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CASE STUDIES IN FAMILY BUSINESS RESEARCH

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Based on a review of 63 case studies from the family business field, the authors emphasize the potential of critical realist case studies for family business scholars. The review revealed that the positivistic case study introduced by Yin and Eisenhardt is the disciplinary convention of family business field. Since there are several events and mechanisms underspinning social phenomena, such as succession, they need to be both explanained (erklären, matching the positivist view) and understood (verstehen, matching the constructivist/interpretive view) which is the staring point of critical realism (Bhaskar, 1998; Sayer, 1992). Hence critical realis ontology can be very fruitful for future studies. In a critical realist case study, the research question addresses a research phenomenon of interest, in terms of discernible events, and asks what causes them to happen (Easton, 2010). This matches FB research that studies events, mechanisms and processes in special.

Keywords: case study, family business; philosophy of science

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INTRODUCTION

Sociologists argue that scientific techniques and methods are interpreted and performed locally, i.e. within a specific scientific discipline, such as family business field. Hence, scientific methods such as the case study are not universal or unvarying techniques, but need to be understood within the context of particular disciplinary tradition (Piekkari, Welch & Paavilainen, 2009). Indeed, after methods have been diffused within a scientific community "they become normalized, legitimized, and standardized" (Piekkari, Welch & Paavilainen, 2009, p. 568). This paper clarifies how case studies have been normalized in the family business field.

In his research note, Chenail (2009) discusses qualitative research, in practice case studies, and sees that family business researchers need to pay attention to following details in relation to case studies: (i) Firstly, family business scholars need to position their paper better in relation to its theoretical orientation: hence, they will need to increase the amount of discussion on ontology, epistemology and methodology. (ii) Secondly, Chenail (2009) suggests that alignment may implicitly suggest linearity in terms of conducting research. He sees that the strength of case study research is also iteration and abduction. (iii) Thirdly, transparency is essential according to Chenail (2009): scholars ought to report how their studies have been conducted in a detailed manner by following the chosen philosophical paradigm. (iv) Fourthly, Chenail (2009) also concludes that there is a need for increasing external validity of case study research.

The study of family businesses is still at an early stage as a scientific discipline, but it has undergone vigorous development (Chrisman et al., 2003; Sharma, 2004; Zahra and Sharma, 2004) since its beginnings in the mid-1980s and it is developing in a dynamic fashion (Bird et al., 2002). Like stated by Zahra and Sharma (2004, p. 331), "Family business research is fast becoming an integral part of what is being published on entrepreneurship in the leading academic journals". Some indicators for this include special issues on family business in leading entrepreneurship journals like *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice* and *Journal of Business Venturing* and emergence of new family business journals like *Journal of Family Business Strategy* and *Journal of Family Business Management*.

The research among family business scholars has focused heavily on succession (Zahra and Sharma, 2004), many other important research areas remaining unexplored. In addition, family business theories are emerging but the theoretical underpinning of the field is

still fragmented (Sharma, 2004), thus the field is still nascent. This indicates that qualitative methods, especially case study method, will be needed also in the future to develop knowledge and theories on family business (cf. Dawson and Hjorth, in press; Edmondson and McManus, 2007; Siggelkow, 2007). For instance, Sharma and Zahra (2004) and Sharma (2004) highlight the need for deeper understanding on family business issues. Sharma (2004) points out that family business studies should improve the functioning of family firms and we need a *deeper understanding* of the forces that underlie family firms. Case studies have a great potential in providing a deeper understanding of the area of family business. Additionally, case study research may contribute not only to developing a deeper understanding through theory building but also may leverage current knowledge in the field through theory refinement or testing cases (see Welch et al., 2011).

However, qualitative studies overall seem to have a minor role in the leading journal of family business studies, *Family Business Review* (FBR)*:* According to Sharma (2011), only one out of 17 empirical articles published in FBR in 2010 was qualitative, concluding that good qualitative research submissions were welcomed and hoped for. However, altogether, there has been a strong preference for practice-oriented research methods among the scholars of family business (Zahra and Sharma, 2004). Hence, many researchers have used case study research as a methodology of choice for conducting research. However, it seems that the majority of qualitative research in the field has not been rigorous enough to be published in the leading journals of entrepreneurship and management (see .e.g. Dawson & Hjorth, in press). Furthermore, case study method is still approached with skepticism. In their review on family business research in the new millennium, Debicki et al. (2009, p.162) state the following: "Finally, although not analyzed in this study, we need to mention that about half the papers were not empirical and of the empirical papers many were case studies." This leaves the reader an impression that the authors are somewhat dismissive on cases. This is perhaps due the fact that *the full potential of case study research has not been exploited*.

Based on the above, *the current paper provides a state-of-art view of case study practice in the area of family business*. It presents an analysis conducted on 63 refereed articles on family business issues utilizing qualitative case study method. Our aim is to review how case studies have been used by scholars of family business in the new millennium. Even though, methodological texts on the case study have proliferated, they do not elaborate on how this research approach has actually been practiced by researchers. Viewed in this light, we join voices with Piekkari et al (2009, p. 568) who argue that "understanding the case study requires going beyond methodological texts and coming to

grips with how it is practiced in a particular disciplinary context". Our findings indicate that the theory building case study endorsed by Eisenhardt and Yin is the disciplinary convention of family business scholars. Based on our findings, we highlight the potential of critical realism paradigm that is likely to advance the usage of case study methodology among the scholars of family business.

Our research questions are as follows:

How has case study method been utilized by the scholars of family business?

What are the possibilities of case study in the future?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of Family Business

The research field of family business was born in the mid-1980s (Bird et al., 2002). Hence, family business field is still a young scientific discipline, but it has been and is still experiencing a dynamic development (Sharma, 2004; Zahra & Sharma, 2004). Like stated by Zahra and Sharma (2004, p. 331), "Family business research is fast becoming an integral part of what is being published on entrepreneurship in the leading academic journals".

Among the scholars of family business, the specific features of a family firm have been called *familiness*. The term familiness refers to the causal relationships between a business-owning family and the resources and capabilities of a business. Familiness is defined as "the unique bundle of resources a particular firm has because of the systems interaction between the family, its individual members and the business" (Habbershon & Williams, 1999, p. 11). Familiness may lead to hard-to-duplicate capabilities, and it can allow family firms to survive and grow in an adverse economic environment (Christman et al., 2005, 2006). *Agency and stewardship theories* are two theories which are often used by the scholars of family business. Both agency and the stewardship theory set out from the assumption that there is a separation between ownership and control in the business – something which tends not to be the case in family business settings. Hence, as suggested by Schulze et al. (2001), it would be natural to think that there will be reduced agency costs in a family business, given that the owner and the manager are one and the same person (Schulze et al., 2001).

Sirmon and Hitt (2003) suggest five unique characteristics that can differentiate family firms from non-family firms and which are thus related to their familiness: human

capital, social capital, survivability capital, patient capital, and governance structures and costs. These five unique resources – which are absent from non-family SMEs but which are present in family SMEs – may contribute to wealth creation, so long as they are linked to adequate management capabilities.

There has been a strong preference for practice-oriented research methods, such as case studies, among the scholars of family business (Zahra and Sharma, 2004). Succession is a phenomenon that has been intensely studied (Zahra and Sharma, 2004), many other important research areas of family business remaining unexplored.

The Case Study Method: Insights from Business Discipline

Conflicting views about case study are related to differences in philosophical assumptions that may be explicitly stated but often remain implicit. In the mainstream management literature, the case study method has a long and respected history (Perren and Ram, 2004). However, the philosophical implications of case study method have been discussed to a limited extent (Perren and Ram, 2004; Welch et al., 2011). Eisenhardt (1989) is very well-known and widely referenced among scholars conducting case studies (Ravenswood, 2011). The emphasis of Eisenhardt's (1989) thinking in *"Building Theories from Case Study Research"* is lying on the potential of the case study to induce new theory from empirical data and to generate theoretical propositions upon which large-scale quantitative testing can be based. Hence, this method seeks to establish regularities rather than the reasons behind them. Eisenhardt does not regard generalization it as a problem, since she believes that observation is the basis of theory since it closely mirrors reality. Generalization differenciates Eisenhardt's approach from other qualitative traditions that avoid generalisability and universal claims in favour of "rich, complex description" (Eisenhardt, 1989: 547). The strength of Eisenhardt's (1989) case study is related to its induction logic. However, the generalization to population together with the lack of contextual description can be seen as weaknesses of this **positivistic** case study approach (Welch et al., 2011).

Yin (1991, 2009) has endored the usage of case study rather for **explanatory** than exploratory purposes who sees that case study is a natural experiment. Yin sees that case studies are best suited for how and why questions that "deal with operational links needing to be traced over time" (2009: 9). In other words, they are suited to **verification** and not just discovery of new theory. Yin's (1991, 2009) thinking as a whole is related to the deductive logic of testing propositions, revising existing theories and establishing causal relationships.

Yin (1991, 2009) sees the possible contribution of case study very differently from Eisenhardt (1989). According to him, case studies share many features with laboratory experiments and, hence, replication logic, pattern matching, time-series analysis, etc. are important tools in conducting case studies. One of the strengths of this **alternative positivistic** case study approach is its high degree of internal validity, when appropriate procedures listed above are followed (Welch et al., 2011).

Stake (1995) represents the **constructionist/interpretive** side of case study research. Stake (1995, 38) insists on ”the difference between case studies seeking to identify cause and effect relationships and those seeking understanding of human experience”. In contract 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; 449). According to Stake (1995), particularization is the aim of case studies instead of generalization. Particularization is related to the understanding of actor’s subjective experiences and the uniqueness of the case in its entirety. Hence, contextual description is regarded necessary for understanding. The most obvious strenght of this type of a case study approach is thick description (Welch et al., 2011).

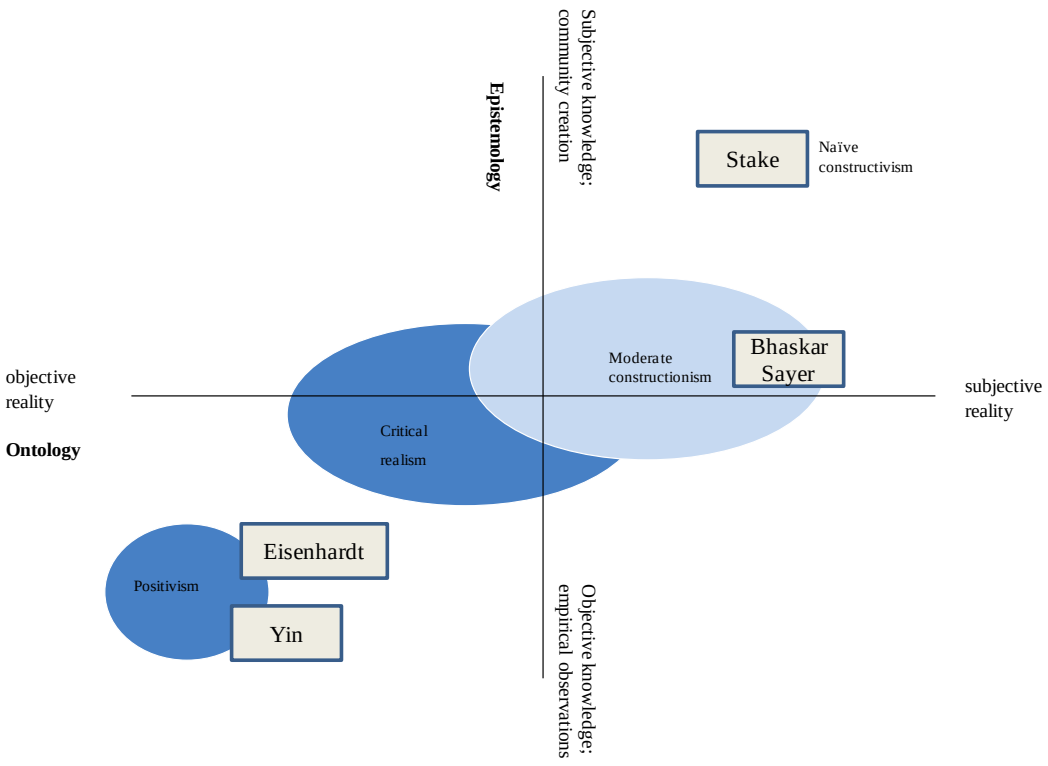
A fourth, emerging approach in case study research is the **critical realist** paradigm. Bhaskar (1998), who is a critical realist philosopher, regards the explanation of social phenomena as being both causal (matching the positivist view) and interpretive (matching the constructivist/interpretive view). Hence, Bhaskar (1998) emphasizes the importance of both explanation (erkären) and understanding (verstehen) in the conduct of research. Sayer (1992: 243) argues that enquiries into causes (as opposed to regularities) – typified by questions such as ”What produces a certain change?” – require an ”intensive” research strategy, typically involving a qualitative, in-depth study of ”individual agents in their causal contexts”. However, causation does not mean merely 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). Hence, the nature of this research process is a subjective search for causes, the outcome of the study being explanation in the form of causal mechanisms (Welch et al., 2011). The attitude to generalization is that contingent and limited generalizations can be formed by specifying causal mechanisms and the contextual conditions under which they work.

To summarize the four different approaches to case study methods, we take the assumption of Sayer (1992) as a starting point, according to which methodology should not

just be regarded as a matter of choosing among different methods of data production and analysis, such as case research or a survey. For Sayer it is rather about *choosing among competing methods of theorizing* (Sayer, 1992). In their recent study, Welch et al. (2011) clarified the theoretical foundations of case studies in the international business field, which has many similarities with the family business field, since it aims to understand the behavior and strategies of firms in a multicultural context. Welch et al. (2011) discovered that there are four different means of theorizing when conducting case studies: 1. *inductive theory-building* represented by Eisenhardt (1989), 2. *natural experiment* represented by Yin (1991, 2009), 3. *interpretive sensemaking* represented by Stake (2005), and 4. *contextualized explanation* represented by Sayer (1992) and Bhaskar (1998).

In *inductive theory building* represented by Eisenhardt (1989), the emphasis is lying on the potential of the case study to induce new theory from empirical data and to generate theoretical propositions upon which large-scale quantitative testing can be based; this method seeks to establish regularities rather than the reasons behind them (Welch et al, 2011). The *natural experiment* is related to the deductive logic of testing propositions, revising existing theories and establishing causal relationships. This method has been introduced to the field for instance by Yin (1991, 2009). Researchers concerned with *interpretive sensemaking* embrace context, narratives and personal engagement. Stake (1995), a representative of this tradition, sees that particularization is the goal of case studies – in other words, the understanding of the uniqueness of the case study in its entirety. In *contextualized explanation* the aim is both to understand and to explain the phenomenon (see Easton, 2010; Welch et al, 2011). Causalities play a role in this tradition – which can be termed "contextual explanation." However, causation does not mean merely 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). In Figure 1, the positioning of these different views can is presented from the perspecive of their relation to their epismetological and ontological positioning:

Figure 1. Epistemological and ontological continuum of case studies (adapted from Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2010).



In his discussion concerning qualitative research in the family business field, Chenail (2009) suggests that alignment may implicitly suggest linearity in terms of conducting research. He sees that the strength of case study research is also iteration and abduction. Secondly, the scholars ought to report have their studies have been conducted in a detailed manner (Chenail, 2009). However, it is to be noted that criteria are not universal but relevant to the philosophical paradigm we follow. The authors ought to report in detail what the philocophical orientation of the study is, how the cases were selected, what kinds of data the researchers are using, how the data was collected and analyzed. Furthermore, Chenail (2009) suggests that there is a need for increasing external validity of case study research. The perspective, too, is related to the selected philosophical paradigm.

METHODOLOGY

In order to understand the use of the case study approach in family business studies, we conducted an in-depth literature review. The articles for the review were searched from the main journals of family business and entrepreneurship disciplines having ISI impact factor over 1.0. These journals were namely: *Family Business Review (FBR), Journal of Business Venturing (JBV), Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice (ET&P), Journal of Small Business Management (JSBM), International Small Business Journal (ISBJ), Small Business Economics (SBE),* and *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development (E&RD)*. These journals were selected because within management discipline, family business studies are closest to the entrepreneurship research as approximately 69% of the family business articles that does not appear in the FBR are published in entrepreneurship journals (Chrisman et al., 2008).

Case studies published within a 10-year period were included in the review (2000-2009). This was seen as an appropriate time period since we were not interested in trends or changes in the case studies over a certain period. This time span is also in line with several earlier methodological reviews (e.g. Piekkari et al. (2010); Welch et al. (2011); Yang et al. (2006)). Excluding Family Business Review, we conducted a keyword search by using the keyword "family" that had to occur in the title, as keywords, and/or in the abstract section of the articles. For the articles found, we conducted a manual search to find all the articles using a case study method. The most important source of family business research, Family Business Review was reviewed manually. Each article found was analyzed by the first two authors and then the third author double-checked all the articles included to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Any differences in opinion were discussed among authors.

Altogether, we found 330 family business studies (see Table 1). Within these studies, 166 were quantitative, 67 were qualitative, 6 studies used both quantitative and qualitative approaches (mixed method papers), and 91 were non-empirical including literature reviews and conceptual papers. From 67 qualitative studies, 57 were qualitative case studies and all 6 mixed method papers used qualitative case stady approach together with quantitative measurement. Thus, 63 articles (57 qualitative case studies + 6 mixed method papers) were included for this review.

Journal	Case studies	Qualitative[1] studies	Quantitative studies	Mixed	Non-empirical[2]	Total
FBR	41	5	94	5	54	199
E&RD	1	0	6	0	0	7
ET&P	2	2	22	0	31	57
JBV	4	2	11	0	4	21
JSBM	2	0	22	0	1	25
SBE	0	0	7	1	1	9
ISBJ	7	1	4	0	0	12
Total	57	10	166	6	91	330

Table 1. Family business articles in the journals reviewed

We used qualitative content analysis in analyzing the articles. Following Welch et al. (2011), we call it "directed": the analysis started with an initial coding scheme (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In conducting the analysis, we identified for instance the following aspects as critical: topic of research, rationale for a case study, sampling strategy, data collection and analysis, sources of evidence, theoretical objective, presentation of findings, integration of theory etc. Unlike in a quantitative content analysis, we refined the codes through successive iterations between theory and data (Berelson, 1971), when we noticed that something new arose as interesting

FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

Our findings show that the most common form of qualitative research in the family business field is case study. Out of 67 qualitative studies, 57 were qualitative case studies and in six mixed method studies the qualitative case study method was also utilized, aside the quantative approach.

Altogether, it seems that the disciplinary convention of family business field is **the case study conducted in a positivistic manner**. The philospohical orientation was actually discussed in very few articles we studied, but the case methodology authors refered in the articles were mainly Yin (1991, 2009) and Eisenhardt (1989), who represent the positivistic side on case study approach. Yin was referred to in 28 out of 63 papers and Eisenhardt was used as a reference in 25 manuscripts. For instance Chirico and Salvato (2008, 435-436) reported the usage of multiple case study logic adapted from Yin (2009) and Eisenhardt (1989) as follows:

[1] Excluding case studies
[2] Literature reviews and conceptual papers

"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".

Glaser & Strauss (1967) was utilized in 10 studies and Miles and Huberman (1994) in 8 studies. Strauss and Corbin (1990) with the grounded theory approach were referred to in 5 studies. Kenyon-Rouvinez (2001, 179) gave the following reasons for using a grounded theory approach and adapting the guidelines of Yin (1991) and Eisenhardt (1989) simultaneously:

"The subject and the innovative nature of the research clearly indicated that the most appropriate methodology at this stage was a qualitative empirical approach that would lead to a good understanding of the characteristics of serial business families and, thus, set a strong basis for further research. Grounded research was the preferred choice. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue, it is the intimate connection with empirical reality—interviews and analysis of real-life cases—that permits the development of a testable, relevant, and valid theory. The method applied in this research derives from the works of Eisenhardt (1989) on theory building and of Yin (1994) on case study research. Eisenhardt lists a number of points that are key for the emergence of a strong theory. She recommends starting with an initial definition and a priori constructs, even if broadly defined, as they will help focus the research and identify cases to be investigated. She recommends selecting cases based on their theoretical values (not all case studies in the sample are analyzed; cases studied are chosen for their contribution to the building of a theory) and states that multiple-case research (four to 10 case studies) is preferable to singlecase research in that it enables comparison, brings evidence that it is not a one-off phenomenon, highlights different aspects of the theory, and helps refine it. She recommends stopping the research when the incremental contribution of one additional case becomes marginal."

Also Pettigrew (1990) and Patton (1990) had references in five studies. All the remaining authors, such as Creswell (2007), Denzin and Lincoln (2005), and Burrel and Morgan (1979) were used in just three papers or less. For instance Stake (1995) was used as a reference in

only two studies and Easton (1995) in just one study. Table 2 illustrates the most important authors referenced in the methodology sections.

Table 2. The most important methodology authors referenced in the studies.

Author	Number of studies	Author	Number of studies
Yin	28	Pettigrew (1990)	5
Eisenhardt	25	Patton	5
Glauser & Strauss (1967)	10	Denzin&Lincoln (2000)	3
Miles & Huberman (1994)	8	Burrel&Morgan (1979)	3
Strauss& Corbin (1990)	5	Creswell (1998)	3

Concerning the topics of the studies, 16 articles out of 63 case studies dealt with succession issues, which was the most common topic for the case studies. Other typical topics were for instance management practices, governemental issues, internationalization, and the role of different family members.

The theoretical objective of the studies was not discussed in the majority of the studies, but based on our interpretation, 55 out of 63 studies were theory-building case studies. For instance Miller et al. (2003, 515) state the following in relation to the nature of the study:

> *"Our approach was to track poorly performing or failed family enterprises for several years after succession to determine what happened. Of particular interest were characteristic postsuccession themes in competitive tactics and capabilities, goals and values, organizational designs and processes, and top management boards and teams. We sought inductively to discover common patterns in the data—to identify early warning signs so that these can be directly addressed. We also speculate on the sources of the patterns and their performance implications in different contexts."*

The number of theory-testing case studies was 8. Tsang (2002, 22) states the following in relation to existing research: "This study confirms the distinct characteristics of CFBs discussed in the literature". Research questions were reported in only about half of the studies. In one third of the articles, the research questions were mainly *what* questions, such as "What strategies do entrepreneurs use to help their businesses survive in a hostile environment?" or "What values are founders trying to pass onto potential successors?". In the

remaining 18 studies, *how and why* questions were asked. For instance, Hall and Nordqvist (2008) posed the following question: *"How can we understand professional management in FBs in a way that more explicitly recognizes the special characteristics of these firms, originating in the influence of family on the business?"*

The rational of conducting a case study was reported in two thirds of the studies. Like Table 3 illustrates, the most important reason for a case study was the need for *understanding* the phenomenon under study (17 studies). For instance Manikutty (2000) reported to aim *"to understand the strategic responses of nine family groups to the more liberalized environment".* The second common justification (7 studies) was *lack of research or earlier knowledge*. The remaining justifications were *qualitative nature of the topic*, obtaining of *complementary findings* to earlier quantitative findings and *need for richer, more detailed* data, which were the main justification in four articles each. As an example, Cater and Schwab (2008) based the usage of case study method on the following criteria in their report: *"to identify unique characteristics of established small family firms that affect their ability to initiate turnaround strategies when encountering an organizational crisis".* As another kind of example, Haberman and Danes (2007) gave the following criteria for using a case study: "*follow-up study after the larger quantitative study to further investigate the human dynamics surrounding the changes identified by these family businesses".*

Justification	**Amount of articles**
Need for / provides with understanding	17
Lack of research/earlier knowledge	7
Qualitative nature of the topic	4
To obtain complementary findings / additional insigths or to test earlier quantitative findings	4
Need for richer deeper, more detailed data	4
Others (observation, to illuminate)	3

Table 3. Justification for a case study.

Interviewing was the most common source of evidence. Like Table 4 illustrates, it was used in 55 case studies. In 25 studies, it was the only method of data collection and in several studies, the data consisted of interviews + public information. In 31 cases, the usage of interviews was not specified. In 18 studies, the usage of semistructured interviews was announced and there were only one or two examples of in-depth, group and structured interviews.

Primary sources of evidence	**Number of articles**	**Secondary sources of evidence**	**Number of articles**
Interviews	55	Newspaper and magazine articles	9
Observation	14	Business and public documents	9
Notes	9	Web pages	3
Conversations	6	Videocasettes	1
Questionnaries	3		

Table 4. Sources of evidence.

In addition to interviews, some other primary sources of evidence were used: observation (utilized in 14 studies), field notes (9 studies), conversations (5 studies), and questionnaries (3 studies). Regarding the secondary sources of evidence, newspaper and magazine articles (9 studies) and business and public documents (9 studies) were the most common sources, but also the usage of web pages (3 studies) and videocasettes (1 study) was reported. The amount of empirical evidence, in other words the number of interviews, was generally relatively high, which is also related to Eisenhardt's (1989) and Yin's (1991, 2009) thinking. In the majority of studies, there were from 13 to 34 interviews, but there were also examples of case studies with three (Steen & Welch, 2006) and with 95 interviews (Hall & Nordqvist, 2008). The amount of cases varied between one (for instance Mickelsson & Worley, 2003) and 44 cases (Lambrecht, 2005), the majority of studies being multiple case studies with more than 8 cases. The proportion of snapshot case studies was 89 % (56 studies) and, hence, the number of longitudinal case studies was rather limited (7 studies).

Concerning the method and process of analysis in the articles, the reporting varied greatly. *Theming* was the most common method of analysis, most generally conducted without a software program. However, the usage of Atlas, Nvivo or Max was reported in five articles. For instance Cater and Schwab (2008, 35) reported their analysis as follows: *"We utilized MAX.Qualitative Data Analysis Software to content analyze the interview transcripts to discover patterns, core consistencies, and meanings related to turn-around activities".* When being illustrated, the case study analysis seemed to follow "case-by-case analysis and cross-case analysis", "listings and comparisons to indentify emerging patterns" or "data reduction; data displays; conclusion drawing /verification" (introduced by Miles and Huberman, 1994) kinds of logics. For instance Hall and Nordqvist (2008) reported following features in their analysis: *"repeated reading of interviews and observation notes; cases were*

grouped together in empirical categories, categories were merged/clustered into three themes; reinterpration of cases with themes". Cadieux (2007) has the following description: *"predetermined codes in the Atlas.ti was used and withdrawn as new codes emerged, establishment of patterns, role categories were formed, redundant categories were eliminated, analysis grid was formed, data was processed by using the final grid"*.

The findings of the case studies were reported in the majority (78%) of the articles *under themes*. For instance Graves and Thomas (2008) reported their findings under "determinant 1: Level of Commitment to Internationalization", "Determinant 2: Funds Available for International Growth", and "Determinant 3: Ability to Develop the Organizational Capabilities Required for Internationalization". *Chronological reporting* was used in 8 and narrative reporting in 6 articles. For instance Steier (2001, 357-362) applied chronological telling in his research report:

> *"Case 1. A Partnership of In-Laws. Upon completing high school, Jay left the rural community where he was raised, went to university, and eventually built a successful professional career. In 1982, several years after he started working full time, Jay made his first significant business investment by purchasing 160 acres of farmland. […] Case 2. Sunterra Enterprises. […]Sunterra's origins date back to the early 1950s, when Stan and Flo Price began farming near Acme, Alberta. Typical of most operations in the area, they had a mixed farm growing grain and raising Hereford cattle."*

Haberman and Danes (2007) presented their chronologies under the stories of "Family A" and "Family B" followed by a chapter of "observational coding". Discussion of the case study findings in relation to the theories (presented in the beginning of the manuscript) was the most common way of integrating theory with the empirical findings, but there were few examples of studies in which the empirical findings were not discussed in relation to existing theories or knowledge at all. In 2 articles, propositions were formed on the basis of the empirical findings for further quantitative testing.

As regards the limitations in relation to case study, the inability to generalize was discussed as the only or as the most significant limitation in the majority of studies. Other limitations discussed in the manuscripts were too few cases, limited number of informants and case selection criteria, which are also related to the inability to generalize. For instance Miller et al. (2003, 528) state the following:

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

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In relation to enhancing the variaty and quality of case studies in family business field, we propose the following:

To begin, we emphasize the potential of critical realist case studies for family business scholars. Our review revealed that the positivistic case study introduced by Yin and Eisenhardt is the disciplinary convention of family business field. Since social phenomena, such as sucession or the management of a family business, need tp be both explanained (erklären, matching the positivist view) and understood (verstehen, matching the constructivist/interpretive view), the method of critical realism (Bhaskar, 1998; Sayer, 1992) has a lot to offer. In a critical realist case study, the research question addresses a research phenomenon of interest, in terms of discernible events, and asks what causes them to happen (Easton, 2010). Using that method, the scholars could get more nuanced understanding of these issues, in-depth study of "individual agents in their causal contexts" (Sayer, 1992). Like stated by Welch et al. (2011), the nature of a critical realist research process is a subjective search for causes, the outcome of the study being explanation in the form of causal mechanisms (Welch et al., 2011). This also supports the suggestions by Chenail (2009), who asked for contextualization from family business scholars.

Secondly, and in relation to the point above, the authors should better indicate the relation of their case study towards theory; whether it is a theory building study, or a theory testing study.

Thirdly, we want to emphasize the importance of positioning the paper in terms of its epismemological and ontological orientation. Discussion on ontology, epistemology and methodology were very limited in the case studies reviewed and case authors of different paradigms were applied in the very same study, although they have very different epistemological and ontological starting points for conducting a case study. This is in line with Chenail (2009).

Fourthly, the reporting of the usage of case study method should be more transparent. Unlike Chenail (2009), we do not, however, see transparency would include homogeneity in the criteria employed for evaluating research rather the notion of contingent criteriology. Criteria are not universal but relevant to the philosophical paradigm we follow.

Fifthly, the case study scholars could use other data than just interviews in their analyses in a more extensive manner. Observation, focus group discussion and the usage of secondary materials was limited in the articles reviewed. Secondary materials help with to understanding the history and the products of each the cases, to form detailed case histories, and to understand the circumstances behind certain events. The secondary material is also useful to triangulate with the information given by the informants.

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