteria, a realist view assumes that social reality has an independent existence prior to human cognition (Sayer, 1992). Healy and Perry (2000) have identified the following criteria as relevant to the quality of a critical realist case study: (i) ontological appropriateness, (ii) contingent validity, (iii) multiple perceptions, (iv) methodological trustworthiness, (v) analytic generalisation, and (vi) construct validity. They give detailed instructions on how each of these dimensions can be assessed. In aiming at (i) ontological appropriateness, it is important that the research problem should be related to complex social science phenomena involving what Healy and Perry (2000) call ‘reflective people’, reflective in the sense that they think about past events critically and discuss them with the researcher and other people in the firm. In practice, ontological appropriateness can be assessed according to whether there is a good match between the research problem and the research questions. As regards (ii) contingent validity, it is held that the researcher should not isolate direct cause-and-effect-paths, but rather name and describe generative mechanisms operating in the real world. Scholars ought to ask informants in-depth questions, and the emphasis in the data collection should be on ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Healy & Perry, 2000). Furthermore, the contexts of the cases need to be described as fully as possible.

In relation to (iii) multiple perceptions, it is suggested that researchers need to indicate an awareness of their own values in their studies. All this leads to the notion that critical realist

scholars are neither value-laden nor value-free, but that they are value-aware. In addition to the perspectives of the researchers, it is made clear that the voices of multiple informants should be included, and that secondary material should be used for the purposes of triangulation. Healy and Perry (2000) also suggest that the researcher should initially pose broad questions, seeking to avoid an over-narrow focus. In relation to (iv) methodological trustworthiness, a methodologically trustworthy study will include relevant quotations and matrices summarising the data (Healy & Perry, 2000). Full descriptions of procedures (including case selection and interview procedures) are also important in increasing methodological trustworthiness (Healy & Perry, 2000). For Healy and Perry (2000), important features in the appropriateness of (v) analytical generalisations include the identification of research issues prior to data collection and the formulation of an interview protocol. Moreover, Healy and Perry (2000, p. 123) argue as follows: ‘Given the complexity of realism’s world, realism research must be primarily theory-building, rather than the testing of the applicability of a theory to a population, which is the primary concern of positivism’. Finally, with regard to (vi) the construct validity of a critical realist case study, it is suggested that it depends on the ways in which the researcher uses prior theory, the case study database and triangulation. Our dataset provides one critical realist article (see Kontinen and Ojala [2012]).

METHODOLOGY

To investigate case study practice in FB research, we conducted a qualitative content analysis of published peer-reviewed journal articles. We decided to exclude articles published in conference proceedings or in book chapters. Although this procedure may bring with it a risk of publication bias (Kepes et al., 2012), we took the view that increased scientific rigour would be achieved by basing our results on peer-reviewed academic publications.

The review covered case studies published over an 18-year period (2000–2017). The selection of articles followed the systematic analytical procedure described by Kitchenham (2004) and employed by Leppäaho et al. (2016). First, the articles were identified via a systematic search of the leading journals in the fields of FB, management and entrepreneurship. Family Business Review (FBR) is considered the most well recognised academic journal for FB research (Bird et al., 2002); therefore, it was reviewed manually. Prior to the first issue of the FBR journal, a few FB articles appeared in a variety of academic management journals (Bird et al., 2002) and that was the reason we decided to include articles published in top management journals. Moreover, given the fact that entrepreneurship is considered the foundation of FB (Chua et al., 2004), we decided to search for peer-reviewed articles in high quality academic journals from the entrepreneurship field as well. We located the leading management and entrepreneurship journals in terms of i) the scope of each journal (the mission of the journal is to publish original empirical research which contributes to the advancement of the FB, management and entrepreneurship field); and ii) the acceptance rate of the journal (top journals were selected on the basis of the Harzing quality ranking list). The journals identified were *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *Family Business Review*, *International Small Business Journal*, *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Journal of Small Business Management*, *Small Business Economics*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Management Science*, *Organization Science*, and *Strategic Management Journal*. We then conducted a keyword search using the keyword ‘famil*’. This keyword had to occur in the title, within the set of keywords and/or in the abstract sections of the articles.

Having identified these articles, we conducted a manual search to identify all works which reported employment of a case study method. The articles were categorised as case studies if they met the definition of Piekkari et al. (2009). We excluded teaching cases (such

as Kontinen, 2014) since they have a different aim lacking a theoretical orientation. We also excluded seven mixed-method papers as these had primarily a quantitative orientation, with survey as the main research method. Altogether, we identified 88 qualitative case studies for analysis in the present review.

We used qualitative content analysis in analysing the articles (see Hsieh & Shannon, 2005 and Welch et al., 2011). Our coding system was both theory-driven and data-driven in that new insights from the data were imported into our initial coding scheme. In conducting the analysis, we identified the following aspects as critical: the topic of the research, the rationale for conducting a case study, the sampling strategy, data collection and analysis, the sources of evidence, the theoretical purpose, presentation of the findings, and the integration with theory. In contrast to quantitative content analysis, we refined the codes through successive iterations between theory and data (Berelson, 1971) when we noticed that new insights arose as interesting.

FINDINGS

We analysed 88 qualitative case study articles on FB. The categorisation of each article is summarised in Table 2 below. Our findings show that the most common template was the qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template, represented by 75 studies. Hence, it seems that *the de facto disciplinary convention in the family business field is the qualitative positivist case study method introduced by Yin and Eisenhardt*. The interpretive perspective was represented by 12 studies and the critical realist by one.

Authors (Year)	Perspective	The Logic	Writing Style
Andersson, T., Carlsen, J., & Getz, D. (2002)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Nine CSs; interviews; writing a case for each unit studied, grouping answers together according to questions, themes or central issues; emphasis on cross-case comparison	Provides evidence by presenting chronological themes; findings discussed against literature

Bachkaniwala, D., Wright, M., & Ram, M. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Five CS; interviews and observation; emphasis on cross-case comparison	Presents a comparable table; provide narrative quote examples
Bizri, R. M. (2017)	Interpretive perspective	Single CS; interviews, official documents and printed materials; coding and identification of themes	Emphasis on context; coding and thematic categories; presents quotes; identifies distinct factors which could potentially influence new ventures started by refugee-entrepreneurs
Cadieux, L. (2007)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Five CSs; interviews with five predecessors, 12 successors, one other person in each firm (total of 22 interviews)	Provides narrative examples of cases; present themes; findings discussed against literature
Cadieux, L., Lorrain, J., & Hugron, P. (2002)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Four CSs; interviews, notes and secondary data from newspapers, resumes of video cassettes, documents provided by the businesses	Presents themes and discusses findings based on the literature
Calabrò, A., Brogi, M., & Torchia, M. (2016)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Four CSs; interviews with four different CEOs and archival records	Contrasts findings with previous research
Cater J. J., Kidwell, R. E., & Camp, K. M. (2016)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Nineteen CSs; interviews from 48 respondents and documents	Presents data in data tables and via quotes from different cases and categories; develops ten propositions to analytically generalise testable propositions from their findings; ends up with a model of successor team dynamics in FFs with three main stages and several sub-components
Cater, J., & Schwab, A. (2008)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Two CSs; semi-structured interviews with ten respondents and company documents, newspaper and magazine articles, company catalogues, field notes	Provides case descriptions; presents themes; findings discussed based on the literature; develops eight propositions
Cater, J.J., & Justis, R. T. (2009)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Six CSs; ten interviews and observations, field notes, informal conversations, company documents, family information available, newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements, company catalogues, other documents	Presents themes; findings discussed against literature; develops six propositions
Chalus-Sauvannet, M. C., Deschamps, B., & Cisneros, L. (2016)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Six CSs; at least 15 interviews; the authors selected repeated interviews in a few cases and secondary sources (balance sheets, brochures, activity reports, family business histories, company websites, articles in local newspapers, and videos of the successors participating in symposia on the transfer of	Provides data tables and explains why children who initially pursued careers outside the family firm decided to return to the family firm

		family firms) and observations; replication logic	
Chirico, F., & Nordqvist, M. (2010)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Four CSs; interviews, questionnaires, secondary sources (newspaper and magazine articles, internal documents, slide presentations, press releases, websites and balance sheets); emphasis on cross-case comparison	Provides narrative examples of cases; proposes a model of transgenerational value creation in family businesses
Chirico, F. (2008)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Four CSs; eight interviews and secondary data; emphasis on triangulation	Presents quotes in tables; presents themes; discusses findings against theoretical background
Chittoor, R., & Das, R. (2007)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Three CSs; secondary sources	Five propositions developed based on the literature and cases presented as illustrations; cases described at the end of the article
Cole, P. M., & Johnson, K. (2007)	Interpretive Perspective	Nine CSs; 27 interviews and site visits, observations; common categories and themes, integration of categories and their properties	Emphasis on closing the gap; themes and categories; findings discussed against literature; six major themes emerged: trust, compartmentalisation, emotional connection, synergy, commitment to business, and positive gender issues
Cruz, A., Howorth, C., & Hamilton, E. (2013)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Seven CSs; 24 interviews; cross-case comparison	Provides quotes in data tables; develops a conceptual framework of family entrepreneurial team formation and membership
Curimbaba, F. (2002)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	12 CSs; interviews; analysed according to a three-dimensional model	Presents themes and findings discussed based on the three-dimensional model
De Massis, A., Frattini, F., Pizzurno, E., & Cassia, L. (2015)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Ten CSs; at least two interviews with each firm and follow-up and secondary data (reports and project documentation); emphasis on cross-case comparison	Presents data tables; discusses the reasons underlying dissimilarities of product innovation processes of family and non-family firms in light of the peculiarities of family firms' resources, authority structures, incentives, orientations, and behavioural attitudes
De Massis, A., Kotlar, J., Frattini, F., Chrisman, J. J., & Nordqvist, M. (2016)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Six CSs; 49 semi-structured interviews with 43 informants and secondary sources (balance sheets and project reports)	Presents tables; offers explanation through identification of mechanisms underlying family governance in NPD teams design
DeNoble, A., Ehrlich, S., & Singh, G. (2007)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Seven CSs; semi-structured group interview	Provides narrative examples of cases; presents themes; findings discussed against background theories
Dyck, B., Mauws, M., Starke, F. A., & Mischke, G. A. (2002)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; ten interviews; inductive data analysis	Provides narrative quote examples; presents themes & and a four-phase model; develops six propositions

Dyer Jr, W. G., & Panicheva Mortensen, S. (2005)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Six CSs; interviews; comparison of cases	Presents themes; presents a data table
Fitz-Koch, S., & Nordqvist, M. (2017)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; 38 interviews during site visits, casual conversations, reports, news items, booklets and brochures; analysis on multiple levels; conduction of a systematic interplay between data, insights and the extant theory	Contrasts findings with previous research
García-Álvarez, E., López-Sintas, J., & Gonzalvo, P. S. (2002)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	13 CSs; 13 interviews, observation notes and other secondary data and quantitative data; emphasis on cross-case comparison	Presents themes and discusses findings against literature
Gilding, M. (2000)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	50 CSs; 50 interviews	Provides narrative examples; presents themes; findings discussed against literature
Giovannoni, E., Maraghini, M. P., & Riccaboni, A. (2011)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; 29 interviews with ten different informants, secondary data, causal links	Presents quotes in data tables; presents a chronology; findings discussed against literature
Glover, J. L., & Reay, T. (2015)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	20 CSs; 48 interviews with owners and other family members; emphasis on within- and cross-case analysis	Presents data tables and quotes; presents themes; discusses findings against literature
Graves, C., & Thomas, J. (2008)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Eight CSs; 34 interviews and notes, observations, questionnaires, firm documents; emphasis on cross-case comparison	Presents data tables and quotes; presents themes; theory is integrated in the beginning and in the end.
Haberman, H., & Danes, S.M. (2007)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Two CSs; videotaped group-interviews and individual audiotaped interviews	Presents narratives of cases; findings discussed against theory
Hall, A., & Nordqvist, M. (2008)	Interpretive perspective	Five CSs; 95 interviews, observations of meetings, site visits, informal interaction with family and firm-related individuals; observation notes; cases were grouped together in empirical categories, categories were merged/clustered into three themes, reinterpretation of cases with themes.	Emphasis on context; emphasis on understanding; presents themes and categories; findings discussed against literature; key concepts: cultural competence, arenas for interaction and communication, and reciprocal role-taking
Hall, A., Melin, L., & Nordqvist, M. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Two CSs; interviews and participant observation, nonparticipant observation, documentary studies, informal talks; emphasis on comparison	Presents chronological and quotes examples; conceptual framework developed
Hamilton, E. (2006)	Interpretive perspective	Eight individuals within the same family; narrative analysis and identification of key themes	Presents narratives; describes the differing views of family members in relation to gender issues and patriarchy; provides lengthy quotes and descriptions

Hatum, A., & Pettigrew, A. (2004)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Two CSs; 30 interviews and archival material; uses different methods of analysis; uses a significance test	Presents themes and discusses findings against literature
Howorth, C., & Ali, Z. A. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Three CSs; interviews and informal conversations, personal observation; emphasis on cross-case comparison	Explains how the cases are similar and different; develops a conceptual framework
Howorth, C., Westhead, P., & Wright, M. (2004)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Eight cases; interviews and pre-survey	Presents themes; conceptual framework developed (based on the background theories); develops 14 propositions
Howorth, C., Wright, M., Westhead, P., & Allcock, D. (2016)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Sixteen CSs; survey data and nineteen interviews; transcripts were coded and analysed using pattern-coding, tables and matrices; analyses data through comparison and iterating between emerging conceptual insights and re-examination of the data	Provides tables with summaries of findings
Ibrahim, A. B., Soufani, K., & Lam, J. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; public documents; data reduction, modification of data in chronological order, formation of case history, triangulation	Presents a discussion on different themes; findings discussed against literature
Janjuha-Jivraj, S., & Woods, A. (2002)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Six CSs; interviews	Provides narrative examples; discusses findings against literature
Jaskiewicz, P., Combs, J. G., & Rau, S. B. (2015)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Twenty-one CSs; 48 core interviews and 45 additional interviews and field observations and archival data	Presents quotes in a table; develops five propositions
Johannisson, B., & Huse, M. (2000)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Twelve CSs; two rounds of interviews; comparison of cases	Presents narratives; develops a framework and empirically tests it
Jones, O., & Craven, M. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; observation, conversations	Presents themes; findings discussed against literature
Jones, O., & Li, H. (2017)	Interpretive perspective	Single CS; interviews with four family members; follows the process of systematic combing coding of the interviews	Presents a narrative and themes; builds theory; key concepts: family, sense-making, dispositions, learning and entrepreneurship
Kammerlander, N., Dessi, C., Bird, M., Floris, M., & Murru, A. (2015)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Forty-one CSs; 76 interviews and eight additional documents per firm (a total of 328 documents); cross-case comparison	Develops four propositions
Karra, N., Tracey, P., & Phillips, N. (2006)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; interviews and archival and secondary data (journalists' accounts of the political and economic contacts), telephone interviews, field notes, one of	Chronology, enfolding findings with the literature, theoretical saturation

		the authors had previously worked for the company.	
Kenyon-Rouvinez, D. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Nine CSs; interviews and observations and discussions with experts; emphasis on cross-case analysis	Description of cases; presents themes; findings discussed against literature
Khavul, S., Bruton, G. D., & Wood, E. (2009)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Eight CSs; interviews and archival data, expert informant data (interviews with outside African experts)	Presents themes; findings discussed against literature; develops four propositions
King, S. W., Solomon, G. T., & Fernald Jr, L. W. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; interviews from 29 subjects; uses correlations	Contrasts findings with previous research
Knapp, J. R., Smith, B. R., Kreiner, G. E., Sundaramurthy, C., & Barton, S. L. (2013)	Interpretive perspective	Four CSs; interviews with 44 organisational leaders; emphasis on first-order concepts and second-order themes	Presents the data structure emphasising second-order themes and overarching dimensions; contributes to the notion of social boundaries
Kontinen, T., & Ojala, A. (2012)	Critical realist perspective	Eight CSs; combines causal and interpretive approach; emphasis on identifying events	Presents mechanisms and procedures, creating explanations; use of <i>retroduction</i>
Kontinen, T., & Ojala, A. (2011)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Eight CSs; 16 interviews with two respondents from each firm and secondary information (such as websites and annual reports)	Presents quotes in data tables; presents themes; findings discussed against literature and theory; develops five propositions
Kotlar, J., & De Massis, A. (2013)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Nineteen CSs; interviews with 76 informants, observations and archival data; emphasis on first-order codes, second-order themes and aggregate theoretical dimensions	Presents data tables; presents seven propositions
Lambrecht, J. (2005)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Forty-four CSs; 19 interviews; cross-case comparison	Presents themes; findings discussed against literature
Lambrecht, J., & Lievens, J. (2008)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Seventeen CSs; interviews with 20 respondents; emphasis on cross-case comparison	Presents themes; findings discussed against literature
Lee, J., & Tan, F. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Eight CSs; interviews; emphasis on cross-case comparison	Presents comparable tables; presents themes; findings discussed based on seven factors
Litz, R. A., & Kleysen, R. F. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; observation and conversations	Presents themes; contrasts findings with previous research at the end
Manikutty, S. (2000)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Nine CSs; interviews and public information; tests hypothesis; comparisons to identify emerging patterns	Provides narrative quotes; discusses whether the hypotheses are supported; findings discussed against the resource-based view
Marchisio, G., Mazzola, P., Sciascia, S., Miles,	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Three CSs; 27 semi-structured interviews, corporate archives, private family documents, family letters, annual reports,	Provides narrative examples of cases; proposes a model of the impact of CV on a FB

M., & Astrachan, J. (2010)		public documents, newspapers and related documents such as consultant reports and industry analyses; cross-case comparison	
Mazzola, P., Marchisio, G., & Astrachan, J. (2008)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Eighteen CSs; 64 interviews, observation and archives; emphasis on cross-case comparison	Presents data tables; presents themes; findings discussed against literature; develops eight propositions
Meier, O., & Schier, G. (2016)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; interviews, participant observation and secondary data; analysis based on interpretative reasoning	Emphasis on themes; data presented in tables, quotes and table with mechanisms
Michael-Tsabari, N., Labaki, R., & Zachary, R. K. (2014)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; data collected from interviews and company website, press articles, massive media coverage, external and internal company and family documents; content analysis	Presents data both in the body of the article and in the tables in the form of quotes; develops eight propositions
Mickelson, R. E., & Worley, C. (2003)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; 16 interviews with 8 informants; content analysis; comparison with theories and interviews	Presents themes; discusses findings against literature
Miller, D., Steier, L., & Le Breton-Miller, I. (2003)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Sixteen CSs; book accounts, newspapers, journal articles	Presents themes; discusses findings against literature and develops hypotheses
Murray, B. (2003)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Five CSs; interviews, secondary data (no mention what); emphasis on reliability	Presents themes and discusses findings against literature
Ng, W., & Keasey, K. (2010)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; 45 interviews with 24 board directors, senior and middle managers; annual reports; media news	Presents themes; findings discussed against literature; develops six propositions
Niemelä, T. (2004)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Five CSs; interviews; analysis at multiple levels	Presents themes and discusses findings against literature
Nordqvist, M. (2012)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Three CSs; 90 interviews and observations of meetings, casual conversations, company reports, newspaper articles, web and site visits; emphasis on cross-case comparisons	Contrasts findings with previous research
Pagliarussi, M. S., & Rapozo, F. O. (2011)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; 20 interviews and archival research; test propositions; comparisons of themes	Presents chronological findings; findings discussed against literature
Parada, M. J., Nordqvist, M., & Gimeno, A. (2010)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Three CSs; 22 interviews; internet, newspapers, corporate brochures; looking for patterns and emerging themes; within- and cross-case analysis	Emphasises emerging themes and looks for patterns; presents narratives
Parmentier, M. A. (2011)	Interpretive Perspective	Single CS; data collection via archives; the procedures for coding and analysing data	Presents themes; presents two interrelated practices critical for

		were adapted from Strauss and Corbin (1998)	developing family brand distinctiveness
Poza, E. J., & Messer, T. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Eleven CSs; 11 interviews	Presents themes; provides narrative quote examples; findings discussed against literature
Sabah, S., Carsrud, A. L., & Kocak, A. (2014)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Six CSs; interviews; cross-case comparison	Provides narrative examples of cases
Salvato, C., & Melin, L. (2008)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Four CSs; interviews and questionnaires, secondary sources; emphasis on cross-case analysis	Presents data tables; presents themes; findings discussed against literature; develops three propositions
Salvato, C., Chirico, F., & Sharma, P. (2010)	Interpretive Perspective	Single CS; semi-structured interviews, financial reports, newspaper clips, company website, transcripts of previous interviews, note to the investors; categories were determined by assembling first-order codes into higher-order themes.	Emphasis on second-order themes and aggregate dimensions; emphasis on context; presents chronological narratives
Santiago, A. L. (2000)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Eight CSs; interviews with the former and current generation managing the business (primary data); interviews with key executives and long-term employees (secondary data); case notes, industry and corporate publications, newspaper reports, published annuals, media interviews; emphasis on cross-case comparison	Presents a table for each case; presents themes; discusses findings against literature; builds a model
Smith, C. (2016)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Five CSs; 45 interviews; both deductive and inductive approaches	Presents themes and quotes in tables; findings discussed against literature
Steen, A., & Welch, L. S. (2006)	Interpretive perspective	Single CS; data collected via interviews, media reports, newspapers, magazine articles, company reports, press releases, takeover documents and related literature	Emphasis on closing the gap; emphasis on context; presents narratives
Steier, L. (2001a)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Three CSs; interviews, site visits and library and internet-based research, for one case publicly available documents, informal interviews	Provides narrative quotes; findings discussed against literature; develops ten propositions
Steier, L. (2001b)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Eighteen CSs; interviews and annual reports, company publications; cross-case comparison	Presents themes; findings discussed against theory; develops eight propositions
Strike, V. M., & Rerup, C. (2016)	Interpretive perspective	Six CSs; data collected via interviews with 45 interviews over a ten-year period and observation and documents; conducts first- and second-	Starts by establishing the research gap; builds a process model; presents themes and quotes; key concepts: mediation structure, disposition to

		order analysis in the light of prior research	mediate, actions of mediation, adaptive sense-making
Su, E., & Dou, J. (2013)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Twenty CSs; interviews with 20 family business advisors; emphasis on cross-case comparison	Provides quotes in data tables; develops four propositions
Tan, W. L., & Fock, S. T. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Five CSs; interviews, secondary source data (not mentioned what)	Provides a chronological discussion on the cases and develops a model
Thomas, J. (2002)	Interpretive perspective	Two CSs; data collected via interviews, participant observations, documentation and field notes	Starts by establishing the research gap; presents a chronology and quotes; findings discussed based on the literature
Tokarczyk, J., Hansen, E., Green, M., & Down, J. (2007)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Eight CSs; 21 interviews	Provides narrative examples; presents themes; findings discussed against theory
Tsang, E. W. (2001)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Single CS; eight interviews and reports, memos, manuals, company reports, newspaper cuttings, other public material, tour of each facility, brief conversations with some other managers and supervisors	General discussion of findings
Tsang, E. W. (2002)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Ten CSs; 60 interviews; emphasis on comparison	Presents themes and compares them between a FB and a non-FB
Vera, C. F., & Dean, M. A. (2005)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Ten CSs; interviews	Presents themes and discusses findings against theory
Watson, T. J. (2009)	Interpretive perspective	Single CS; data collected via interviews and field notes; writing full ethnographies	Emphasises context; elaborates fully the history of the firm, fleshes out multiple voices; presents themes
Yeung, H. W. C. (2000)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Three CSs; interviews and secondary data	Provides narrative quotes; presents comparable tables; presents themes; theory integrated based on paternalism, nepotism, personalism, fragmentation
Zellweger, T., & Sieger, P. (2012)	Qualitative positivist Eisenhardt template	Three CSs; two interviewers conducted four or five semi-structured interviews with both family and nonfamily members in top-echelon positions and secondary data from company websites, annual reports, press releases, and company documents to map out major strategic entrepreneurial actions gathered; emphasis on cross-case comparison	Presents themes; develops seven propositions

Table 2. Categorisation of the articles in the dataset.

Below, we will describe the qualitative positivist template and the alternative perspectives of interpretivism and critical realism. The qualitative positivist template has clearly given rise to a body of work in which the norms of presentation and methodological process have become to a degree standardised and institutionalised among FB scholars. However, the template is not exhaustive of approaches for qualitative research on FB. The interpretative perspective is still an emerging one, but we discuss norms created so far. The most nascent emerging perspective is the critical realist one with just one study, but we present how it is has been realised as well because it stems from different epistemological and ontological traditions and because of the consistency, clarity and future research agenda of the current study. Altogether, we believe that the presentation of the perspectives is particularly instructive for FB scholars.

The Qualitative Positivist Template in FB

The *logic* of qualitative positivist FB studies was related to (i) usage of multiple cases and large interview datasets with replication logic and (ii) cross-case comparison to arrive at analytical generalisations and testable propositions. The influence of Eisenhardt (1989) can be seen, for example, in the article by Cater et al. (2016), which we, for its transparency and newness, use as our main example. Cater et al. (2016) used 19 cases and 48 respondents and collected data until they thought no new information was emerging:

After the two rounds of data collection, we found a level of redundancy of responses (Merriam, 2009) with little new information forthcoming (Cater et al., 2016, p. 306).

Cater et al. (2016, p. 307) reported that the in-depth interview transcriptions formed the basis of the data analysis, but they also collected company documents, newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements, and company catalogues. In the analysis, Cater et al. (2016, p. 309) reported that they:

analyzed each case separately by writing complete case histories of each company (available on request). Then, we engaged in content analysis of the data looking for insights and patterns across the cases (cross-case analysis).

Additionally, Chirico (2008, pp. 435-436) adopted the logic of having studies on multiple cases for the purposes of replication:

Multiple cases permit a replication logic where each case is viewed as an independent experiment that either confirms or does not the theoretical background and the new emerging insights. A replication logic yields more precise and generalizable results compared to single case studies.

Following Eisenhardt (1989), Cater et al. (2016) formed ten propositions to analytically generalise testable propositions from their findings. Hence, the authors aimed at robustness and credibility by having several cases confirming certain features. They also emphasised that they refined and expanded their model through several iterations until they arrived at their final model.

In relation to the quality criteria, most studies did not discuss it separately, but followed in detail the suggested Eisenhardt (1989)/Yin (2018)/Strauss and Corbin (1990) logic. The use of multiple researchers and checks by informants were applied by, for example, Zellweger and Sieger (2012, p. 72-74).

We chose a third person for this part of our study to further increase the reliability of our findings and interpretations and to ensure divergent perspectives (Eisenhardt, 1989). The three researchers then met, discussed the case study protocols, and agreed on a final version, which varied only marginally from the original version. After comparing identified EO patterns, we agreed upon one profile for each firm, reflecting our shared understanding. The case study protocols and the audiotapes were then sent to the two interviewers, who independently reviewed and adapted the protocols. The interviewees had only minor comments, which were incorporated into our analysis.

Related to quality, most of the studies discussed the inability of the study to generalise as the most significant, and often the only, limitation. Some articles concluded on a note of apology, stating or implying that quantitative data would have advanced the generalisability of the research. In this vein, Miller et al. (2003, p. 528) evaluated their findings as follows:

Although the findings from this qualitative study are suggestive, they require significant follow-up work to establish their range, reliability, and validity.

In relation to **writing style**, in the study by Cater et al. (2016), data were presented in data tables and via quotes from different cases and categories. On the basis of the categorisation of their findings, they ended up with a model of successor team dynamics in family firms with three main stages and several sub-components. On page 312, they present one of the successor-categories as follows.

The final category of successor teams is complete equals, meaning that the successors have equal ownership and management decision-making authority. We found complete equals at Companies 2, 8, and 13. At Company 13, Respondent B replied: “Yeah, as far as a leader. . . . We kind of are divided into our thing. I’m good with the plants and mechanical and I lead that and my brother is good on the paving and he leads that... We are completely equal in status.”

Cater et al. (2016, p. 316) have a strong tone of comparison in their writing (p. 316):

Common pattern reported by respondents was that on joining the family firm, successors were assigned a job consisting of tasks that the incumbent generation leaders believed they could perform or suited their personality based on years of family behavioral interactions”.

As suggested by Eisenhardt, Cater et al. (2016, p. 314) offered an explanation for their findings and propositions and combined propositions in their model:

Family dynamics, a pattern of rich interaction of family members, sets the stage before entrance of the next generation into the family firm. At Company 12, Respondent C explained the situation:

“Families have certain dynamics when you are growing up that spill over into the business. In any other job, it is from when you started. But growing up with these guys they know all about you from day one. They know all your characteristics.” ...

*These findings lead us to propose the following: **Proposition 1:** Positive associations with family business history, family dynamics, personal experience of successors, and the invitation or permission of the predecessor lead to the entrance of successors into family firms.*

Zellweger and Sieger (2012, p. 72) also offered propositions, stating:

We investigate the five EO dimensions exploratively and, where appropriate, develop propositions ex post.

The Interpretivist Perspective in FB

Within the ten studies with the interpretative approach, single cases and the study of sense-making emerged as an important *logic*. Strike and Rerup (2016), with the aim of building new theory, studied sense-making related to how most trusted advisors (experienced individuals not making part of the biological family) within six family firms invite family business entrepreneurs to consider an issue from different points of view. They (p. 884, 888) applied the Gioia design, conducting first- and second-order analysis in the light of prior research, but reported that, having multiple cases, they combined it with the Yin approach.

We conducted an inductive multi-case study of six family firms and their nine MTAs (Yin, 2009). We followed the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013) by choosing “revelatory” cases that offered rich data and potential to develop new, distinctive insights into mediated sensemaking (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). We wanted to search for and capture informants’ meanings and understandings of organizational events and processes to access the subtle or hidden aspect of mediation and its implications for sensemaking.

Strike and Rerup (2016) described the context in detail, and the interview data with 45 interviews was collected longitudinally over almost a ten-year period. Observation and documents also made up part of their dataset. Jones and Li (2017), studying a single case – a start-up by two brothers – wanted to study how sense-making contributes to the creation of organisational routines. They describe how the brothers started from a schoolboy hobby and developed towards successful entrepreneurship with a significant turnover. Hamilton (2006, p. 253) offered a detailed account of how women challenged power relations and assumptions, as opposed to the general assumption that women were marginalised and held back by patriarchal power patterns, seeking to reveal conditions under which patriarchy might be challenged:

This article illuminates complex relationships in a family business context, putting the family at the heart of the research as opposed to an individual owner-manager [...] The

narratives presented in this article point to alternative gender discourses and practices, and to evidence of clear resistance to patriarchy.

Watson (2009, p. 251) shed new light on the concept of entrepreneurial identity by demonstrating the discourses surrounding two intertwined aspects, notably a self-identity aspect and a social identities aspect:

A case study is presented in which we see two principle figures in a growing family firm [...]. This fine-grained analysis [...] shows how people in entrepreneurial contexts use discursive resources in a negotiated, shifting, creative and nuanced but often ambiguous manner.

In relation to quality criteria, the author presented data directly from his field notes and allowed readers to interpret the data and determine for themselves if the interpretation was adequate. For instance, Hamilton (2006) described in considerable detail the differing views of family members in relation to gender issues and patriarchy, providing lengthy quotes and descriptions. Both of these authors presented their findings while at the same time reflecting on the actual research process.

In relation to *writing style*, Strike and Rerup (2016) started their study by establishing the research gap. For example, they discussed how infrequently mediated sense-making and the roles of most trusted advisors have been studied and why it is important to study them in the context of family firms in particular. They presented the data structure (see Figure 1 on page 889 of their manuscript) and built a process model (see Figure 2 on page 891) of mediated sense-making with a detailed presentation and discussion of each component of the model and a good number of quotes from the interview data.

The remaining interpretative studies provided contextual accounts with rich interview data, embracing participants' multiple life worlds and experiences, which are time- and context-bound. The researchers' interpretations served to bring subjectivity to the fore, supported by rich contextual data and thick descriptions. For instance, Watson (2009)

elaborated fully the history of the firm, fleshing out multiple voices. By including a conversation between two family members (Ali and Dina), he sought to describe the identity work operating in this single case. He used expressions such as:

Dina said [...] Dina continued [...] At this point Ali interrupted to say... [...] “Well there you are” commented Ali. [...] “It wasn’t long things started to unravel,” Ali explained, continuing: [...] As Dina explained...

The Critical Realist Perspective in FB

Kontinen and Ojala (2012, p. 501) applied a critical realist approach in their study on internationalisation pathways among eight family firms:

[A] critical realist case study method was applied in this study. [...] Based on this and on an investigation of all possible secondary material on the case firms, the most important features related to their internationalization pathways could be identified and discussed.

The authors wished to determine the types of features underlying different internationalisation pathways of family firms. They examined the most important events and dimensions behind different internationalisation pathways (traditional, born global, and born-again global). Then, via the use of retroduction, they selected the six dimensions as a means of informing theory, labelling six main causal aspects influencing the internationalisation pathways (2012, p. 506).

We found that the dimensions that best encompass the various internationalization pathways are: (i) ownership structure, (ii) stewardship attitude, (iii) international opportunity recognition, (iv) attitude to psychic distance, (v) the development of networks, and (vi) product.

There are separate quality criteria for critical realist case studies (see Healy & Perry, 2000), but the authors did not discuss them separately. The criteria to be discussed in a good critical realist case study are: (i) ontological appropriateness, (ii) contingent validity, (iii) multiple perceptions, (iv) methodological trustworthiness, (v) analytic generalisation, and (vi) construct validity (for more details, see Healy & Perry, 2000). In their *writing style*, Kontinen and Ojala

(2012) followed a logic according to which one can rarely, if ever, identify a complete set of precedents which would always lead to an outcome. This situation holds true because of the possible interactions between structural entities and contextual factors in an open system (Wynn & Williams, 2012). Kontinen and Ojala (2012) created explanations, using expressions of causation such as ‘lead to’.

[F]ragmented ownership seemed to lead to cautious internationalization strategies. [...] A strong stewardship attitude seemed to lead to a traditional pathway, whereas a weak/moderate attitude was related to born global or born-again global pathways. [...].”

Similarities and Differences Between the Case Study Approaches

Different approaches to qualitative case studies in our dataset have some similarities, but also differences. In terms of similarities, all of them encourage the use of diverse data sources and a deep immersion in the phenomena and are based on theoretical sampling (not random sampling) and aim to build theory (see also Gehman et al., 2017).

With regard to differences, in the qualitative positivist template (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2018), theory building from cases was closely related to deductive theory testing, the goal being a generalisable and testable theory, which was typically a combination of constructs, relationships between the constructs, and the underlying logic linking those constructs (as examples from our dataset, see the studies of Cater et al., 2016; Miller et al, 2003; Zellweger and Sieger, 2012).

Conversely, in the interpretative case study approach (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Stake, 1995), the emergent theory was strongly rooted in the data, and the contributions arose from generation of new concepts and/or relationships between the concepts to understand phenomena (as examples from our dataset, see the studies by Strike and Rerup, 2016; Watson, 2009; Hamilton, 2006). In the critical realist approach (Easton, 1995), the aim was to

understand causal relationships via the use of retrodution (see Kontinen & Ojala, 2012, as an example from our dataset).

FUTURE CASE RESEARCH: MULTIMETHOD AND PLURALIST APPROACHES AND INTERPRETIVIST AND CRITICAL REALIST ALTERNATIVES

In this study, we reviewed 88 case studies from the FB field and observed that the qualitative positivist case study constitutes the *de facto* disciplinary convention. With regard to future research, we make two major suggestions: (i) The pluralist, multimethod approach would allow FB case scholars to collect more versatile datasets on FB in relation to all the case study approaches we discussed; and (ii) A more extensive application of the interpretivist and critical realist case study approaches could deepen the understanding of FB discipline.

Many authors have promoted pluralism as a viable alternative to the prevailing positivism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Welch et al., 2011; Welch et al., 2013) to enable ‘scientific discovery and theoretical advances’. Pluralism can open up broader varieties of methods for researchers, enrich the array of research foci and settings and in the end broaden the scope for theoretical contributions (Morse, 2003; Welch et al., 2011). Case research offers an apt basis for interdisciplinary research, in which the methods and approaches trialled in different fields can be exploited to compile rich data for a case. Here, in addition to the cross-fertilisation of knowledge from different fields through pluralism, researchers can also benefit from the use of numerous methods in one study via the multimethod approach and triangulation (Jick, 1979; Piekkari et al., 2009). Different methods answer different research questions and different datasets offer different perspectives to a research topic (Morse, 2003). When combining methods and sources within a single study, a researcher can approach his/her topic from various viewpoints, obtain a more holistic grasp of the topic (Morse & Chung, 2003) and flexibility in complex and changing research contexts (Gummesson, 2005), and generate more

informed and richer theoretical contributions. In FB research, multimethod approaches can prove to be useful in grasping the FB reality with its social and business layers, individual and company levels of analysis and interlinked and networked relationships, accompanied with the eclectic tendency of FB research to borrow theories and explanations from other fields of research. The multimethod approach could also release FB research from the limitations of qualitative positivism and embrace holism and contextuality, and therefore interpretivism and critical realism.

We recommend these alternative approaches as options for use among FB scholars. In the qualitative positivist case studies presented by Yin (2018) and Eisenhardt (1989), fairly rigid guidelines are followed, and these tend to work against the richness of the data. The provision of rich data is an advantage of interpretivism (Stake, 1995), but also of critical realism (Easton, 1995), which we regard as the most fruitful case study design for family business scholars, combining as it does the in-depth investigation of a phenomenon with the search for the causal mechanisms behind it (Sayer, 1992).

Interpretive studies have the potential to capture the rich story of a phenomenon, such as that of socio-economic wealth (Berrone et al., 2012; Gomez-Mejia et al., 2011) within its context. For example, Dawson and Hjorth (2012, pp. 350–351) conclude, ‘Our narrative analysis of this story has revealed the intensely social nature of family business succession. [...] It seems to us that a densely storied and tightly relational social reality as that of family business can in this way be opened to novel approaches of study and analysis. [...] An expanded methodological toolbox will enable a widened toolbox of inquiry’. All in all, the interpretive perspective has characteristics which make it applicable to family business studies, which address multifaceted and complex social constructs which are performed by different actors in multiple contexts.

Critical realism, for its part, offers opportunities to search subjectively for causes and to take advantage of some of the features of interpretivism, while at the same time *discovering and explaining the causal mechanisms behind the phenomenon*. Given that dynamic phenomena – such as succession, internationalisation, socio-emotional wealth or the management of a family business – are complex, the explanations behind them might advance the field of family business. Within this tradition, they can be both explained (matching the positivist view) and understood (matching the constructivist/interpretive view). Hence, the method of critical realism (Bhaskar, 1998; Sayer, 1992) has the potential to provide scholars with new perspectives for understanding the uniqueness of family businesses. In other words, scholars can look at discernible events and at the same time ask what causes them to happen (Easton, 2010). Using case studies, family business scholars may achieve a more nuanced understanding of (for example) the issue of succession, through conducting an in-depth study of ‘individual agents in their causal contexts’ (Sayer, 1992). Furthermore, critical realism also provides the authors with clear and easy-to-follow quality guidelines which can provide the field with high quality research.

In relation to the analysis of the case studies, we wish in addition to make some overall suggestions for the improvement of case studies in the future, no matter which perspective the authors may be adhering to. First of all, we wish to highlight the importance of positioning the paper in terms of its epistemological and ontological orientation. Discussion of ontology, epistemology and methodology was very limited in the case studies reviewed, and the case authors seemed to struggle in terms of aligning themselves with a single philosophical orientation. The authors in FB research were often bringing the disparate elements forcibly together, without adequate justification provided for any of them. They engaged in blending different philosophical assumptions within a single paper, although they had very different ontological and epistemological starting points.

Second, the reporting of the case study method seemed to lack transparency in FB research. However, in contrast with Chenail (2009), in terms of the criteria employed for evaluating research, we do not see transparency as necessarily including homogeneity; rather, we would keep in view the notion of *contingent criteriology*. We take the view that it is unfruitful to seek universal criteria for all research methods and see it as important rather that the criteria should be in line with the philosophical paradigm adhered to (see also Johnson et al., 2006). In relation to inadequate reporting in the case studies reported, we acknowledge that space limitations make it difficult for authors to discuss in detail methodological choices, analytical procedures, etc. Hence, in qualitative studies, flexibility in word limits is needed to make this type of research more rigorous.

Third, case study scholars in FB research could use data beyond merely interviews in developing their accounts. The use of direct observation, focus group discussion and secondary materials (or company archival data) was limited in the articles reviewed. Secondary materials can be helpful in FB research in understanding the history and the products of each case, in forming detailed case histories, and in understanding the circumstances behind certain events. Here the multimethod approach could become useful.

The contribution of this study is fourfold. First, we discuss, deconstruct and codify case study practices drawing on exemplars from FB literature, finding a qualitative positivist template and two emerging approaches: interpretivism and critical realism. Discussions of different approaches to qualitative case studies are useful and relevant for FB scholars who wish to enhance their methodological practices for gaining a richer understanding of FB phenomena. Second, we outline common practices inspired by the qualitative positivist template and explain its potential for FB scholarship. We give examples of and discuss FB studies following each of the approaches. Third, we suggest how and why the emerging alternative perspectives of interpretivism and critical realism can inform the field by achieving

deeper and more comprehensive theorising of the specific features of FB. The interpretive and critical realist designs would permit greater sensitivity to individual voices (e.g., those of family owners) and their contexts (e.g., FB organisational idiosyncrasies) within the FB literature (see also Dawson & Hjorth, 2012; Leppäaho et al., 2016; Nordqvist et al., 2009). Fourth, we discuss how the multimethod and pluralist approaches can enrich all the case study approaches currently used by FB scholars.

In conclusion, we believe that in examining case studies in FB research our review has opened up a range of issues, also meriting consideration by case study scholars in related research areas (for example, entrepreneurship and international business). Crucially, however, we suggest that a greater understanding of disciplinary conventions and their limitations may increase the potential for methodological pluralism in the study of FB phenomena.

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³ Includes all the 88 articles reviewed.

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