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Innovation Collaboration Between Family Firms and Startups: Insights from the German Construction Industry

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Abstract

Seeking to increase their innovative strength, family firms increasingly collaborate with startups to explore new technologies, act upon trends, and rejuvenate their corporate culture. While family firms usually innovate incrementally, collaborating with startups allows them to take a more radical approach to innovation to explore new business models and enter untapped markets. The present study aims to contribute to the emerging research field around innovation collaboration between family firms and startups by providing insights from the German construction industry. Drawing on the findings of 40 interviews, comprising four exploratory case studies and 24 expert interviews, this study analyzes impediments, mitigation mechanisms, and prospects of family firm startup collaboration in the German construction industry. The findings reveal that impediments emerge before and during collaboration and are influenced by the construction industry's context. Involved organizations address these impediments by leveraging mitigation mechanisms, including trust-building, financial incentivization, stakeholder involvement, and communication. In this way, innovation collaboration with startups can help strengthen family-owned construction companies' future viability in an evolving industry.

Keywords: construction industry; family firm (FF); family firm startup collaboration (FSC); innovation collaboration; startup (SU)

1. Introduction

Amid changing market dynamics resulting from globalization, digitization, and political and economic developments, companies must develop strategies to survive and thrive in the market (Kammerlander & Prügl, 2016; Volberda, 1999). Innovation, a key enabler of corporate transformation, constitutes a significant share of these strategies and is indispensable when facing increasing competition among market participants (Llach & Nordqvist, 2010). After all, innovation has been framed as a meaningful strategic instrument for firm survival (Schumpeter, 1934). For family firms, whose core differentiators include the pursuit of continuity and cross-generational succession, innovation seems all the more important to ensure long-term success (Chua et al., 1999). Due to their unique combination of characteristics, goals, resources, and structures, family firms are internationally renowned for their innovativeness (De Mas-

sis, Frattini, et al., 2018; De Massis et al., 2013). However, given that they may face internal resource scarcity, they need to find ways to acquire resources necessary for innovation from outside the organization (Feranita et al., 2017). In this respect, open innovation is considered an effective strategy to access external resources and knowledge to increase firm performance and innovative strength (Ahn et al., 2015). An auspicious constellation in pursuing open innovation in family firms is identified in collaboration with startups (Heider et al., 2020; Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017). Involved organizations can create win-win situations by contributing complementary ideas, skills, and resources to the collaboration (Löher et al., 2017). While startups seek access to industry knowledge, capital, resources, or reputational gains from collaboration, family firms expect to gain access to new technologies, increase their innovativeness, act upon trends, or transform existing business models (Leitner et al., 2019). These factors can significantly contribute to family firms'

survival considering the market movements outlined before.

Volberda (1999) argues that “competitive changes force firms to move more quickly and boldly and experiment in ways that do not conform to traditional (...) work” (p. 5). Thus, family firm startup collaboration (FSC) can be an excellent opportunity for family firms to do so.

An industry that is not only strongly dominated by family firms but is also affected by a multitude of geopolitical shifts and emerging trends is the German construction industry. Topics ranging from digitalization and sustainability to a shortage of skilled workers and raw materials are prompting construction companies to develop innovative strategies to remain competitive in the market (Berbner et al., 2023). Since FSC has been perceived as a powerful means to ensure innovativeness and competitiveness by fellow family firms, these benefits could also apply to family firms in the construction industry. Nevertheless, the topic is still in its infancy in theory and practice. While collaborating with suppliers, clients, or fellow contractors has been highlighted as critical for innovation in construction (Bossink, 2004; Bresnen & Marshall, 2000; Rutten et al., 2009; Tidd, 2001), there is no qualified research on innovation collaboration with startups yet. Thus, to provide initial insights into this largely untapped research area around FSC in the construction industry, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: Which impediments to collaboration between family firms and startups arise in the construction industry?

RQ 2: How can involved organizations mitigate arising impediments?

RQ 3: What role do startup collaborations play for family-owned construction companies in preparing for (future) industry challenges?

By answering these research questions, this qualitative study aims to contribute to contemporary literature around FSC and innovation in the construction industry and guide practical insights for future pathways into FSC in construction.

First, it seeks to enrich family business research around FSC by examining collaborative innovation in the large group of family-owned construction companies. In the process, the analysis explores generic, industry-independent behavioral patterns related to FSC while contributing to understanding how the overall context influences an FSC in the construction industry. Simultaneously, the study's findings aim to enrich the existing literature on innovation in construction by examining FSC's viability as an effective innovation strategy for construction companies. Ultimately, the results provide practical implications for family firm owners, managers, and startups to advance FSC in the construction industry.

The study begins by establishing the overall literary context. Initially, the literature section examines family firm

characteristics and innovation before focusing on the construction industry, examining general industry characteristics, trends, industry dynamics, and innovation in construction in more detail. In light of the present study's research objective, the literature section subsequently reviews previous findings on FSC. Following the literature review, the study elaborates on the applied methodology and research design before concluding with the results' presentation and implication-drawing discussion.

2. Theoretical Background

To place the present study in a literary context, the theoretical background is initially elaborated. Thus, this section begins by exploring family firm characteristics and their innovation behavior before focusing on family firms in the German construction industry, investigating general industry characteristics, trends and dynamics, and construction innovation. Subsequently, innovation collaboration between family firms and startups is elaborated against the background of existing literature.

2.1. Family Firms and Their Innovation Behavior

Innovation is a widely recognized driver and enabler of organizational and economic growth (Garud et al., 2013), making it a powerful means for family firms to remain competitive (De Massis et al., 2022; Fuetsch & Suess-Reyes, 2017; Johnson et al., 2008) and pursue their cross-generational intentions (Chua et al., 1999). In this respect, family firms are internationally renowned for their innovativeness (De Massis, Frattini, et al., 2018; De Massis et al., 2013; Kammerlander & van Essen, 2017). However, many family firms face what has been framed as the “family innovator's dilemma,” with their unique combination of goals, strategies, and structures influencing their innovation decisions in sometimes conflicting ways (König et al., 2013). The following chapters explain what differentiates family firms and their innovation behavior while presenting them with significant decision-making challenges.

2.1.1. Family Firms

Family firms are the backbone of the German private economic sector. Over 90% of private sector businesses are family-controlled, and 86% are owner-managed family firms (Gottschalk et al., 2019). Globally, family firms have historically been recognized as the backbone of economic growth and prosperity (La Porta et al., 1999). Thus, over the last few decades, researchers have increasingly elaborated on what distinguishes family firms (e.g., Chua et al. 1999; Miller and Le Breton-Miller 2005; Miller et al. 2011; Zellweger 2017). In this respect, Chua et al. (1999) stated that “what makes a family business unique is that the pattern of ownership, governance, management, and succession materially influences the firm's goals, strategies, structure, and the manner in which each is formulated, designed, and implemented” (p. 22). In particular, family firms can be distinguished from

non-family firms by four distinctive attributes, i.e., continuity, community, connection, and command (the 4Cs), significantly influencing their behavior (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005).

- *Continuity* describes the owning family's intention to "pursue an enduring, substantive mission and create a healthy company to realize it" (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005, p. 519). Thereby, continuity reflects the family firm's long-term perspective and intergenerational commitment to handing over the business to family successors (Arregle et al., 2007; Barnes & Hershon, 2004; Caprio et al., 2011; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007; Kotlar et al., 2018; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005; Pizzurno & Alberti, 2013; Zellweger & Sieger, 2012). In the context of continuity, the family firm establishes a long-term vision according to which sustainable investments are made (Arregle et al., 2007; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005; Miller et al., 2009; Palmer & Barber, 2001). These investments are not purely financially driven but firmly aimed at preserving family values, their so-called socio-emotional wealth (SEW) (e.g., Chua et al. 1999; Zellweger and Astrachan 2008). SEW are "nonfinancial aspects of the firm that meet the family's affective needs, such as identity, the ability to exercise family influence, and the perpetuation of the family dynasty" (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007, p. 106). SEW constitutes a significant part of continuity, which is why family firms strive to preserve it (Berrone et al., 2012; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007, 2010, 2011), and even accept performance sacrifices to protect it (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007).
- *Community* represents the family firm's commitment to "[nurturing] a cohesive, caring culture made up of committed and motivated people" (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005, p. 519). The community notion is reflected in family firms' close relationships with their employees (De Massis, Audretsch, et al., 2018; Werner et al., 2018). Family firms are often prominent regional employers (Berrone et al., 2012) and are highly employee-oriented (Löher et al., 2017; Werner et al., 2018; Zellweger & Nason, 2008). Relationships between family members and employees are usually kept informal, with flat hierarchical levels and short lines of communication (Cassia et al., 2011; De Massis et al., 2022).
- *Connection* is related to the family firm's priority to "develop lasting, win-win relationships with outside parties to sustain the firm in the long haul" (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005, p. 519), reflecting the family firm's endeavors to maintain benevolent relationships with their stakeholders (Cruz et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2015). One of the overriding, nonfinancial family firm goals is to build trustworthy and reliable partnerships with suppliers and customers (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007; Zellweger & Nason, 2008), which is considered

a significant contributor to their competitive advantage (e.g., Arregle et al. 2007; Ireland et al. 2002; Miller and Le Breton-Miller 2005). Thus, their culture is firmly based on customer care (Nieto et al., 2015) and emphasizes customer collaboration (De Massis, Audretsch, et al., 2018).

- *Command* allows family firms to "exploit the freedom to make courageous, adaptive decisions to keep the firm spry" (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005, p. 519). The inherent unity of ownership and management allows family firms to effectively exercise command (Werner et al., 2018). They have a high decision-making speed thanks to short decision-making paths (Chrisman et al., 2015; Kammerlander & Prügl, 2016; Werner et al., 2018), direct influence on budget decisions, and reduced agency costs through close monitoring (De Massis et al., 2022). Therefore, the unity of ownership and management allows them to act flexibly, renew constantly, and stay innovative in emerging competitive landscapes (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005).

The combination of these unique characteristics, goals, resources, and structures allows family firms to create long-lasting legacies and multigenerational success (Chua et al., 1999; Kammerlander et al., 2015; Nieto et al., 2015) and to display a distinct innovation behavior (e.g., Chrisman et al. 2015; Classen et al. 2014; De Massis, Audretsch, et al. 2018; De Massis, Di Minin, and Frattini 2015; De Massis et al. 2016, 2022; Duran et al. 2016; Fuetsch and Suess-Reyes 2017; Kammerlander and Prügl 2016; König et al. 2013; Miller et al. 2015; Nieto et al. 2015), which will be reviewed in the next chapter.

2.1.2. Innovation in Family Firms

While innovation is defined differently in research, it essentially involves generating a new idea, product, process, or business model and its implementation in the market or within a company (Kammerlander & Prügl, 2016, p. 3). The innovation process constitutes innovation input, activity, and output (Covin & Lumpkin, 2011; De Massis et al., 2013), whereby innovation is differentiated by its type, degree, and approach (De Massis et al., 2013). The type of innovation relates to new products (goods or services), new processes (modified ways of production), new ways of organizational structures (in terms of leadership style or organizational setup), and new business models (value-creating activities) developed by the innovating company (Kammerlander & Prügl, 2016, pp. 4-5). Thereby, the novelty's degree ranges from incremental to radical, depending on the innovation's discontinuity from existing solutions (Utterback, 1996). When considering how to innovate, firms rely on closed (in-house) vs. open (across corporate boundaries) approaches to innovation (Almirall & Casadesus-Masanell, 2010; Chesbrough & Bogers, 2014), whereby new ideas can be explored or exploited (Benner & Tushman, 2003).

Early on, researchers identified innovation as one of the main strategic instruments for the firm's survival (Schumpeter, 1934) and economic prosperity (Porter, 1980). In this respect, Fuetsch and Suess-Reyes (2017) state that "innovation seems all the more important to help family firms remain competitive in their respective market" (p. 44). Thus, researchers are increasingly focusing their attention on family firm innovation (e.g., Calabrò et al. 2019; De Massis et al. 2013; Duran et al. 2016; Filser et al. 2016; Heider et al. 2022; Hu and Hughes 2020), revealing that family firm characteristics, goals, and structures can have both positive, negative, and ambivalent effects on innovation (Calabrò et al., 2019).

When reviewing innovation in family businesses, the combination of their resources, long-term orientation, and non-economic goals can be framed into what Chrisman et al. (2015) named the ability-willingness paradox, explaining family firms' higher ability but a lower willingness to pursue innovation than non-family firms. Thereby, ability depicts the owner's freedom and power to decide upon the use and distribution of resources (De Massis et al., 2014). Thus, the ability to innovate is higher in family firms in that ownership and management are usually united in one person or family, resulting in shared goals and values (Cassia et al., 2011; Craig & Dibrell, 2006; De Massis, Audretsch, et al., 2018; De Massis et al., 2022; Sanchez-Famoso et al., 2015) and reduced agency costs as ownership and management incentives are aligned (De Massis et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2015). Furthermore, the owner's immediate decision-making authority and flexible organizational structure enable the family firm to benefit from short decision-making paths and flat hierarchies in the innovation process (Chrisman et al., 2015; Kammerlander & Prügl, 2016; Werner et al., 2018). In this way, investment decisions can be made quickly and effectively, rendering the innovation process leaner and more efficient. Moreover, the family firm's long-term orientation and cross-generational involvement enhance family firms' innovative strength (Llach & Nordqvist, 2010) by allowing them to accumulate, internalize, and reinterpret the knowledge of multiple generations, referred to as human capital (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003), empowering innovation through organizational learning (Cassia et al., 2012; De Massis et al., 2016, 2022). Altogether, the combination of these capabilities provides family firms with a powerful bundle of resources conducive to innovation (Bammens et al., 2013; Carnes & Ireland, 2013; Eddleston et al., 2008; Spriggs et al., 2013; Zahra et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, despite their ability to innovate successfully, many family entrepreneurs take an ambivalent view on innovation, especially concerning ensuring continuity and building a legacy (Miller et al., 2015). On the one hand, family firms recognize that they need to innovate to pursue this goal in the long term. On the other hand, innovation comprises activities that family firms may view as threatening to their business and SEW, causing them to refrain from projects that appear too risky (Cassia et al., 2012; De Massis, Frattini, et al., 2015). These associated trade-offs in innovation activities often lead to family firms' reduced willingness to

innovate, which is primarily determined by the owner's ambitions, motives, and incentives (Chrisman et al., 2015) and highly influenced by socio-emotional concerns (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007).

Family entrepreneurs want to preserve control of their businesses (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007) and cautiously contemplate how much risk they want to expose their company to (De Massis et al., 2022; Werner et al., 2018). Their preference for consistency renders some family firms to favor tried and tested approaches over experimenting with new ideas (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005), and given their limited (financial) resources, family firms also carefully consider what to invest in the first place (Block et al., 2013; De Massis, Di Minin, & Frattini, 2015). The propensity to invest in costly, simultaneously risky, radical new business models, for which the results are largely unpredictable, is usually relatively low (De Massis, Frattini, et al., 2015). In line with this, family firms usually refrain from accessing external sources of innovation (Nieto et al., 2015) but prefer a *closed* approach to innovation, whereby related activities happen within the company's boundaries, separated from external influence (Almirall & Casadesus-Masanell, 2010). This closed innovation approach is consistent with family firms' attitude of not wanting to disclose too much internal information to external parties in order not to expose their business and its SEW to high risk (Cassia et al., 2012; De Massis et al., 2022; Nieto et al., 2015; Werner et al., 2018). As a result, the degree to which family firms tend to innovate is rather incremental than radical (e.g., Block and Spiegel 2013; Carnes and Ireland 2013; De Massis, Frattini, et al. 2015; Nieto et al. 2015; Werner et al. 2018), with a focus on perfecting internal processes instead of producing radical product, market, or technology innovations (Classen et al., 2014; De Massis et al., 2022; Zellweger & Sieger, 2012).

Due to their preference for invisible, incremental process innovation, family businesses are frequently considered less innovative (Economist, 2009). However, they can successfully capitalize on their unique characteristics and resources and excel in process innovation (Classen et al., 2014). Thus, family firms often achieve superior innovation output regarding the number and quality of patents or citations generated compared to non-family firms (Duran et al., 2016; Matzler et al., 2015). Therefore, family firms are often referred to as *hidden champions*, representing a significant share of innovation leaders in their respective markets while being almost invisible to outsiders (Simon, 1996).

Ultimately, family firm innovation depends on various influencing factors, not least on the overall heterogeneity among the different firms (De Massis, Di Minin, & Frattini, 2015). Furthermore, the general context, i.e., local and national conditions, industry, or company size, has an equally pronounced influence on innovation activities in family firms (Röd, 2016). For instance, researchers have found that family firms exhibit a higher risk appetite and increased research and development spending in times of poor business performance (Chrisman & Patel, 2012; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2015; Patel & Chrisman, 2014), while investment propensity de-

clines in financially stable times (Hayton et al., 2013; Patel & Chrisman, 2014). Thus, family firms can be more and less innovative depending on the circumstances (De Massis, Di Minin, & Frattini, 2015).

2.2. Family Firms in the German Construction Industry

One of the industries most dominated by family firms in Germany is the construction industry, in which 97% of companies are family-controlled, and 94% are owner-managed family firms (Gottschalk et al., 2019). Construction can be broadly considered an “industrial branch of manufacturing and trade related to building, repairing, renovating, and maintaining infrastructures” (Hussain et al., 2022, p. 111). In 2020, the sector generated around € 175 billion in revenues, employed more than 961,000 people, and accounted for 6% of gross value added in Germany, making it one of the most important economic sectors (Destatis, 2023).

At the same time, construction is a complex industry influenced by many macro- and microeconomic factors, distinguishing it from other industries. Authors Gruneberg and Francis (2018) state, “The construction sector shares many of its economic features with other industries but the combination of features in the construction process makes it unique” (p. vii). Critical drivers of complexity in construction include the contractors’ dependence on clients, a procurement system based on the lowest bidder principle, high fragmentation, the project-based building approach, and the plethora of regulations to comply with (e.g., Barbosa et al. 2017; Blayse and Manley 2004; Dubois and Gadde 2002; Hartmann 2006; Ribeirinho et al. 2020).

To achieve a broader understanding of the construction industry’s realities and complexities, the following chapters elaborate on the industry’s characteristics, highlight emerging trends and evolving industry dynamics and review innovation in construction based on existing literature.

2.2.1. Industry Characteristics

The construction industry’s complexity stems from multiple sources and affects construction companies’ operations. Fundamentally, construction is an industry that does not produce consumer goods or services but enables a functioning economy by building infrastructure, constructing buildings to work and live in, and creating roads to connect daily destinations (Gruneberg & Francis, 2018). Thereby, the client shapes the construction industry by deciding upon project requirements (Barlow, 2000; Blayse & Manley, 2004; Gann & Salter, 2000; Hartmann, 2006). Thus, contractors have little leeway to help shape the specifications. Instead, clients put contracts out to tender and subsequently award them based on the lowest bidder principle, i.e., the most favorable bidder in terms of price receives the contract (Barbosa et al., 2017; Barlow, 2000; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Kehl et al., 2022; Ribeirinho et al., 2020).

This price-focused procurement system creates enormous competitive pressure within the industry, with competing construction companies trying to outbid each other under

sometimes uneconomic conditions (Asgari et al., 2016; Myers, 2022). As a result, contractors often have limited budgets available (Abbott et al., 2007), rendering many companies to monetize on claims rather than good performance (Ribeirinho et al., 2020). At the same time, the industry’s low entry barriers result in a highly fragmented industry with predominantly small companies entering the market and exerting additional competitive pressure (Barbosa et al., 2017; Barlow, 2000; Baumanns et al., 2016; Dulaimi et al., 2002; Fischer et al., 2014; Kehl et al., 2022; Lindblad & Guerrero, 2020; Ribeirinho et al., 2020; Winch, 1998). In 2022, companies with fewer than 49 employees accounted for 96.6% of total construction companies (Destatis, 2023).

Due to the ever-changing requirements and specifics of a construction project, the construction industry is characterized by a project-based nature (Barlow, 2000; Lindblad & Guerrero, 2020; Ribeirinho et al., 2020), presenting construction companies with varying, project-dependent actor constellations, non-influenceable externalities, and challenges due to limited standardization opportunities, impacting overall industry performance.

First, since each project is awarded to the most favorable contractor, the constellation of stakeholders differs from project to project, requiring a variety of contractors with different responsibilities to be coordinated throughout the process (Barlow, 2000; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Kehl et al., 2022; Ribeirinho et al., 2020). Dubois and Gadde (2002) refer to this ongoing change in actor constellations across different construction projects as “loose couplings” (p. 15), impeding productivity, limiting economies of scale, and diminishing the quality of deliverables and customer satisfaction (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Ribeirinho et al., 2020).

Secondly, each project is subject to different externalities that executing organizations can hardly influence, i.e., the natural conditions on site (Barlow, 2000; Lindblad & Guerrero, 2020; Ribeirinho et al., 2020). Therefore, construction companies operate under high levels of unpredictability and cyclicity and must always anticipate setbacks during the project resulting from external influences, including weather conditions, changes in stakeholder constellations, and other factors beyond their control (Ribeirinho et al., 2020). These non-controllable parameters limit the plannability and, thus, the projects’ productivity (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Since the project-based nature further requires on-site task execution, externalities can severely impede project progress (Lindblad & Guerrero, 2020).

Lastly, as the high individuality and project-based nature of construction projects presents few possibilities for standardization, construction work still requires a high proportion of manual labor, limiting overall productivity (Kehl et al., 2022; Ribeirinho et al., 2020). In this context, the increasing shortage of skilled workers in the construction industry, with 70,000 vacancies in 2018 (Kehl et al., 2022), is detrimental (Ribeirinho et al., 2020).

In addition to the project-specific requirements, the construction industry and its projects are subject to high safety standards and regulations that executing construction com-

panies must always ensure, which further impedes productivity (Barbosa et al., 2017; Blayse & Manley, 2004; Bygballe & Ingemansson, 2014; Gambatese & Hallowell, 2011; Kehl et al., 2022; Ribeirinho et al., 2020).

Thus, in summary, construction companies are confronted with a multitude of aspects that they need to cope with and for which they need to develop strategies to run their business successfully and competitively. As new trends and changes emerge, the need for such strategies is even more emphasized.

2.2.2. Trends and Industry Dynamics

New studies on construction transformation predict that the industry will likely look different in five to ten years (Ribeirinho et al., 2020). This transformation is driven by emerging megatrends, including digitization, globalization, sustainability requirements, changing socio-demographics, as well as geopolitical developments and general structural change (e.g., Baumanns et al. 2016; Berbner et al. 2023; Saiz and Salazar 2017; Zeitner and Peyinghaus 2015).

Due to these industry shifts, project complexity is predicted to increase (Barlow, 2000). On the one hand, more sophisticated customers increasingly consider the total cost of ownership (TCO) in their decisions rather than just the initial acquisition cost, elevating their requirements and standards (Ribeirinho et al., 2020). Thereby, the social and political pressure to ensure sustainability is further intensified, forcing construction companies to consider new materials, alternative engines, and the like (Fischer et al., 2014; Ribeirinho et al., 2020). On the other hand, the need for more skilled workers complicates complex projects' execution, increasing pressure on construction companies to establish more flexible structures within the company to perform tasks despite personnel shortages (Ribeirinho et al., 2020). Most recently, the Ukraine war has also significantly impacted the construction industry. In a new PwC study on how the industry deals with current challenges, 57% of the companies surveyed reported experiencing the war's consequences (Berbner et al., 2023). In the same study, 9 out of 10 companies noted the unpredictable price development and disruptions in their supply chain, which is particularly detrimental given the increasing cost pressure for affordable housing (Ribeirinho et al., 2020). Several companies surveyed indicated that this development would cause them to reposition themselves over the next few years (Berbner et al., 2023).

As a result, there is already an initial trend for construction companies to either consolidate or specialize in their respective field of operation to better meet changing requirements (Ribeirinho et al., 2020). In addition, they increasingly build their corporate brand to position themselves more selectively with customers and defend their market position (Ribeirinho et al., 2020). Other strategies include, above all, investing in the company's human resources by developing more sophisticated HR strategies (Ribeirinho et al., 2020) and by establishing partner networks both with suppliers and customers, as well as with so-called "innovation

brokers," e.g., universities, professional institutions, or construction research bodies (Bankvall et al., 2010; Barbosa et al., 2017; Blayse & Manley, 2004; Bygballe & Ingemansson, 2014; Ribeirinho et al., 2020; Winch & Courtney, 2007). Construction companies consider such partnerships a valuable means for trial and error, enabling innovation through knowledge exchange (Ribeirinho et al., 2020).

On the part of the construction product itself, contractors are increasingly diving into new modes of operation to meet sustainability, affordability, and efficiency requirements. In this respect, construction companies are trying to pursue a product-based rather than project-based approach to construction, using industrialization to standardize the end product as far as possible (Barbosa et al., 2017; Bygballe & Ingemansson, 2014; Ribeirinho et al., 2020). The two buzzwords in this respect are serial and modular construction. Serial construction is the industrial and mass production of buildings or at least parts of them in factories. Modular construction extends serial production by assembling prefabricated components (modules) according to a building block principle (Bertram et al., 2019). These trends in component production enable construction companies to prepare construction sites more efficiently and, thus, to execute projects more leanly in light of evolving industry demands (Ribeirinho et al., 2020).

Lastly, digitizing products and processes represent one of the construction industry's most significant trends (Berbner et al., 2023; Bygballe & Ingemansson, 2014) with growing demand for simplified and digital interactions (Ribeirinho et al., 2020). Compared to other industries, e.g., the automotive or production industry, the construction industry lags digitally (Berbner et al., 2023; Ribeirinho et al., 2020). Nevertheless, companies were able to catch up significantly in 2022 compared to the previous year and are increasingly investing in their development (Berbner et al., 2023). In this sense, research and development spending has increased by 77% since 2013 (Ribeirinho et al., 2020). Along the way, companies are also investing more in technology, e.g., IoT (Internet of Things) or BIM (building information modeling), to share and utilize data more effectively in their decision-making process (Kehl et al., 2022; Ribeirinho et al., 2020).

Drawing on the PwC study's findings, the identified trends and developments will cause companies to reposition themselves or even conquer new business areas over the following years (Berbner et al., 2023; Ribeirinho et al., 2020). Thus, construction companies increasingly recognize that they need to address and pursue innovation more consciously (Dulaimi et al., 2003; Gann & Salter, 2000).

2.2.3. Innovation in the German Construction Industry

Innovation in construction is usually seen in relation to product, process, and organizational innovation, with construction companies having different opportunities for active involvement depending on the type of innovation (Anderson & Manseau, 1999; Laage-Hellman, 2015; Slaughter, 1998).

Product-related innovation mostly happens at the industry level, is comparatively visible to outsiders, and can be

relatively radical (Barrett & Sexton, 2006). These product innovations at the industry level usually involve new regulations and standards surrounding new materials or health and safety compliance (Abbott et al., 2007). Construction companies tend to refrain from actively participating in innovation at the industry level but react passively by adapting their behavior to external requirements (Harty, 2008).

Process-related innovation occurs at the project level, usually happens incrementally but impacts overall industry performance the most (Abbott et al., 2007). The innovation of processes involves adapted activity combinations for the optimized execution of these activities across company boundaries (Anderson & Manseau, 1999; Bygballe & Ingemansson, 2014). The primary aim is continuously improving day-to-day business through exchanging tacit knowledge across the project teams and drawing lessons for subsequent projects (Abbott et al., 2007; Fischer et al., 2014; Kehl et al., 2022). Although invisible to outsiders (Bygballe & Ingemansson, 2014), this type of innovation is prevalent in construction, as it helps industry players to plan and manage projects more effectively and efficiently to serve customer needs better (Bygballe & Ingemansson, 2014).

Organizational innovation demands the highest input from individual construction companies (Abbott et al., 2007). At the organizational level, innovation concerns the company's resources and capabilities, including radically or incrementally improved materials, products, subsystems, or business processes (Abbott et al., 2007). The latter can include changes in the organization's set-up, implementing new management routines, and pursuing alternative business directions (Anderson & Manseau, 1999; Bygballe & Ingemansson, 2014).

In the overall context, and compared to other industries, numerous studies have highlighted the construction industry's backwardness, labeling it as conservative, risk-averse, sluggish, and dependent on externals to stimulate innovation (e.g., Abbott et al. 2007; Gann and Salter 2000; Nicolini et al. 2001; Rosenberg 1982; Winch 1998; Woudhuysen and Abley 2003). However, Bresnen and Marshall (2000) noted that the industry's context significantly influences its participants' innovation behavior. After all, empirical research widely recognizes and supports that effective innovation management depends on several contextual variables (Damanpour, 1996; Frambach & Schillewaert, 2002; Scott & Bruce, 1994; Tidd, 2001). Thus, the fundamental contextual differences between construction and other industries are partly responsible for the observable disparities in innovation (Gambatese & Hallowell, 2011; Green et al., 2005).

Innovation bottlenecks primarily manifest at the industry and project level, i.e., concerning product and process innovation. Thereby, contextual factors influencing construction companies' innovativeness the most relate to the construction industry's overall framework and the project-based nature (Abbott et al., 2007).

- *Framework.* The construction industry's general framework proves to be an obstacle to innovation, for which

the industry's fragmentation – both at the horizontal industry level and at the vertical project level – is mainly responsible (Sexton & Barrett, 2003). First, fragmentation at the horizontal level limits overall innovation because the numerous small players do not have sufficient innovation capabilities and resources to contribute to the industry's innovativeness (Winch, 1998). Second, on the vertical level, fragmentation occurs due to the many parties involved in the project. As such, any innovation activity in the construction industry involves complex interactions within and across the company's boundaries (Barlow, 2000; Blayse & Manley, 2004; Marceau et al., 1999; Seaden & Manseau, 2001). Since most approaches to innovation must be negotiated with various stakeholders within the project coalition, including governments, suppliers, designers, general contractors, workforce, owners, or certification authorities, several innovation attempts become unattainable (Winch, 1998). In addition to this horizontal and vertical fragmentation, various health and safety regulations complicate the innovation process for construction companies as part of the overall framework (Blayse & Manley, 2004; Hartmann, 2006).

- *Project-based nature.* Gann and Salter (2000) stated that the “management of innovation is complicated by the discontinuous nature of project-based production in which, often, there are broken learning and feedback loops” (p. 961). The project-based approach to construction has two interdependent drivers that are incredibly inhibitive to innovation: the system of the lowest bidder and the constant shift in actor constellations (Abbott et al., 2007; Blayse & Manley, 2004; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Hartmann, 2006). Initially, the construction industry's procurement system, i.e., favoring the lowest bidder, leads to a situation in which companies compete on price instead of collaborating on a best-for-project basis, which severely hampers innovation (Blayse & Manley, 2004; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Hartmann, 2006). In addition, this procurement principle leads to a constant change in actor constellations. These “loose couplings” among involved stakeholders essentially prevent the creation of network effects (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 15), restraining interaction for mutual learning and, thus, innovation (Gann & Salter, 2000).

Consequently, the industry's general framework and the project-based nature significantly impact construction companies' innovation behavior, especially concerning product and process innovation.

Nevertheless, several construction companies strive for innovation despite adverse circumstances. These companies possess a set of organizational structures and apply dedicated management techniques to induce innovation at the organizational level (Blayse & Manley, 2004; Hartmann, 2006).

In this regard, highly innovative construction companies usually have an innovation strategy and actively promote

a culture of innovation (Blayse & Manley, 2004; Gambatese & Hallowell, 2011). Management techniques conducive to building this innovation capability include explicit advocacy of new ideas, conscious decision-making about the company's innovation activities' direction, and methodical and hierarchical support for the innovation process (Hartmann, 2006). Upper management support and the presence of an innovation champion within the company were found to have a particularly empowering effect in this context (Barlow, 2000; Blayse & Manley, 2004; Gambatese & Hallowell, 2011; Hartmann, 2006; Hausman, 2005; Howell & Higgins, 1990; Sexton & Barrett, 2003). As such, innovation frequently results from formal "top-down" initiatives, with senior management deciding on new working methods (Bygballe & Ingemansson, 2014). In addition, construction companies pursuing an innovation strategy usually invest more in research and development, increasing innovation capacity (Gambatese & Hallowell, 2011). Such development funding is aimed more at developing internal ideas; external innovation sources tend to be perceived as less valuable in the industry (Bygballe & Ingemansson, 2011).

Furthermore, innovative construction companies have a high absorptive capacity and knowledge-codified systems (Blayse & Manley, 2004). Absorptive capacity reflects the organization's propensity "to recognize the value of new, external information, assimilate it, and apply it (...)" (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990, p. 128). Similarly, innovative construction companies absorb and codify new knowledge and purposefully apply their lessons learned to new projects (Barlow, 2000; Blayse & Manley, 2004; Chinowsky & Carrillo, 2007; Gambatese & Hallowell, 2011; Sexton & Barrett, 2003). Thus, they foster innovation by facilitating knowledge flow between individuals and companies through interactions and transactions (Anderson & Manseau, 1999; Blayse & Manley, 2004; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Miozzo & Dewick, 2002).

Ultimately, collaboration is vital in construction innovation (Rutten et al., 2009). Partnerships for innovation in construction have been found to significantly improve the company's performance at both the project and organizational levels by improving the planning and execution of different project phases and integrating different levels of knowledge more quickly (Barlow, 2000). Especially concerning process-oriented innovation, for which knowledge transfer between project participants is vital, collaboration can increase performance immensely (Abbott et al., 2007; Fischer et al., 2014). Therefore, partnerships can lead to higher productivity, lower costs, shorter project duration, better quality, and higher customer satisfaction (Bresnen & Marshall, 2000, p. 231).

In summary, construction innovation can be distinguished into product, process, and organizational innovation, with varying degrees of influence for the individual players within the industry. At the product and process level, the construction industry's general framework and project-based nature limit construction innovation. Therefore, construction companies seek innovation at the organizational level by establishing respective organizational structures and applying dedicated management techniques. Lastly, collaboration and

partnerships for co-innovation have been referred to as enablers of innovation in the construction industry to generate performance improvements.

Against this background, collaboration with external parties, particularly startups, can be an effective means for construction companies to increase their performance and innovativeness to better cope with changing industry trends and dynamics. In this regard, researchers are beginning to examine patterns of co-innovation in construction (Bossink, 2004). However, previous research has primarily focused on collaborations with clients, suppliers, or fellow contractors. Innovation collaboration with startups has yet to be studied scientifically, providing the foundation for this study.

Thus, considering the underlying research objective, the following chapter reviews related literature on innovation collaborations between family firms and startups to obtain the first implications for answering the research question.

2.3. Innovation Collaboration Between Family Firms and Startups

As the construction industry's insights indicate, significant innovation potential exists in inter-firm collaboration. This particular type of open innovation allows involved organizations to achieve competitive advantage by sharing resources, know-how, and insights with each other (Block, 2012; Das & Teng, 2000; Gulati, 1995; Kale & Singh, 2009; Matzler et al., 2015; Muñoz-Bullón & Sanchez-Bueno, 2011; Un et al., 2010). Thereby, collaborative innovation is particularly valuable in overcoming resource and knowledge-related barriers to innovation (Feranita et al., 2017).

Recent studies suggest that innovation collaboration is even more successful when the involved parties contribute complementary skills and resources (Löher et al., 2017). Therefore, researchers and practitioners increasingly consider collaboration between established family firms and startups to be very successful in developing innovative products or services (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Heider et al., 2020; Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017; Mocker et al., 2015).

Classified mainly by their characteristics, startups are "young and small" businesses whose structures are barely formalized and whose founders are pivotal in directing the startup's activities (Engelen et al., 2015, p. 10). Due to their low degree of formalization, they often exhibit a high degree of flexibility and independence, which allows them to quickly and radically develop and test innovations and new business models leveraging external capital (Achleitner, 2018; Engelen et al., 2015).

Although quite different in their structures and corporate cultures, family firms and startups are united by their entrepreneurial spirit, providing a solid basis for cooperation. Since both organizations are run by the entrepreneur, short decision-making paths due to flat hierarchies prevail on both sides, providing prospects for agile cooperation and, thus, increasing the chances of success (Löher et al., 2017). The involved parties' complementary strengths enhance these prospects for success. The startup's ability to

execute promptly complements the family firm's long-term thinking. Moreover, while startups have a higher risk appetite, family firms are more capable of successfully managing this risk. Startups' radical innovation approaches can complement incremental, evolutionary developments within the family firm, and respective network effects can be leveraged to benefit from one another (Leitner et al., 2019). By entering collaborations, family firms and startups can utilize these complementary strengths to overcome internal constraints they would find difficult to address on their own (Heider et al., 2020).

From the family firm's point of view, collaboration with startups can be very intriguing, as the co-development of new products and the penetration of new markets can significantly increase their innovation potential, thereby defending their market position and ensuring long-term success (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017; Prügl et al., 2019). While family firms usually prefer to innovate incrementally, startups portray an opportunity for them to take a more radical approach to innovation to diversify and conquer new markets (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017; Mocker et al., 2015; Prügl et al., 2019). In addition, FSC represents an opportunity for family firms to gain access to new, innovative technologies and, thus, explore digitization potentials that they may not discover by themselves (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017; Prügl et al., 2019). By collaborating with startups, family firms also hope to attract highly qualified personnel to complement their human capital. Similarly, they seek to benefit from intangible aspects by exploring the startup's highly dynamic corporate culture and working methods, empowering family firms to challenge entrenched processes and structures (Löher et al., 2017; Prügl et al., 2019). Ultimately, there is also an incentive for family firms to cooperate with startups in pure financial investments (Leitner et al., 2019).

Startups, on the other hand, hope to gain first-hand industry knowledge through FSC to accelerate their learning and development (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017; Prügl et al., 2019). This learning process is particularly effective when product development and testing happen under real-life conditions, which FSC could facilitate (Löher et al., 2017). In this way, startups receive immediate feedback and can draw on valuable, existing family firm resources during their development phase (Löher et al., 2017). These resources include production resources, financial capital, supplier networks required for initial product development, and access to existing customer networks to benefit prototype testing (Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017; Prügl et al., 2019). In the process, startups can enhance their reputation to establish their product or service in the market (Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017). By testing their product under realistic conditions, startups can further identify precise-fit market positions, enabling them to scale faster and accelerate their success (Löher et al., 2017). Finally, startups also hope to access financial investments by coop-

erating with family firms (Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017; Prügl et al., 2019).

Family firms and startups cooperate in varying constellations to achieve the desired results. Following the differentiation of Leitner et al. (2019), who elaborate on types of collaborations explicitly related to FSC, a fundamental distinction can be made between collaboration, investment, and acquisition. Collaboration happens purely project-based, with both parties remaining independent of each other and merely exchanging resources and knowledge. An investment exceeds the scope of a mere collaboration, with the family firm acquiring minority stakes in the startup. Similarly, the startup's acquisition includes its entire takeover by the family-owned company (Leitner et al., 2019). Depending on the FSC type, collaboration varies in duration, intensity, scope, and trust, requiring different levels of commitment from the organizations involved (Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017; Mocker et al., 2015).

Despite the prospect of success resulting from FSC, challenges in the run-up to and during the collaboration are not inevitable. While it is not easy for either established family firms or startups to identify suitable partners in the first place (Armutat et al., 2015; Bannerjee et al., 2016; Baumgärtner et al., 2022), different characteristics, previously considered as complementary success factors, can lead to fear, prejudice, and different expectations in the process (Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017; Wallisch & Funke, 2016).

A frequently cited hurdle is the clash of two cultures, posing reconciliation challenges for the organizations involved (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Kawohl et al., 2015; Prügl et al., 2019; Wallisch & Funke, 2016). While family firms follow a long-term strategy and usually progress incrementally, startups focus on radical innovation to enable rapid growth and scalability (Löher et al., 2017). Thus, unconventional founders meet partly conservative employees and directors, affecting communication, trust, and appreciation toward the partner company (Garbs, 2017; Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017). For instance, family firms often criticize startups for behaving unreliably and for applying unrealistic company valuations while not even being able to guarantee fundamental requirements, such as data protection or a consistent corporate strategy (Leitner et al., 2019). Furthermore, family firms feel that startups often fail to articulate their product or service's added value to the incumbent, rendering the startup less credible from the incumbent's perspective (Bannerjee et al., 2016). These prejudices lead to increased risk aversion and the withholding of information on the part of the family firm (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017; Prügl et al., 2019). On the other hand, startups criticize this same risk aversion, frequently resulting in overly complicated and time-consuming decision-making processes that sacrifice flexibility and speed (Heider et al., 2020; Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017). Moreover, startups complain about potential collaboration partners not understanding what they can offer regarding technology, products, or services (Bannerjee et al., 2016), which they partly blame on the family firm's conservatism

(Leitner et al., 2019). Thus, barriers center around different expectations, prejudices, cultures, working styles, and communication issues (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017).

To overcome these barriers to reap the benefits of complementarity, researchers present mechanisms to mitigate the perceived limitations (Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017).

Startups, for instance, should acquire industry knowledge to emphasize more explicitly what added value they could provide for the family firm (Löher et al., 2017). To get traction with family firms in the first place, it helps to make contact via the private network (Hofmann, 2016; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017). If the founders have previous experience in an established company, this will further facilitate the collaboration by providing them with more credibility (Löher et al., 2017). In addition, the founders should tolerate the more complex decision-making processes in established companies (Löher et al., 2017).

The family firm, for its part, should have a fundamental openness and willingness to make decisions and, as far as possible, shed worries about security (Löher et al., 2017). Management support is paramount, especially in preparing for possible setbacks during the cooperation (Löher et al., 2017). To further support FSC emergence, family firms should actively search for collaboration partners (Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017).

Furthermore, both parties should collectively engage in initial goal setting and expectation management, allowing them to communicate concerns up front, developing sensitivity to the other company's structures, ensuring a human fit, and forming interdisciplinary teams (Löher et al., 2017). Leitner et al. (2019) further suggest pursuing shared visions and values, engaging in team-building activities, expanding the cooperation step-by-step, ensuring continuous knowledge transfer, and setting mutual milestones.

With the collaboration partners becoming aware of and applying these mechanisms, they can deploy complementary skills proficiently to create win-win situations without either company having to transform its structures or characteristics fundamentally (Löher et al., 2017). Indeed, since some FSC benefits derive precisely from these organizational differences, it is vital to preserve the different cultures despite associated adversities (Hofmann, 2016).

In summary, there is considerable innovation potential in the collaboration between family businesses and startups; both can leverage their complementary strengths and resources to create win-win situations. While family firms aim to increase their innovativeness, act upon trends, or transform their business models, startups seek access to industry knowledge, capital, resources, or reputational gains. Despite these incentives, the organizations involved encounter challenges from different cultures, structures, goals, and expectations. Therefore, to reap the benefits of collaboration, family firms and startups apply independently influenced or jointly developed mitigation strategies to overcome these challenges.

Contemporary literature concludes that almost every small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) with experience in startup collaboration would engage in an FSC again in the future (Baharian & Wallisch, 2017, S. 14). Nevertheless, the considerable potential is currently left untapped, as many established SMEs are not yet involved in FSCs (Baharian & Wallisch, 2017; Brink & Schleppehorst, 2015; Müller et al., 2016).

Family-owned construction companies are no exception to this. Therefore, the present study aims to address this deficit theoretically and practically. More specifically, it aims to uncover impediments to FSC in the construction industry and propose mitigation mechanisms. Moreover, it examines what role startup collaborations can play for family-owned construction companies in preparing for (future) industry challenges.

To elaborate on how this knowledge was obtained, the study's methodological framework is subsequently explained before the overall results are presented comprehensively.

3. Methodological Approach

Having reviewed the theoretical background, this chapter explains the methodological approach underlying the present study. The latter aims to expand the research area around FSC by examining innovation collaboration between family firms and startups in the construction industry. To this end, a theory-building case study was conducted to uncover the poorly investigated directions of FSC in construction. The following section first presents the chosen methodology and study design before explaining the data collection and analysis process.

3.1. Method, Case Study Design & Data Collection

This study aims to investigate the dynamics of innovation collaboration between family firms and startups in the construction industry, an industry heavily dominated by family firms, thus contributing to the emerging research field around FSC. Thereby, the goal is to make a theoretical contribution to existing literature and provide practical input. One form of qualitative research that allows for both theoretical and practical contribution is the case study method, developed and informed by De Massis and Kotlar (2014), Eisenhardt (1989), and Yin (1984, 2003). Case study analysis is a commonly used research method in organizational and family business research (De Massis et al., 2012; Eisenhardt, 1989), as it enables the profound examination of a phenomenon in its real-world context (Yin, 2003) by enabling an "understanding (of) the dynamics within single settings" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 533).

Since the topic of FSC in the construction industry has yet to be addressed scientifically, this study deploys an exploratory, multi-case approach. This approach to case study analysis is particularly well suited to describing a complex phenomenon poorly researched scientifically and for which new theories have yet to be established (De Massis & Kotlar,

2014, p. 2). Exploratory case studies are commonly used to understand organizational dynamics or processes and should be applied if the goal is to understand *how* and *why* a phenomenon occurs. Examining multiple case studies helps to cross-reference whether observations of the phenomena occurring are unique to a particular case or can be replicated across case studies (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). This cross-case examination ensures that the newly developed theory is based on multiple foundations and does not comprise case-dependent biases (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2003).

As proposed by Eisenhardt (1989) and De Massis and Kotlar (2014), the underlying research questions were first determined with reference to contemporary literature. In this respect, the study aims to identify impediments to FSC in the construction industry and mechanisms to overcome these impediments. Furthermore, the analysis examines what role startup collaborations play for family-owned construction companies in preparing for (future) industry challenges. Appropriate case studies were then selected to answer these questions tangibly using real-world examples. To identify relevant case studies, the researcher's existing private network in the construction industry and publicly available information, e.g., from company websites and press releases, were used as initial sources of information to determine whether a company is already engaged in FSC. In sampling respondents relevant to the case studies, cross-case variation was ensured to increase the results' generalizability (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). Since the study explicitly focuses on the construction industry, FSC could not be considered across industries but only in industry subgroups. Thus, the individual case studies aimed to sample different construction companies, each specializing in another sub-segment of the overall industry. Furthermore, each FSC's solution optimized a different area within the construction company. In this way, the study aimed to increase response variance and, thus, generalizability.

Against this background, four case studies were performed. Each case comprised interviews with four stakeholders to examine different perspectives and compare the claims made. In addition to the four case studies, 24 expert interviews were conducted, predominantly with owners or managing directors of family-run construction companies based in Germany. Unlike the case studies, the expert interviewees were selected solely based on their general open-mindedness toward FSC. Previous collaboration with startups on the part of the family firm was no selection criterion. This sampling scheme should help explore what prevents construction companies from engaging in an FSC in the first place as part of the first research question.

Both case and expert interviews followed a semi-structured interview guideline. In this way, sufficient comparability among the case studies could be ensured while at the same time allowing for the conversation to flourish beyond the guiding questions. Four questionnaires were prepared, each tailored to the respective interviewee category. Thus, one questionnaire was designed for family firm owners and man-

agers (with varying questions according to whether the family firm has already engaged in an FSC), one for startups, and one for family firm employees. Thereby, questions were formulated to understand *how* and *why* patterns occur.

Depending on the respective interviewee, the questionnaire featured between 13 and 21 guiding questions, organized into leitmotifs based on the research questions:

- Overarching trends and industry dynamics
- Innovation and new business models in construction
- Motives that led to or discouraged from FSC
- FSC: Motivations and expectations, barriers and enablers, key results
- Relevance of FSC in addressing trends
- Family firm influence

Prior to each interview, secondary data about the company and the interviewees was obtained via their company websites, LinkedIn profiles, or press releases to ensure good preparation and objectivity during the interview. Notes and audio recordings were always briefly analyzed in the follow-up to slightly adapt interview questions to ask subsequent interviewees even more precisely about emerging patterns.

A total of 40 interviews, including 31 interviewees from 26 family firms and nine interviewees from five startups, were conducted between February and April 2023 either via Microsoft Teams or in person. Detailed information on the individual case studies and expert interviews can be obtained from Table 1. 38 participants consented to audio recording and processing, while two refused. The interviews lasted 48 minutes on average, resulting in 32.5 hours of audio material. The interview period was terminated when data saturation emerged. Subsequently, the audio recordings were transcribed, and the transcripts were used for interview data analysis.

3.2. Data Analysis

The next step was to analyze and reduce the data collected to obtain validated results that help answer the research questions. For this purpose, a three-step process, as proposed by De Massis and Kotlar (2014), Eisenhardt (1989), and Yin (2003), was applied to extract critical findings and conceptualize the theoretical model systematically. MAXQDA, a software specialized in qualitative research analysis, was used to support this process.

First, the case study and expert interview transcripts were read and coded. Recurring codes attributable to a particular subject were then grouped into categories. Again, categories that stood out concisely were consolidated into higher-level themes and those into aggregate dimensions, representing the highest level of abstraction in case study analysis (Gioia et al., 2013). Next, the individual cases were analyzed in single-case analyses. These analyses provided an understanding of

Table 1: Case Overview (Source: Interviews, company websites & LinkedIn profiles)

Case	Core Business Family Firm (FF)	Core Business Startup (SU)	FSC Type
Case A	Building construction, infrastructure, production	IoT solutions for SMEs (hardware & software)	Collaboration & Investment (Product & use case validation)
Case B	Real Estate	Equipment, material, and personnel management (software)	Collaboration & Investment (Product validation)
Case C	Building construction, (special) underground construction, project development	Building process management (software)	Collaboration & Investment (Idea & use case validation)
Case D	Sewer construction, earthworks, local road construction, pipeline & hydraulic engineering	Digital device and building material management (software)	Collaboration (Product validation)

what FSC looked like in each case, leading to initial elaborations of the theoretical model. In the third step, a cross-case analysis was used to uncover analogies and discrepancies between the individual case studies and refine the findings obtained thus far. Following the single- and cross-case analyses, observations and patterns were cross-referenced with the expert interviews to substantiate the findings. This process further consolidated the results and refined the theoretical model. In addition, first-order codes and second-order themes were continuously cross-checked with secondary data and literature to ensure external validity.

This three-step analysis resulted in a theoretical model with an underlying data structure that includes six aggregated dimensions related to barriers, coping mechanisms, and the future viability of FSC in construction. Figure 1 depicts the theoretical model.

4. Findings

The following section presents the case study and expert interviews' findings on innovation collaboration between family firms and startups in the construction industry. The study analyzed FSC impediments and how these can be mitigated by the organizations involved. In addition, it examined what role startup collaborations play for family-owned construction companies in preparing for (future) industry challenges. Against this background, the data was analyzed and aggregated into a theoretical model.

Drawing on the findings from case studies and expert interviews, FSC in construction can be considered in three parts. The first part concerns the impediments and corresponding mitigation strategies in the run-up to the actual cooperation. The second part relates to how involved organizations manage impediments during the FSC, leveraging tried and tested mitigation mechanisms. Finally, the third part highlights the FSC's impact on the viability of family-owned construction companies in an evolving construction industry.

Based on this three-part consideration of FSC in construction, derived from both single-case and cross-case analyses,

further informed by expert interviews, the theoretical model (Figure 1) has emerged. The latter illustrates how distinct mechanisms employed by the organizations involved guide the FSC's progression from the pre-collaboration phase to future outcomes. The detailed results will be explained in the following chapters.

4.1. Shared Motivation With Impairments in Challenges and Perceptions

The analysis initially focuses on internal and external parameters to explore the observed pre-collaboration impediments' and mitigation mechanisms' causes and effects. To this end, this chapter first analyzes the internal factors, i.e., illuminates the family firms' and startups' perspectives on FSC prior to the collaboration.

Shared motivation. Across the case studies, family firms and startups fundamentally shared a similar motivation for FSC. In particular, the involved parties aimed to co-create viable solutions that benefit both parties by leveraging their respective strengths and resources. Startups aimed to draw on the incumbent's expertise to develop an optimized solution to gain broad market acceptance in the economically attractive construction industry. At the same time, family firms sought inspiration and support from startups to improve an aspect of their business, hoping to help shape the solution's particulars through collaboration.

More specifically, in Cases A, B, and C, the startups initiated the FSC. In each case, the founding team uncovered optimization potential and looked for practical partners to advance their initial idea jointly. The respective family firms were generally very open-minded towards innovation, understood the catch-up potential identified by the startup, and, thus, agreed to the FSC. In contrast, Case D involved the startup's spin-off from another family-owned construction company, whereby the founding family firm had recognized a market gap they aimed to close. Thus, they sought further collaborating partners to help validate their product, which led to FSC D. As in the other cases, FF D recognized that the solution would offer optimization potential, prompting them to collaborate with SU D. Thus, each FSC was estab-

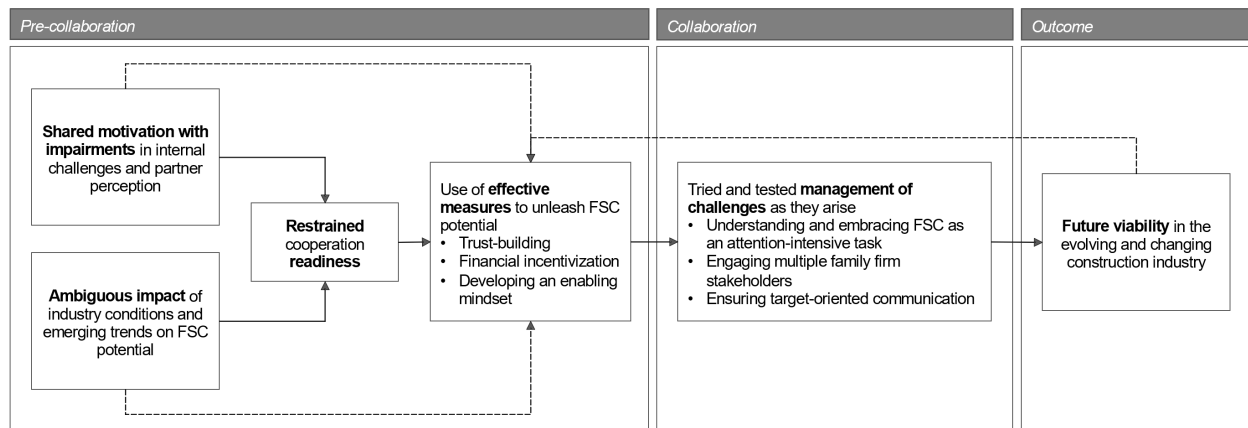


Figure 1: Theoretical Model (Source: Own illustration based on the case studies and expert interviews)

lished based on the common desire to advance an initial idea or product to create viable solutions for the construction industry, providing a common ground before the FSC.

Nevertheless, insights from case studies and expert interviews revealed that this shared motivation can initially be compromised by both parties facing *internal challenges* and family firms without FSC experience possessing *preconceived notions* about startups, impacting FSC potential on their part.

Coping with individual challenges. Case study and expert interviewees emphasized that FSC potential can initially be hampered by startups and family firms facing individual challenges. While startups reported challenges in identifying and acquiring suitable partners, family-owned construction companies noted constraints related to daily business, resource availability, and an overall lack of startup access.

According to the case studies, startups face two inter-related pre-collaboration challenges concerning knowledge and partner acquisition, translating into a “chicken-and-egg problem” in finding partners. To better tailor their solution to industry requirements, startups would need more in-depth industry knowledge, which they could gain during an FSC. However, family firms often require prior industry knowledge to enter an FSC in the first place. Case studies and expert interviews revealed that family firms without prior experience in FSC especially adopt a skeptical position if the startup lacks industry knowledge. Thus, this matter initially creates a significant challenge for startups, constraining FSC potential. Except for Case D, the spin-off, all case startups reported that their most significant pre-collaboration challenge was finding open-minded partners.

Family-owned construction companies, on the other hand, reported facing challenges concerning day-to-day business, limited resources, and the general lack of startup access. These impediments were partially confirmed by the case study family firms but were primarily identified and informed through expert interviews.

The first significant internal barrier emphasized by interviewees is day-to-day operations. Most construction companies are occupied winning contracts, participating in tenders, or executing mandates. As a result, interviewees reported

that there is little time and sometimes little willingness to deal with topics that do not directly impact day-to-day business, impeding FSC opportunities.

Simultaneously, FSC requires a high level of resource commitment from the incumbent regarding human resources and time, which many family firms cannot provide. FF C, for instance, noted that they could not pursue collaborations like FSC C on a large scale because, given their size, they do not possess the necessary resources to do so. Other interviewees reported that they could only pursue FSC intentions because they have at least one other managing director who runs the operational business, ensuring that the latter is not neglected in the face of innovation. Thus, the resource element is a significant obstacle to FSC emergence in the construction industry, as Interviewee 17 summarized:

“The challenge is how much time to invest because the personnel capacity of medium-sized companies is not that large. And [...] the person who can say the most, i.e., a department head for structural engineering or civil engineering, is also very involved with other topics.” (CEO (FF), Interviewee 17, Expert)

The last strongly emphasized FSC hurdle for family-owned construction companies is their fundamental lack of startup access, as confirmed by most interviewees who have yet to collaborate. Despite their great interest in FSC, many interviewees did not know where and how to contact startups for an initial exchange about FSC prospects, hindering FSC emergence in the construction industry.

Thus, the startups’ partner acquisition challenge and the family-owned construction companies’ constraints related to daily business, resource availability, and startup access can initially limit FSC adoption in the construction industry.

Initial partner perception. Case study and expert interviewees with prior experience in FSC generally demonstrated positive perceptions of their collaboration partners. For instance, family firms described startups as unconventional, intelligent, fast, and eager, capable of challenging the traditional market to find interesting, new approaches to solving

problems. Startups, on the other hand, considered family-owned construction companies honest and open collaboration partners who sometimes work chaotically but allow suggestions for improvement.

Nevertheless, initial perception is not always as positive. Some case study and expert interviewees with prior FSC experience even acknowledged that some of their positive perceptions have only emerged during the FSC. Initial partner perception – especially among family firms that have yet to cooperate – can be much poorer, negatively affecting initial FSC potential.

Some interviewees, including FF D, perceived startups as partly underestimating the industry's complexity. As a result, family-owned construction companies felt that startups have not yet developed market-revolutionizing products that would be worthwhile to invest in or support via an FSC. In addition, FF A criticized that startups' promises sometimes differ from the product's actual development maturity, supported by other expert interviews. In some cases, this aspect has led to family firms discovering only during the collaboration that much more development work than initially anticipated was needed, leaving them feeling betrayed. Such adverse experiences rendered failed construction companies more skeptical of future FSC, radiating FSC-reducing effects on other companies. Finally, family-owned construction companies' most strongly pronounced concern about startups is that they primarily pursue shortsighted exit strategies, which family firms perceived as incompatible with their idea of (family) entrepreneurship. As a result, some incumbents found themselves reluctant to enter FSCs based on their preconceived perceptions of startups.

On the contrary, the startups' perception of family-owned construction companies did not negatively influence their FSC intentions but motivated them in their development. In Cases B and C, for instance, the startups perceived their family-owned counterparts as slightly inexperienced in applying digital tools but open to new opportunities, which motivated the startup team to take them along in that direction. They also appreciated construction companies' open and honest feedback, which empowered and facilitated their development work. Only SU D noted construction companies' price sensitivity as slightly hindering the process, as it requires much convincing concerning necessary investments. Overall, however, the startups' perceptions of family-owned construction companies did not reduce FSC readiness on their part.

Thus, despite startups' FSC-enabling perceptions of family-owned construction companies, the incumbent's perceptions of startups may constrain FSC potential.

In summary, there is a common interest in FSC on behalf of respective collaboration partners. However, internal barriers relating to individual challenges and perceptions may have an inhibiting effect on FSC emergence. These insights yield the following propositions:

Proposition 1a: The family firm's resource limitations, focus on revenue-generating day-to-day

business, and lack of startup access, as well as the startup's difficulty in finding suitable collaboration partners, pose inherent challenges to the respective parties, limiting FSC potential.

Proposition 1b: Startups' perceptions of family-owned construction companies inspire FSC intentions, while the opposite is observed in family-owned construction companies' initial perceptions of startups.

4.2. Ambiguous Influence of Externalities on FSC Potential

Alongside the somewhat aggravating internal circumstances, the construction industry's external environment was reported to constitute a harsh environment for FSC emergence as well. The analysis revealed that external factors have an ambiguous influence on FSC potential in that family-owned construction companies find themselves discouraged from engaging in FSC by general industry conditions while, at the same time, emerging trends pressure them to adapt to new circumstances, arousing interest in FSC.

Nature of the industry limits FSC potential. Throughout the interviews, interviewees noted the construction industry's discouraging effects on FSC emergence. The most significant barriers identified by interviewees include client dependence, low margins, the multitude of regulations, and the decentralized nature of construction projects.

First, many family-owned construction companies interviewed did not consider themselves drivers of innovation. Instead, they deliver the client's requirements, with little room for involvement, as FF A described:

"[...] We build other people's ideas. That means if a client and an architect say they want to build a wooden house, we will build a wooden house for them. We are not asked to contribute too much innovation." (CEO (FF), Interviewee 1, Case A)

Thus, without explicit customer demand for innovation, some interviewees reported that construction companies have less incentive to propose and adopt innovation, limiting FSC potential.

If anything, interviewees noted, customers seek passive innovation, i.e., organizational or process innovation for leaner project execution, which translates into more favorable prices. However, this same price focus results in family-owned construction companies operating under shallow profit margins, limiting their willingness and overall financial capacity to invest in innovation. As a result, interviewees noted, FSCs are often disregarded because they initially incur costs without providing immediate benefits.

Another factor that several interviewees perceived as limiting FSC is the multitude of regulations that must be complied with. For instance, FF C noted that the German construction market still lacks highly innovative products, which he partly blamed on the countless standards and regulations a product must meet to be approved on the market in the first

place. Expert interviews supported this assumption, finding that many approaches to building more innovatively fail because the necessary regulations cannot be met. In that regard, the industry also represents a harsh environment for startups and the emergence of FSC.

Lastly, the decentralized nature of operations and unique conditions of almost every construction project were reported as hurdles for FSC. According to Cases B, C, and D, decentralization in construction is a challenge in executing FSC, as many steps and stakeholders along the value chain have to be involved in highly complex, decentralized processes. As a result, some family-owned construction companies felt discouraged from attempting an FSC as they would need to engage and negotiate with many stakeholders along the way.

The following quote aptly summarizes the construction industry's discouraging impact on FSC potential:

"[...] Even if a startup wants to emerge somewhere and solve these problems, this startup first needs a gigantic reach and depth of impact until all process participants become involved. And that is why I do not think many startups want to enter this entire construction sector. Because I find myself in an industry that is extremely price-sensitive, [and] does not want to spend money on things it does not know anything about. [...] And then, in the end, an end customer who says, 'I do not care about all that anyway because the cheapest one gets the order. I do not need innovation [...].'" (CEO (FF), Interviewee 5, Expert)

Nevertheless, interviewees reported increasing pressure on construction companies to cope with emerging trends and compensate for the last years' shortcomings, arousing interest in FSC.

Industry trends reinforce the need for FSC. According to the case studies and expert interviews, the major trends and challenges in the construction industry include sustainability, digitization, and skilled labor shortage. In light of these drivers, construction companies are taking a more active approach toward innovation, arousing interest in FSC.

The first big trend outlined by interviewees is sustainability. As one of the largest CO₂ emitters (EDGAR/JRC, 2022), interviewees reported increasing pressure on construction companies to develop sustainability concepts, promote a circular economy, and use alternative building materials, engines, and energy sources. However, many family-owned construction companies interviewed perceived sustainability measures as requiring investments, attention, and creativity, which they partly felt overwhelmed with. Therefore, they expressed high hopes for startups to help them cope with this challenge, inspiring FSC potential.

The second significant trend in the construction industry that sparks FSC is digitization. As FF A and SU D explained, family-owned construction companies increasingly recognize that digitization and the resulting connectivity can provide enormous efficiency benefits by streamlining processes, creating more transparency, and enabling better data utilization.

These elements were perceived as a great advantage, especially in the competition for the most cost-effective bidder. Simultaneously, the digitization of products and processes remains one of the areas with the highest potential for improvement, with many startups entering the market to create change. As such, all case study startups were founded to advance digitization and connectivity in the construction industry. Thus, there is FSC potential in digitization.

As outlined by the case studies and expert interviews, the third prominent challenge in the construction industry is the growing shortage of skilled personnel. In this respect, family firms reported needing to develop appropriate personnel strategies to recruit, motivate and retain employees, and seek alternatives to cushion these shortfalls. Among others, AI and robotics were reported to entail promising prospects, with some family firms, including FF B, already embarking on development partnerships with universities and startups. Therefore, several family firms surveyed perceived FSC as a promising measure to address the personnel issue.

In summary, the findings revealed that family-owned construction companies initially face an innovation dilemma in that the construction industry's circumstances negatively influence their willingness to innovate while emerging trends and developments simultaneously stimulate it. Thus, the external influence's impact on FSC potential is ambiguous, yielding the following propositions:

Proposition 2a: The construction industry's client dependence, low-profit margins, numerous regulations, and the decentralized nature of construction projects present a challenging environment for FSC emergence.

Proposition 2b: Severe labor shortage, deficits in digitization, and sustainability regulations put increasing pressure on construction companies to strategically address these trends, creating opportunities for FSC.

4.3. Restrained Cooperation Readiness

Despite a general interest in FSC and the pressure to innovate from industry trends, external and internal factors combined may initially induce restrained cooperation readiness among the respective parties. Throughout the interviews, this reticence was reflected in family firms' risk aversion and startups' challenge of managing complexity due to individuality.

Risk aversion. Family firms' risk aversion toward FSC, caused by external and internal factors, manifested in their reluctance to share internal know-how, concerns about the startup's longevity, and hesitancy to engage in projects they cannot estimate. Risk aversion was particularly pronounced among family firms that have not yet participated in an FSC.

As such, some interviewees demonstrated risk aversion by avoiding sharing their internal knowledge. They feared that by sharing and commercializing their know-how via the FSC, competitors could participate in the family firm's knowledge,

which would cause the family firm to lose its unique selling point and, thus, a competitive edge in the highly competitive construction industry. Thus, their reluctance to share internal knowledge restrained family firms' cooperation readiness.

Furthermore, some family-owned construction companies interviewed were concerned about the startup's longevity, reflecting their initial perceptions of startups as focused on short-term success and mainly pursuing exit strategies. Family firms feared that the startup could be sold to a corporation, resulting in a loss of costly development work. Furthermore, they assumed that, upon an exit, the startup would no longer be able to support them in the way they are comfortable with and, in some cases, require. As a result, some family firms were hesitant to engage in an FSC at all.

Lastly, risk aversion manifested in family firms' hesitancy to engage in projects they can hardly assess. Interviewees noted that family firms struggle to assess startups' viability, some of whose ideas are comparably distant from their core business model, which causes them to refrain from risky investments and participating in an FSC that could fail. Thus, the startup's anticipated failure reduces family firms' willingness to engage in FSC.

In summary, family firms' fear of disclosing internal know-how, uncertainty about startups' longevity, and hesitancy to engage in projects they cannot estimate, reflect family-owned construction companies' risk aversion, initially constraining FSC readiness.

Complexity due to individuality. Apart from the family firms' risk aversion, startups reported obstacles to FSC adoption arising from the construction industry's individuality and resulting complexity.

Due to construction's project-based nature and high individuality, startups recalled facing significant challenges in depicting holistic processes, as almost every construction company approaches projects differently. In this context, the limited selection of partners was reported to have an aggravating effect, as startups only gain relatively one-sided insights into the processes of individual companies. Worst case, case study startups recalled, the limited selection of partners might lead to the startup developing a too-unilateral solution that does not apply to the broader market if they only get feedback from a few practitioners. Thus, apart from SU A, who offers a universally applicable hardware solution, all case startups were initially concerned with the challenge of mapping processes holistically. SU C emphasized:

"[...] The construction industry is very, very heterogeneous [...] both in terms of data per se, in terms of the software used, in terms of processes, how construction sites are planned in the first place, these are actually very, very different. [...] The path until the construction site starts is completely different for many companies. And that is of course difficult for us to map." (Co-Founder & CEO (SU), Interviewee 19, Case C)

As a result, interviewees noted that a tendency has emerged for startups to cherry-pick small parts of the overall construction process, which are similar in almost every construction company, and try to optimize those. However, even though these solutions are high performing in their sub-process, this development generates a plethora of offers on the market, among which the incumbents have to weigh up. Especially FF C found the proper selection of suitable startups hindering the emergence of new FSCs, as it takes much time to pre-screen suitable candidates:

"[...] It is simply a challenge to make a good selection, because there are already so many offers, and everyone knows [...] that the construction industry is poorly digitized. And then there are just a lot of offers flooding in. And you have to find your way through this jungle." (Digitization & Optimization (FF), Interviewee 14, Case C)

Consequently, the findings revealed that some family firms hesitate to spend tedious time and resources reviewing the many offerings on the market, resulting in FSC not materializing.

The third FSC-limiting constraint, partly resulting from this multitude of software tools, was identified in interface management. Case study and expert interviewees noted that most construction companies want to ensure interface compatibility with existing software products when introducing new tools to allow for a smooth data flow within the company. However, ensuring this compatibility can be challenging for startups. SU D noted that programming interfaces with existing tools is generally straightforward from a technical perspective. However, as the industry is missing uniform data standards, the solution has to be adapted to a different data basis with every new client, which is complicated and time-consuming, creating significant FSC impediments. Interface management was perceived as a significant challenge in Cases C and D, with expert testimonies substantiating these findings. Some family-owned construction companies even mentioned refraining from pursuing an FSC if they feel the new solution is incompatible with existing software tools.

In sum, the high degree of individuality in construction manifests differently and constraints FSC potential. Startups have difficulty mapping holistic processes, resulting in many small-scale solutions that are difficult to integrate due to lacking data standards.

Considering that risk aversion and technical challenges related to individuality in construction initially limit FSC readiness, the following propositions can be established:

Proposition 3a: The combination of internal and external factors (cf. propositions 1 and 2) creates risk aversion among family-owned construction companies, limiting their willingness to cooperate.

Proposition 3b: Startups face complexity due to individuality in construction, presenting impediments to FSC implementation for them and family-owned construction companies.

4.4. Use of Effective Measures to Unleash FSC Potential

To mitigate pre-collaboration impediments and unlock FSC potential, case study participants and expert interviewees with prior FSC experience proposed effective mechanisms. While startups should prioritize trust building and create financial incentives, family firms should establish the right mindset to enable FSC.

Trust-building. Across the case study interviews, trust was emphasized as a critical factor in unlocking FSC potential. The most effective trust-building measures reported include interpersonal fit, professionalism on the part of the startup, and leveraging personal touchpoints.

Cases A, B, and C highlighted interpersonal fit as decisive in unlocking FSC potential. For instance, FF B and FF C reported initially investing as much in the founders' personalities as in the product. Their decisions were strongly based on gut feeling and sympathy. In Case A, too, sympathy was fundamental as FF A explained that initially assessing the team's technical capabilities is almost impossible. Thus, decisions were made according to whom the people were and how convincing they presented themselves. SU C even incorporated the trust element when initially seeking partners. In particular, they primarily approached potential partners in the vicinity to strengthen trust by enabling regular on-site in-person exchanges. SU C shared:

"We made sure that all of our partners were located within our vicinity, simply to be able to visit the construction sites and to have a personal interaction with them. Especially in such a phase, when trust is ultimately at stake, and construction companies are not yet investing in a product or software but rather in the people behind it. And investing, in this case, means time, above all, or sharing data. In other words, it is all about trust. That is why personal proximity was very, very important to us." (Co-Founder & CEO (SU), Interviewee 19, Case C)

In addition to the interpersonal aspect, interviewees noted that the startup's professionalism could increase family firms' trust. In Cases A and B, in particular, professional competence was vital. According to FF A, professionalism could be achieved through SU A's (IT) skills, excellent meeting preparation, and high development speed. FF B focused on the founders' academic and professional backgrounds and the business model's viability. Apart from these enablers, startups were perceived as professional and trustworthy when they were willing to understand the family firm's problems and implement adequate solutions. Expert interviews supported these findings, slightly disagreeing over the need for industry knowledge. While some felt industry knowledge

is essential in ensuring professionalism, others feared that an overly entrenched industry background would limit the startups' necessary impartiality to develop highly innovative products.

Lastly, case studies and expert interviews agreed that personal touchpoints could increase trust to enable FSC. As such, all cases have emerged through references or personal contacts. A prime example of how these personal network effects can increase a family firm's trust is Case D. As previously outlined, SU D was founded as a spin-off from another family-owned construction company. To validate their idea, the founding team sought further cooperation partners and thus acquired six other construction companies that were friends with the founding company, one of which was FF D, who recalled:

"Since we have known [Founding-FF] [...] for 20 years, maybe even longer, and we know that what they initiate usually succeeds and, above all, is approached professionally [...], we said, 'We are in!'" ((Junior) CEO (FF), Interviewee 36, Case D)

Expert interviews confirmed that references, personal contacts, and success stories build trust and inspire FSC. Some interviewees acknowledged that they would be more likely to engage in an FSC if the startup already has use cases and other partners. Similarly, startups reported gaining credibility with new partners and customers through reference marketing, as trust is higher when other well-known or – even better – befriended construction companies have already worked or collaborated with them.

In summary, trust is a crucial aspect in unlocking FSC potential and can be achieved through interpersonal fit, professionalism on the part of the startup, and personal touchpoints.

Financial incentivization. Another mechanism that case study participants reported as beneficial in mitigating initial barriers and unlocking FSC potential is financial incentivization, which is two-sided.

First, a financial incentive can be created by the relatively low capital investment required to engage in an innovation collaboration with a startup. According to the case study and expert interviewees, financial entry into an FSC is a comparatively low threshold compared to what a consulting firm would charge to develop innovative strategies. Therefore, a low entry price may tempt family firms to try a "riskier" project, as the anticipated loss will likely remain low. In Case A, in particular, the low entry price greatly benefited FSC emergence, as FF A emphasized:

"For me, how we have developed SU A, this low-threshold project entry, would be the blueprint for how this can also work in the future. I think it is only because of this that we have gone so far as to make it a research and development project in its own right." (Head of Department (FF), Interviewee 18, Case A)

Family firms in Cases C and D also felt motivated to enter the FSC because the initial financial outlay was relatively small.

The family firm's acquisition of startup shares is the second financial incentive empowering FSC adoption. Ownership of startup shares can strengthen the family firm's commitment to actively promote FSC development, as it is associated with economic prospects for success. In Cases A, B, and C, the incumbents hold shares in the startup, significantly increasing their incentive to pursue the FSC closely to reap the economic benefits. Thereby, the investment may also reduce the family firm's fear of disclosing internal knowledge, as FF A explained:

"The more people participate, the more the startup develops and the more I benefit from it. If I remain the startup's only customer, so to speak, then the startup will no longer exist in three years." (CEO (FF), Interviewee 1, Case A)

Similarly, financial investment was found to co-regulate the too-unilateral product development explained before. Once the incumbents held a stake in the startup, they were more interested in the solution gaining general market acceptance.

In this way, low-threshold project entry and shareholding in the startup can contribute to unleashing FSC potential in the construction industry.

Developing an enabling mindset. As elaborated by the interviewees, developing an innovative and FSC-enabling mindset is critical to unlocking FSC potential. According to case studies and expert interviews, there are four activities conducive to this.

The first contributor to developing an enabling mindset involves the promotion of innovation as a key element of the corporate culture. Case study interviewees promoted an innovative culture by exemplifying innovation as leaders, actively seeking innovation, and giving employees the space and feedback necessary to pursue innovative activities. Expert interviews confirmed that a culture of innovation could significantly empower FSC. Their effective measures for promoting an innovative corporate culture included organizational ideation, empowerment of group dynamics, mobilization of resource capacities, and the development of knowledge databases.

The second factor contributing to mindset development is the openness to adopt an unconventional perspective to break previous conventions. As emphasized in the case studies and expert interviews, startups ask questions that industry experts have long stopped asking. As such, FF C explained that the FSC reminded them not to accept the status quo but challenge it to improve their business operations. By embracing this change in perspective, interviewees noted, family firms can unlock previously untapped innovation and FSC potential. This openness to novelty becomes even stronger with the entry of new generations, as acknowledged in Cases B, C, and D.

The third mindset-related measure, interlinked with the second mechanism, includes the inherent willingness to realize new opportunities. Across all case studies, the decisive factor in actually realizing FSC was the family firm's willingness to seize the opportunity and implement the project. SUs B, C, and D recounted that this fundamental openness to implementing new projects facilitated FSC realization considerably. Therefore, early adopters willing to experiment with and implement new ideas contribute to materializing FSC in construction.

Lastly, family-owned construction companies can develop the mindset necessary to unlock FSC potential by embracing the benefits of cross-fertilization. As such, case study participants recalled their positive experiences related to cross-fertilization. In particular, FF C and SU C mentioned the advantages of combining the startup's speed and the family firm's experience. Similarly, in Case A, the involved parties benefitted from the combination of capital and ideas. FF B summarized:

"[. . .] I believe that this is the motivation to somehow get into business with such young companies or to collaborate with them. You have both worlds. Or the cool things from both worlds. You have this family business background and also, of course, certain financial possibilities [. . .] and then, this mindset and this way of working and acting of young entrepreneurs can combine it quite well." (CEO (FF), Interviewee 4, Case B)

Several expert interviews confirmed the benefits of cross-fertilization and its effect on unlocking FSC potential.

In summary, developing an FSC-enabling mindset conducive to unlocking FSC potential involves promoting innovation as a key component of their corporate culture, adopting an unconventional perspective to break previous conventions, being willing to seize opportunities, and embracing the benefits of cross-fertilization.

Thus, it can be concluded that trust building, financial incentivization, and the development of a promoting mindset contribute significantly to unlocking FSC potential, resulting in the following propositions:

Proposition 4a: Startups acting as approachable and professional partners, willing to understand and solve the family firm's problems, seeking personal touchpoints, and financially incentivizing family firms, builds trust and unlocks FSC potential.

Proposition 4b: By committing to making innovation part of their corporate culture, recognizing opportunities, and allowing them to be pursued, family businesses can challenge existing assumptions and leverage cross-fertilization to unlock FSC potential.

4.5. Tried and Tested Management of Challenges as They Arise

Impediments continued to emerge during the FSC in the case studies and expert interviews reviewed. The following section identifies these challenges and explains how involved organizations mitigated them or, in hindsight, would have mitigated them based on their lessons learned.

Perceived challenges during FSC. The most prominent challenges during FSC, as reported by case study participants, related to employee engagement, miscommunication of expectations, and resource management.

Case study and expert interviewees emphasized that employee acceptance and engagement are conducive to the success or failure of an FSC, as they are the ones who will ultimately work with the developed solution daily. Simultaneously, engaging them entailed noticeable challenges in the individual cases, with employees questioning implementation feasibility, showing reluctance to change, and being skeptical about the solution's benefits. Different knowledge bases between family firm employees, startups, and among employees were further reported to complicate comprehensive employee engagement. Similarly, the different perceptions of construction reality may impede FSC progress, as was described in Cases A and D. If employees perceive the developed solution as irrelevant, their skepticism increases, and a dismissive attitude toward FSC develops, creating challenges or even generating failure.

Next, diverging expectations, some of which were not communicated precisely enough from the beginning, posed inherent challenges for the involved organizations during the FSC. Analyzing the individual case studies, the different expectations mainly related to the speed of software implementation (Cases C, D), adherence to initial timetables and milestones (Cases A, B, D), and the pursuit of development goals (Cases B, D). Consequently, involved organizations reported challenges in reconciling the different expectations.

Finally, as has been confirmed by all four case studies, managing resources was a significant challenge during FSC, both on the part of the family firm and the startup. Cases A, C, and D emphasized the startup's human resource limitations, caused by faster task than team growth and frequently changing actors within the startup team. This condition partially impeded the initial development speed and exchange. SU C summarized:

"I think one challenge is [...] that you are simply limited in resources. And even if a certain user wants something, and you would actually like to implement it, and you think, 'that makes sense,' you simply do not have the capacity for it." (Co-Founder & CFO (SU), Interviewee 32, Case C)

Similarly, on the part of the family firm, as FF B explained, lacking resources led to significant slowdowns in the FSC if it did not get the incumbent's adequate attention.

Thus, in summary, challenges during FSC involved employee engagement, miscommunication of expectations, and resource management.

To deal with these emerging challenges, the single-case and cross-case analyses identified three effective mitigation mechanisms. These include embracing FSC as an attention-intensive task, engaging multiple family firm stakeholders, and ensuring target-oriented communication.

Understanding and embracing FSC as an attention-intensive task. The first mechanism to mitigate impediments during the FSC is understanding and embracing it as an attention-intensive task. Involved organizations realized this strategy by family firms supporting the startup's development, providing necessary human resources to support the FSC, and adopting a long-term perspective on FSC success.

First, family-owned construction companies enabled and actively supported the startup's development to adequately promote FSC and address the previously explained problem of differing construction reality perceptions. FFs A and B, for instance, allowed the startups' products to be tested under realistic conditions on the construction site. In this way, the solution could be developed to comprehend and accommodate realistic use cases. In Case C, this measure was even pursued further, with SU C completing an internship with FF C on the construction site for several months to accompany and experience the daily tasks on-site. By "playing foremen," SU C explained, they could better understand and map realistic processes.

Second, family firms emphasized the need of dedicating adequate human resources to accompany and provide the necessary attention to the FSC. According to interviewees, hiring employees specifically for FSC ensures that day-to-day business is supported and innovation can still be actively pursued. As such, FF A and FF C have dedicated employees supporting FSCs. An expert interviewee who has already had his own FSC experience confirmed:

"And that, I think, was also one of the successful levers for us to say, yes, this requires a personnel point, even in our size, and resources are made available for this because if the other employees do this on their own in addition to their daily business, then it gets difficult." (CEO (FF), Interviewee 38, Expert)

A captivating perspective on human resources was provided by Interviewee 40, who emphasized the importance of the dedicated person combining a technical perspective with entrepreneurial thinking to adequately "translate" the involved stakeholders' intentions. As far as he is concerned, this technology/entrepreneur symbiosis greatly empowers FSC progress in the construction industry.

Third, case study and expert interviewees emphasized the importance of assuming a long-term perspective on the collaboration. This way, the involved parties developed the necessary stamina to ensure the FSC's success. As FF B explained, structures in family firms have grown slowly but steadily over decades. Therefore, the change brought about by FSC cannot happen overnight either but requires gradual steps to be implemented over the long term. Similarly, FF

A stressed the importance of seeing the collaboration in perspective, as an FSC cannot achieve immediate success but needs time to evolve. SU A accommodated FF A in assuming a long-term perspective on FSC by creating smaller work packages as part of the overall project to celebrate interim success, increasing the stamina of all stakeholders involved. SU C added that, especially in time-consuming software development, it is essential for the parties involved to develop a joint vision for the FSC to maintain the necessary endurance. After all, SU D claimed, FSC is a “transformation.”

Thus, understanding and embracing FSC as an attention-intensive task to address ongoing challenges during the FSC requires active startup development support, adequate human resources provision, and a long-term perspective on FSC.

Engaging multiple family firm stakeholders. Since employee engagement was perceived conducive to FSC success but entails significant challenges, the case study and expert interviewees elaborated on effective levers to engage multiple family firm stakeholders and mitigate related impediments. These levers include respectful communication, inspiring employee self-efficacy, and soliciting user feedback.

First, Cases A, C, and D demonstrated how respectful eye-level communication can foster employee engagement. It enabled the parties involved to understand each other's challenges and to balance different perceptions and levels of expertise. Open communication also included transparency about missing industry knowledge on the part of the startup, which increased their credibility. This transparency increased employee engagement, as they felt valued and enjoyed explaining their tasks. Particularly in Cases A and C, family firm employees were impressed by the startups accompanying them to help and learn on-site. SU A recalled their involvement with FF A employees as follows:

“And what I think also resonated well was that we approached the people and said, ‘I have no idea what you are doing. I have this [product], show me how you would use it. I just want to accompany you, I will help you. I’ve also got pants on that will get dirty, I’ve got steel-toed shoes on, now we will run off together and drive around for a day.’ That had a very positive impact.” (Co-Founder & CEO (SU), Interviewee 15, Case A)

Next, Cases B, C, and D reported employee self-efficacy as supportive of the FSC's development. This self-efficacy was solicited by showcasing the product's benefits in facilitating daily tasks. Startups demonstrated the product's value proposition by creating tangible mock-ups for employees. While such a mock-up was naturally given in Case A due to the developed hardware, SU C relied on PowerPoint presentations, and SU D on click dummies. This mock-up creation allowed the construction company's employees to experience the actual application and its value-add physically. As a result, employees recognized the product's benefits in their daily work, increasing their commitment to actively participate in the FSC.

Finally, collecting user feedback was critical to employee engagement. SU D, for instance, reported that regular feedback loops with FF D employees positively impacted their credibility and the trust they were given, reversely benefiting challenge mitigation concerning employee engagement. Similarly, SU C shared a story about how their approach to generating user feedback increased employee engagement sustainably:

“I think people found it cool because they could explain a bit and tell stories, and in the end, they could see how the whole thing was developing – especially the companies involved early on, who initially saw what our software looked like. If you now talk about it and say, ‘Hey, take a look at all the things that have changed and developed in the last year,’ they also find it impressive and have ideas and visions of how it can continue. And then you notice relatively quickly that they also want to contribute and participate.” (Co-Founder & CFO (SU), Interviewee 32, Case C)

Ultimately, obtaining user feedback created win-win situations for involved organizations, as startups, too, benefitted from obtaining user feedback so as not to develop a solution irrelevant to the actual user.

In summary, engaging multiple family stakeholders through respectful communication, inspiring employee self-efficacy, and soliciting user feedback helped mitigate challenges concerning employee engagement.

Target-oriented communication. Finally, case studies and expert interviews suggested target-oriented communication as an effective challenge mitigation mechanism during the collaboration, involving expectation management, family involvement, and continuous exchange.

First, target-oriented communication comprises expectation management, which Case C and D declared particularly important in coping with ongoing challenges. In Case C, expectation management consisted of SU C regularly communicating progress, adjusting the schedule, and re-coordinating with FF C according to adapt milestones. On the contrary, FF D only realized retrospectively that they should have better managed expectations. FF D shared that, in hindsight, they would have defined and monitored expectations and goals, including timeframes and budget, more precisely, which might have prevented impediments. Thus, expectation management can contribute to mitigating challenges during FSC.

Second, interviewees highlighted that family involvement helped ensure target-oriented communication by prioritizing the project appropriately. Especially at the collaboration's start, when many (financial) decisions had to be made, direct and open communication between the family firms and the startups significantly accelerated the project's progress. During the FSC, as well, family involvement significantly empowered progress by communicating the project's seriousness and importance to their employees, thereby increasing their commitment, as was demonstrated in Cases B,

C, and D. Similarly, FF B reported that the family could exert a certain amount of pressure toward the startup when they seemed to no longer adequately prioritize the project. Thus, family involvement positively impacted project progress by ensuring target-oriented communication.

Finally, continuous exchange mitigated challenges during the FSC as part of target-oriented communication. Cases A, C, and D reported that continuous exchange to maintain cross-fertilization is a significant success concept intensively pursued. In particular, Case A hosts weekly or at least fortnightly exchanges with SU A reporting on the latest developmental status. SU C has created a working group with all its collaborative partners, within which joint concept development happens once a month, with SU C proposing ideas and incumbents providing feasibility assessments. In Case D, collaboration partners are updated on the latest developments every two weeks to ask questions or request improvement. This way, all organizations remain up-to-date and can combine their expertise for continuous product improvement.

Thus, target-oriented communication can be ensured through expectation management, family involvement, and continuous exchange.

In summary, with family firms and startups understanding and embracing FSC as an attention-intensive task, engaging multiple family firm stakeholders, and applying target-oriented communication, challenges that arise during the FSC can be successfully managed. The following propositions can, thus, be drawn:

Proposition 5a: Due to different perceptions of construction reality, miscommunication of expectations, limited resource availability, and the challenge of engaging site personnel, impediments arise during the FSC.

Proposition 5b: By understanding and embracing FSC as an attention-intensive task, engaging multiple family firm stakeholders, and ensuring target-oriented communication, involved organizations can effectively mitigate impediments during FSC.

4.6. Future Viability in the Evolving Construction Industry

Across the case studies and expert interviews, family-owned construction companies with FSC experience embraced it as a means to become future-oriented in an evolving construction industry. In particular, they reported feeling inspired by startups to explore new and unconventional avenues, enabling continuous change and business improvement and sustainably leading the company into the future.

Embarking on unknown, unconventional paths. First, case study and expert interviewees with previous FSC experience acknowledged the startups' support in adopting an unbiased mindset to break with preconceived notions and explore new, unconventional paths. For some interviewees, breaking away from previous presumptions enabled corporate transformation, a critical success factor in a changing environment. FF

A, for instance, emphasized change and the willingness to change as crucial success factors in their company. Therefore, they stressed to actively pursue FSC as an enabler of corporate change:

"[...] This willingness to change is simply essential. And a project like this also proves that, even if it fails, it motivates people to be willing to change and shows them that if it works or could work, a change also represents an improvement for the company." (CEO (FF), Interviewee 1, Case A)

According to experts with prior experience in FSC, collaboration with startups considerably supported them in shaping their future orientation in that startups encouraged and inspired them to adopt new perspectives. Family firms learned that they do not need to thoroughly plan a process before it can be started but that mistakes can and should be made along the way. Thus, FSC enabled continuous learning, change, and improvement through flexibility.

Sustainable direction. Aside from taking unconventional paths to inspire corporate transformation, family-owned construction companies achieved efficiencies, increased employee engagement, and expanded their overall business portfolio by participating in an FSC. Thus, they reported feeling empowered to sustainably direct their business into the future.

First, family firms reported significantly benefiting from FSC because their capacity to operate more efficiently, i.e., reduce costs or save time and required human resources, was increased. Interviewee 21, who had previous experience in FSC, reported:

"Everything happens incredibly fast, much, much faster. We can now build much faster, much more efficiently [...]." (CEO (FF), Interviewee 21, Expert)

FF D also pointed out that FSC has allowed them to process tasks more efficiently. Similarly, Case B reported increased employee engagement resulting from FSC engagement, which boosted their dynamism and self-drive and, thus, further increased overall efficiency.

By engaging in FSC, case study and expert interviewees explained, family firms can further expand their portfolio to position themselves more broadly in an evolving construction industry. Interviewees acknowledged that focusing on what already exists is no longer sustainable in a changing market. Instead, it requires establishing flexible structures to explore new business divisions. FF C, for instance, has always embraced the idea that a company thrives the most when it is diversified, even in an overall healthy economic condition. Thus, they have been looking specifically for new investment opportunities, which is how FSC C emerged.

Ultimately, the family firms surveyed considered themselves well prepared for future challenges, thanks to participating in an FSC. Therefore, every company cooperating with a startup confirmed they would do so again.

Considering FSC's role in ensuring family firms' viability in an evolving construction industry, the following propositions can be drawn:

Proposition 6a: By participating in FSC, family-owned construction companies can regain independence from industry biases and be inspired to enable continuous organizational change that ensures future viability in the evolving construction industry.

Proposition 6b: In enabling family-owned construction companies to expand their portfolio to reduce dependency on individual business units and unlock efficiency potential to reduce costs, FSC represents an ideal opportunity for them to defend their market position.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to provide insights into FSC in the construction industry by analyzing the impediments to collaboration, how involved organizations can mitigate these, and what role startup collaborations play for family-owned construction companies in preparing for (future) industry challenges. Drawing on the findings from case studies and expert interviews, FSC in construction was considered in three parts.

The first part concerned the impediments and corresponding mitigation strategies in the run-up to the actual cooperation. The findings proposed that pre-collaboration impediments resulted from external and internal factors and manifested in a restrained collaboration readiness, characterized by family firms being risk averse and startups struggling to navigate high individuality in construction. To address pre-collaboration challenges and unlock FSC potential, involved organizations engaged in trust-building, created financial incentives, and developed an enabling mindset.

The second part related to how involved organizations managed impediments during the FSC, leveraging tried and tested mitigation mechanisms. The insights revealed that challenges during FSC related to employee engagement, miscommunication of expectations, and resource management. The involved organizations mitigated these challenges by understanding and embracing FSC as an attention-intensive task, engaging multiple family firm stakeholders, and ensuring target-oriented communication.

The third part highlighted the FSC's impact on family firms' viability in an evolving construction industry. As such, the findings suggested that startup collaborations can support family-owned construction companies in preparing for future challenges and ensuring viability in an evolving construction industry by facilitating corporate transformation and realizing efficiencies, increasing employee commitment, and expanding the overall business portfolio.

Thus, following this three-part consideration of FSC in construction, the research questions on FSC impediments,

mitigation mechanisms, and the FSC's role in preparing family-owned construction companies for (future) industry challenges could be illuminated comprehensively.

Next, the findings obtained are compared with the existing literature to draw theoretical and practical implications based on the insights gained. Finally, the study identifies limitations and suggests avenues for future research before drawing concluding remarks.

5.1. Comparison of Results With Literature

With the study uncovering impediments, mitigation mechanisms, and prospects of FSC in the construction industry, the findings confirm and extend prior literature on FSC, as well as innovation in family firms and construction.

In light of the first research question around FSC impediments, comparing the results with previous research detects similarities in general barriers to FSC before and during the collaboration. *Pre-collaboration barriers* observed in the present study included the family firm's risk aversion and the startup's challenge of navigating complexity due to high individuality caused by internal and external factors. Thereby, previously identified barriers related to trust-building (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Baumgärtner et al., 2022; Löher et al., 2017), conflicts of interest and expectations (Baumgärtner et al., 2022; Garbs, 2017), prejudices (Leitner et al., 2019), missing resources (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Meyer, 2017), family firm employees' limited opportunities to "look outside" their daily tasks (Baumgärtner et al., 2022, p. 22), and risk aversion (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Meyer, 2017; Prügl et al., 2019) could be confirmed by the interviews' findings. The family firms' reluctance to disclose internal know-how further matches previous insights on information withholding (Löher et al., 2017; Prügl et al., 2019). Moreover, interviewees initially reported difficulties in partner acquisition on the part of startups and a general lack of access to startups on the part of family firms. These findings further confirm previously identified challenges around finding collaboration partners (Armutat et al., 2015; Bannerjee et al., 2016; Baumgärtner et al., 2022).

A similar overlap of the obtained results and previous findings could be observed for *barriers encountered during the collaboration*. Previously studied FSCs revealed challenges arising from conflicts of interests/ expectations (Baumgärtner et al., 2022; Garbs, 2017; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017), missing resources (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Meyer, 2017), communication difficulties (Baumgärtner et al., 2022; Garbs, 2017; Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017), stakeholder involvement (Baumgärtner et al., 2022), and the clash of two different corporate cultures (Bannerjee et al. 2016; Kawohl et al. 2015; Leitner et al. 2019; Prügl et al. 2019; Wallisch and Funke 2016), all of which were confirmed by the study's findings.

Thus, much of FSC's previously observed challenges were confirmed within the scope of this study. The present study's findings, however, extend existing FSC literature by identifying context-specific causes and effects of observed impediments to FSC in the construction industry.

As such, interviewees reported construction-specific characteristics as significantly impeding FSC emergence. These characteristics included the dependence on the client's specifications (e.g., Barlow 2000; Blayse and Manley 2004; Bygballe and Ingemansson 2011; Gambatese and Hollowell 2011; Gann and Salter 2000; Harty 2008; Lindblad and Guerrero 2020), price sensitivity (Ribeirinho et al., 2020), the multitude of regulations (e.g., Barbosa et al. 2017; Blayse and Manley 2004; Bygballe and Ingemansson 2014; Gambatese and Hollowell 2011; Kehl et al. 2022; Ribeirinho et al. 2020), and the decentralized, highly individual mode of construction operation (e.g., Barbosa et al. 2017; Dubois and Gadde 2002; Gann and Salter 2000; Harty 2008; Kehl et al. 2022; Ribeirinho et al. 2020). While these factors have previously been perceived as influencing construction innovation by the listed authors, this study revealed that they induce specific impediments in the FSC context. In particular, the construction context either reinforced observed barriers or generated new barriers to FSC.

For instance, the observed reluctance of family-owned construction companies to share internal know-how, limited (financial) resources to support FSC, and risk aversion prior to the FSC were primarily influenced by the fact that family firms face enormous competition in the construction industry due to the price-focused procurement system (Blayse & Manley, 2004; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Hartmann, 2006), their low operating margins (Ribeirinho et al., 2020), and extreme price fluctuations in building materials (Berbner et al., 2023).

Similarly, the decentralized, highly individual construction mode presented startups with significant challenges in managing complexity due to individuality. More specifically, startups perceived the development of holistic solutions as a significant challenge in the run-up to FSC emergence. During the FSC, the complexity of construction continued to impose challenges, manifested by differing perceptions of construction reality and associated employee engagement restraints.

Thus, context-specific factors (for the role of context in construction innovation, cf. Röd 2016; Sexton and Barrett 2003; Tidd 2001) significantly reinforced and created barriers to FSC.

In sum, many parallels were identified between existing literature and the findings on impediments in FSC. These were extended by revealing that construction-specific characteristics reinforced barriers to FSC in construction or even created new ones. However, fundamental contradictions of the findings with existing observations were not uncovered.

With respect to the second research question concerning *how involved organizations can mitigate impediments*, previous best practices could be confirmed by this study's findings and extended by different mitigation strategies applicable to FSC in general and particularly suitable in the construction industry.

To *mitigate impediments prior to FSC*, previous research highlighted the importance of leveraging network effects and references (Löher et al., 2017), actively seeking touchpoints (Hofmann, 2016; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017),

defining framework conditions including project budget and timeframe (Armutat et al., 2015; Löher et al., 2017; Wallisch & Funke, 2016), and managing expectations (Armutat et al., 2015). The interviews could confirm these findings. In particular, interpersonal fit, professionalism on the part of the startup, and personal touchpoints were perceived as beneficial to creating trust and unlocking FSC potential. Similarly, innovation-enabling mechanisms in family firm and construction innovation, including promoting an innovative corporate culture by advocating innovative ideas (e.g., Blayse and Manley 2004; De Massis et al. 2022; Gambatese and Hollowell 2011), actively seeking innovation (Hartmann 2006; Kellermanns and Eddleston 2006), and promoting organizational learning (e.g., Barlow 2000; Blayse and Manley 2004; Chinowsky and Carrillo 2007; Gambatese and Hollowell 2011) were identified conducive to enabling FSC among the case study and expert interviewees.

The present study's results extend prior findings surrounding pre-collaboration mitigation mechanisms by including financial incentivization as an effective way to unlock FSC. While a financial investment has been found to generally motivate family firms to engage in FSC (e.g., Leitner et al. 2019; Löher et al. 2017), it has not yet been framed as an effective measure to mitigate barriers. In particular, financial incentivization can mitigate impediments and benefit FSC in two ways. First, a low entry price can help overcome the family firms' initial inhibition to FSC adoption by keeping the anticipated loss in case of failure relatively low, thereby decreasing initial risk aversion. Second, by offering shares to the family firm, startups can build trust to convert the fear of knowledge transfer into the prospect of economic success. Since the family firm's fear of losing its competitive advantage by releasing valuable internal know-how impedes FSC emergence in the construction industry, this measure can be instrumental in unlocking FSC potential.

The study's findings could also confirm previously proposed *mitigation mechanisms during the collaboration*. The measures included trust-building through open exchange, mutual respect, and appreciation for one another (Löher et al., 2017). Furthermore, shared values and visions, continuous and mutual knowledge transfer, and common milestones were found to benefit challenge mitigation during FSC (Leitner et al., 2019). In line with these findings, respectful communication, expectation management, long-term perspectives on FSC, ongoing cross-fertilization, knowledge transfer, and transparency significantly contributed to mitigating impediments during the FSC in the analyzed case studies and expert interviews. Similarly, upper management support has been found to emphasize the importance of innovation in construction firms (Gambatese & Hollowell, 2011; Hausman, 2005; Sexton & Barrett, 2003), which can be aligned with the importance of family involvement in mitigating challenges during the FSC, as identified throughout the case study analyses.

The study extends previous observations on mitigation mechanisms during the FSC by including adequate human resources dedication to support FSC intentions as an effective

mitigation measure. This lever ensures that FSC receives adequate attention to not just run alongside the day-to-day business. In this way, innovation can be actively pursued without neglecting day-to-day business. In construction, the dedicated person should ideally possess a high technical affinity and an entrepreneurial mindset to understand and translate between the two parties to mediate between their perspectives.

Contrary to previous findings on the implementation of innovation in construction companies, which Bygballe and Ingemansson (2014) identified as “top-down” approaches, case study and expert interviewees promoted “bottom-up” attempts to FSC. More specifically, the findings proposed that interviewees sought their employees’ active involvement and co-creation in the FSC. As such, interviewees emphasized the importance of engaging multiple family firm stakeholders, especially from the construction site, to help shape the FSC’s framework. This measure had an incredibly empowering effect on employee satisfaction and FSC success, rendering it a powerful means in addressing impediments during FSC. In this way, this finding both refutes previous propositions and adds an effective tool for addressing FSC obstacles.

Altogether, the identified strategies for mitigating FSC-related barriers could be matched with the previous findings, extending them by uncovering additional mechanisms to address impediments based on the insights from the construction industry. Furthermore, a contradiction with previous findings regarding the approach to innovation in construction companies was identified.

Considering the third research question examined within the scope of this study, a high level of coverage with existing literature can be observed. Interviewees reported that engaging in FSC could increase their future viability in that FSC allows them to embark on unknown, unconventional paths, facilitate corporate transformation, realize efficiencies to ensure competitiveness, increase employee commitment, and expand their overall business portfolio. These findings match previously identified benefits of FSC for family firms, including diversification and expansion into new markets (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017; Mocker et al., 2015; Prügl et al., 2019), competitive edge in a dynamic market (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017), and increased innovation potential (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Leitner et al., 2019; Löher et al., 2017; Meyer, 2017). Moreover, prior research found that family firms significantly benefit from FSC by allowing them to rejuvenate their corporate culture (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Baumgärtner et al., 2022; Löher et al., 2017; Mocker et al., 2015), creating efficiencies (Bannerjee et al., 2016), secure survivability (Bannerjee et al., 2016; Meyer, 2017), and explore new business models (Leitner et al., 2019; Meyer, 2017). Thus, in line with previous insights, family-owned construction companies perceived FSC as an effective means to ensure future viability in an evolving construction industry.

This finding contradicts Bygballe and Ingemansson’s (2011) finding that the construction industry generally considers external sources of innovation to be of minimal value.

Instead, case study and expert interviewees emphasized innovation collaboration with (external) startups as particularly beneficial in accelerating corporate transformation. In particular, the startups’ impartiality in adopting new perspectives on entrenched processes and developing their ideas further in collaboration with experienced construction companies was found to be highly successful. Thus, FSC was considered a valuable external source of innovation.

In sum, the findings related to the third research question were mostly consistent with previously obtained FSC-specific findings while refuting previous assertions about the value of external innovation in the construction industry.

Next to these findings directly related to the three research questions, the study further found similarities in family firm and construction characteristics and innovation behavior. As such, interviewees reflected the 4Cs (continuity, community, connection, command) in their behavior. For instance, their long-term perspective on FSC matches their pursuit of continuity. Active family firm stakeholder engagement complies with family firms’ community notion, and the family involvement during FSC reflects the benefits family firms enjoy from command (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005). The family firms’ aim to elevate their performance through FSC to better serve customer needs reflect their pursuit of customer care as part of connection (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005; Nieto et al., 2015). Furthermore, every FSC considered in the case studies involved internal process improvement, which is consistent with both family firms’ propensity to improve internal processes (Classen et al., 2014; De Massis et al., 2022; Zellweger & Sieger, 2012) and construction companies’ preference for organizational innovation (Blayse & Manley, 2004; Hartmann, 2006). These are just a few examples of the many parallels discovered between the findings and existing family business and construction literature. However, since these are beyond the scope of the research’s objective, they will not be further specified in the following.

In summary, identified barriers, mitigation mechanisms, and FSC’s role in ensuring family firms’ future viability are largely consistent with the findings obtained in prior FSC research. Meanwhile, contrasts to previous construction innovation literature could be identified concerning the chosen innovation approach (top-down vs. bottom-up) and the value of external innovation. Furthermore, the present study uncovered that the observed events and actions of organizations involved in FSC in the construction industry are strongly influenced and informed by the industry’s realities, extending previous insights and stressing the importance of future research to consider the role of context when studying FSC.

5.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Drawing on the similarities and differences observed between existing literature and the present study’s findings, theoretical and practical implications can be derived.

By examining impediments, mitigation mechanisms, and prospects of FSC in the construction industry, the study’s results confirm general FSC observations made in prior literature (e.g., Bannerjee et al. 2016; Garbs 2017; Kawohl

et al. 2015; Leitner et al. 2019; Löher et al. 2017; Prügl et al. 2019), while providing in-depth insights into how construction-specific factors impact the overall FSC process. As such, construction industry characteristics (e.g., Barbosa et al. 2017; Barlow 2000; Blayse and Manley 2004; Bygballe and Ingemansson 2011; Dulaimi et al. 2002; Fischer et al. 2014; Gambatese and Hallowell 2011; Gann and Salter 2000; Harty 2008; Kehl et al. 2022; Ribeirinho et al. 2020) were found to significantly influence barriers prior to and during FSC, emphasizing the role of context in assessing FSC impediments. Similarly, while some of the previously identified mitigation strategies to overcome barriers to FSC (e.g., Armutat et al. 2015; Hofmann 2016; Leitner et al. 2019; Löher et al. 2017; Meyer 2017; Prügl et al. 2019; Wallisch and Funke 2016) were confirmed by the findings of this study, more nuanced insights were derived on how the involved organizations in the construction industry can mitigate impediments. Consequently, by cross-referencing the results with existing literature, the study uncovered that observed impediments and mitigators depend not solely on family firm-specific factors but also on the broader context in which the FSC occurs.

As for family firms' future viability resulting from FSC engagement, the findings could largely confirm previous observations on why family firms would and should engage in an FSC, thereby extending the literature on construction innovation by suggesting startup collaboration, i.e., an external source of innovation, as a powerful means to survive and thrive in an evolving construction industry.

Thus, these observations, made in family-owned construction companies, add to the existing literature on FSC as well as family firm and construction innovation.

Along with these theoretical implications, the study's findings provide practical implications for family-owned construction companies and startups. Especially considering that all surveyed family-owned construction companies expressed interest in FSC, but only about half of them have already implemented this interest, these implications can contribute to guiding a pathway into future FSC in the construction industry.

First, family-owned construction companies can leverage FSC as a viable strategic measure to thrive in the evolving construction industry by honoring the following aspects:

- Intentionally seeking touch points with startups by attending industry-related trade fairs, participating in associations and working groups, and leveraging university collaborations can help overcome the lack of access to startups.
- Missing industry knowledge on the part of the startup should not discourage family-owned construction companies from entering FSC. On the contrary, the symbiosis of a startup's impartiality and the family firm's experience can develop highly beneficial solutions for the industry. Thus, instead of rejecting startups for their lack of industry know-how, family-owned construction

companies should help them understand construction realities so that startups can better define actual use cases and develop the product in a more targeted manner, benefiting both parties.

- Acquiring startup shares can help reduce risk aversion, as the family firm's internal know-how is not lost but can be leveraged and marketed as a joint FSC product. In this way, knowledge transfer can be perceived as an opportunity to create a new revenue-generating business model.
- Providing sufficient human resources capacity to provide adequate FSC support increases the prospects for success. These prospects are even higher if the dedicated person acts as a mediator between the technical and business perspectives to translate perspectives and concerns.
- Actively involving multiple family firm stakeholders allows for cross-checking feasibility and receiving realistic feedback necessary to develop a solution relevant to the users while increasing employee satisfaction and commitment through appreciation.

Second, startups can increase the success rate of FSC in the construction industry by considering the following measures:

- Engaging multiple, heterogeneous partners to get as many perspectives as possible on the underlying problem greatly enriches the development of a generally applicable solution in the construction industry and, thus, increases prospects of success.
- Increasing attractiveness with family-owned construction companies to acquire suitable partners can be achieved through approachability, transparency, realism, and the ambition to learn about construction industry realities. Furthermore, financial incentivization can considerably increase risk tolerance on the part of the family firm.
- Informing family-owned construction companies about exit intentions from the beginning can avoid conflicts later on, as sharing these intentions gives the incumbents the authority to decide how to proceed with the FSC. Since the startups' short-lived nature can trigger risk aversion on the part of the family firm, clear communication helps them assess the situation.
- Being transparent about missing industry know-how can increase credibility and trust, as family-owned construction companies will not feel betrayed once they discover that promises differ from reality. In contrast, open communication about shortcomings can even accelerate FSC by helping incumbents understand how much explaining is still needed.

- Developing mock-ups to allow involved stakeholders to experience the solution enriches product development by allowing startups to obtain product-related feedback directly from the user. Likewise, it helps demonstrate intermediate success, increasing the involved parties' stamina.

By getting involved organizations to embrace these practical implications, FSC potential can be better harnessed in the construction industry.

5.3. Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

Although the present study was conducted according to the qualitative case study research specifications developed by Eisenhardt (1989), several limitations exist. Since the four case studies were conducted exclusively with interview partners from German family-owned construction companies, the results should not be generalized to all FSCs in the global construction industry or FSC in general. In addition, most participants represented the family firm's perspective, biasing the results in that the startup perspective was slightly underrepresented. Moreover, results were drawn exclusively from primary interview data and secondary data from company websites, LinkedIn pages, or press releases, excluding observations that would increase objectivity. Moreover, the propositions were derived purely analytically and not measured quantitatively. Considering these aspects, the study's findings do not allow for statistical generalization.

However, limitations simultaneously create avenues for future research. Thus, the study could be replicated with more case studies, including international construction companies, to achieve greater generalizability. Similarly, fellow researchers could extend this study's findings by surveying family-owned and non-family-owned construction companies. This approach would help understand whether the identified barriers and mitigation mechanisms depend on the interviewed organizations' family-aspect or industry-related drivers. In line with this, examining FSC within and across other industries would be insightful to identify how much of the observed FSC behavior depends on the overall context.

Furthermore, future studies should focus more on the startup's perspective on FSC in the construction industry. Since this study only interviewed startups with successful FSC experience, an interesting area of research would be to examine a cross-sample of startups with negative FSC experience in the construction industry. In this way, researchers could shed light on whether construction industry-specific circumstances discourage startups from engaging in FSC in the construction industry. Thus, the focus would not be so much on barriers and reasons for failure from the family firm's point of view but would also be more concerned with the startup's side. Finally, fellow researchers should quantitatively test the propositions developed in this present study to achieve statistical generalizability.

5.4. Conclusion

The present study explored the impediments, mitigation mechanisms, and implications for family-owned construction

companies' future viability through participation in an FSC in the construction industry. Drawing on the findings from 40 interviews, constituting four exploratory cases with four participants each and 24 expert interviews, the study developed a theoretical model depicting the FSC process in the construction industry. With this theoretical model, the study aimed to contribute to the emerging research field around FSC and provide practical implications for future FSC in the construction industry.

The study considered FSC in construction in three parts. The first part concerned the impediments and mitigation strategies in the run-up to the actual cooperation. In this phase, external and internal factors induced a restrained cooperation readiness. In particular, external factors, i.e., industry circumstances and emerging trends, had ambiguous implications for FSC potential. Internally, the organizations involved faced the challenge of overcoming their individual constraints and addressing partner perception to successfully pursue their shared motivation of developing a viable solution for both parties. To unlock FSC potential, the parties involved applied mitigation mechanisms, i.e., trust-building activities, mindset development, and financial incentivization, to progress from the pre-collaboration phase to the actual collaboration. During the FSC, organizations involved, again, faced challenges, some of which remained under the influence of initial impediments. To cope with emerging impediments during the FSC, case study interviewees elaborated on how it was essential to understand and embrace FSC as an attention-intensive task, involve multiple family firm stakeholders, and communicate in a target-oriented manner.

Finally, family-owned construction companies emphasized FSC's considerable importance in preserving their viability in the evolving construction industry. In particular, collaboration with startups allows family firms to explore new, unconventional paths to enable continuous change and sustainably navigate their business into the future. Thus, the family-owned construction companies surveyed considered themselves well prepared for new challenges, thanks to participating in an FSC.

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Vergleich der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung mit dem Optionsmodell für Familienpersonengesellschaften

Comparison of the Preferential Treatment of Retained Earnings with the Option Model for Family Partnerships

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Abstract

The different taxation concepts of partnerships and corporations in Germany lead to systematic disparities and sometimes significant differences in tax burdens, particularly in the case of profit retention. However, legislators are increasingly pursuing the goal of harmonization through tax concessions and options for partnerships. In addition to the preferential treatment of retained earnings in accordance with Section 34a EStG, from 2022 a partnership can be taxed in accordance with the provisions for corporations by means of the new Section 1a KStG. This paper examines the benefits of both options for the primary target group - i.e. "family partnerships". In doing so, the special tax requirements and needs arising from the typical characteristics of family partnerships are defined. It becomes clear that the legislator's aim of achieving taxation that is neutral in terms of legal form cannot be achieved in its current form.

Zusammenfassung

Die unterschiedlichen Besteuerungskonzeptionen von Personen- und Kapitalgesellschaften in Deutschland führen, insbesondere im Fall der Gewinnthesaurierung, zu systematischen Missverhältnissen und teils deutlichen Belastungsunterschieden. Der Gesetzgeber verfolgt indes zunehmend das Ziel einer Angleichung durch steuerliche Begünstigungen und Wahlrechte für Personengesellschaften. Neben der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG, kann ab 2022 mittels § 1a KStG eine Personengesellschaft nach den Vorschriften für Körperschaften besteuert werden. In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird die Vorteilhaftigkeit beider Wahlrechte für den primären Adressatenkreis – d.h. „Familienpersonengesellschaften“ – untersucht. Dabei werden die speziellen steuerlichen Anforderungen und Bedürfnisse, die sich aus den wesentypischen Eigenschaften von Familienpersonengesellschaften ergeben, definiert. Es wird deutlich, dass das vom Gesetzgeber verfolgte Ziel einer rechtsformneutralen Besteuerung in der derzeitigen Ausgestaltung nicht erreicht werden kann.

Keywords: § 1a KStG; § 34a EStG; family business; option model; preferential treatment

1. Einleitung

1.1. Problemstellung und Zielsetzung

Die Besteuerung von Personengesellschaften folgt seit jeher dem Konzept der transparenten Mitunternehmerbesteuerung.¹ Daraus resultiert, dass die Einkünfte der Personen-

¹ Vgl. Hennrichs in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 10 Rz. 1).

Ich möchte Prof. Dr. Christoph Schreiber meinen aufrichtigen Dank aussprechen. Ich freue mich sehr über die Möglichkeit, an seinem Lehrstuhl an der Universität Witten/Herdecke als Doktorandin zum Thema „Rechtsformneutralität im Steuerrecht“ zu forschen und mit ihm zusammenarbeiten zu dürfen.

gesellschaft unmittelbar ihrem Mitunternehmer zugerechnet und auf seiner Ebene der Besteuerung unterworfen werden.² In der jüngeren Vergangenheit verfolgte der Gesetzgeber indes zunehmend das Ziel einer Angleichung der Besteuerungssysteme von Personen- und Kapitalgesellschaften, um eine Gleichheit der steuerlichen Gesamtbelastung herzustellen.³ Bereits mit den in den Jahren 2000 und 2008 umgesetzten Unternehmensteuerreformen sollte das deutsche Unternehmenssteuerrecht rechtsform- und finanzierungsneutral ausgestaltet werden.⁴ Beispielsweise lassen sich als konkrete Regelungen die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG oder die pauschale Ermäßigung des § 35 EStG nennen, die mit Blick auf die genannte Zielsetzung umgesetzt wurden. Als Ergebnis der Entwicklungen in der jüngeren Vergangenheit sind bereits wesentliche Angleichungen der Steuerbelastung von Personengesellschaften und Kapitalgesellschaften und ihren Anteilseignern zu beobachten. Ungeachtet dessen bestehen aber weiterhin systematische Missverhältnisse zwischen der Besteuerung verschiedener Unternehmensrechtsformen, die aus den individuellen Besteuerungsverfahren resultieren.⁵ Einerseits lässt sich dies auf die Tatsache zurückführen, dass in Abhängigkeit von der gewählten Rechtsform verschiedene Steuerarten anfallen, mithin die Rechtsformneutralität nicht gewahrt wird. Andererseits sind bei Steuerarten, die rechtsformübergreifend relevant sind, voneinander abweichende steuerliche Bemessungsgrundlagen zu beachten.⁶ Daher verwundert es nicht, dass sich hieraus im Einzelfall erhebliche Abweichungen hinsichtlich der Steuerbelastung oder des Bürokratieaufwands ergeben.⁷ Auch im internationalen Kontext zeigen sich Herausforderungen, die sich aus den systembedingten Besonderheiten der Besteuerung einer Personengesellschaft ergeben.⁸ Denn nicht zuletzt aufgrund der Tatsache, dass das Grundsystem der Besteuerung einer Personengesellschaft, bestehend aus dem Dreiklang aus Gesamthands-, Ergänzungs- und Sonderbetriebsvermögen, international weitestgehend unbekannt ist, sind mit Blick auf die Doppelbesteuerungsabkommen Qualifikationskonflikte und hybride Steuerbeurteilungen vorprogrammiert.⁹

Mit dem Gesetz zur Modernisierung des Körperschaftsteuerrechts (KöMoG), vorliegend in der Fassung der Bekanntmachung vom 25. Juni 2021 mit Verabschiedung des Gesetzes durch den Bundesrat, führt der Gesetzgeber das Ziel der Angleichung zum System der Besteuerung von Kapitalgesellschaften weiter fort, indem für Personengesellschaften die Optionsmöglichkeit zur Kapitalgesellschaftsbesteuerung umgesetzt wird. Konkret trägt der Gesetzgeber vor, dass das KöMoG insbesondere für international tätige Familienunternehmen in der Rechtsform einer Kommanditgesellschaft

(KG) oder offenen Handelsgesellschaft (OHG) eine Stärkung der internationalen Wettbewerbsfähigkeit darstellt.¹⁰

Vor dem Hintergrund dieses Optionsmodells, stellt sich für den primären Adressatenkreis – d.h. „Familienpersonengesellschaften“ – die Frage nach der Vorteilhaftigkeit des Optionsmodells, insbesondere unter Berücksichtigung der Besteuerungsalternative der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung. Die transparente Besteuerung gilt vor allem für kleine und mittlere Unternehmen als bewährte Konzeption, die, so der Gesetzgeber, erhebliche Vorteile aufweist,¹¹ während die Besteuerung als Kapitalgesellschaft besonders für ertragreiche Unternehmen, mit hoher Thesaurierungsquote Relevanz zeigt.¹² Da sich mit dem Optionsmodell nunmehr eine neue Besteuerungsalternative bietet, ergibt sich Untersuchungsbedarf der verschiedenen Besteuerungskonzeptionen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung unterschiedlicher Thesaurierungsstrategien für ertragreiche Familienpersonengesellschaften. Denn während für diesen Adressatenkreis bisher nur die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG als Alternative zur Regelbesteuerung in Frage kam, erweitert das Optionsmodell nunmehr die Entscheidungsoptionen.

Im Rahmen der vorliegenden Arbeit soll zunächst eine Antwort auf die Frage nach den speziellen steuerlichen Anforderungen und Bedürfnissen von Familienpersonengesellschaften gefunden werden. Aufbauend auf diesen Erkenntnissen wird sodann der Forschungsfrage nachgegangen, ob das Optionsmodell nach dem KöMoG eine vorteilhafte Alternative für Familienpersonengesellschaften im Vergleich zur Regelbesteuerung mit dem persönlichen Einkommensteuersatz und der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG darstellt. Diese Forschungsfrage wird insbesondere unter Berücksichtigung der spezifischen steuerlichen Anforderungen von Familienpersonengesellschaften, die aus den wesensstypischen Eigenschaften dieses Adressatenkreises abgeleitet werden, beleuchtet. Darüber hinaus wird untersucht, welche Steuerwirkungen und Anwendungsdivergenzen sich aus den jeweiligen Besteuerungskonzeptionen ergeben und ob das vom Gesetzgeber verfolgte Ziel der Umsetzung einer rechtsformneutralen Besteuerung durch Angleichung der Steuerbelastungen von Kapital- und Personengesellschaften auf diese Weise tatsächlich erreicht werden kann.

1.2. Gang der Untersuchung

Die Arbeit untergliedert sich in fünf Kapitel. Auf die Einleitung folgend werden im zweiten Kapitel die Grundlagen erörtert. Es erfolgt eine Definition von Familienunternehmen in der Rechtsform der Personengesellschaft, da diese den Großteil der Personengesellschaften in Deutschland ausmachen¹³ und es werden steuerrelevante Besonderheiten und Anforderungen herausgearbeitet. Nach einer kurzen Vorstellung der Rechtsform der Personengesellschaft, gibt eine

² Vgl. Hennrichs in Prinz und Kahle (2020, § 7 Rz. 1).

³ Vgl. Reddig in Kirchhof und Seer (2021, § 34a Rz. 2).

⁴ Vgl. BT-Drs. 14/2683 vom 15.02.2000, 94-98; Volb (2007, 17).

⁵ Vgl. BT-Drs. 19/28656 vom 19.04.2021, 1.

⁶ Vgl. Montag in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 12 Rz. 20).

⁷ Vgl. BT-Drs. 19/28656 vom 19.04.2021, 1.

⁸ Vgl. Schüller (2014, 287); BT-Drs. 19/28656 v. 19.04.2021, 1.

⁹ Vgl. Wassermeyer in Wassermeyer et al. (2015, Rz 2.13).

¹⁰ Vgl. Bundesfinanzministerium (2021).

¹¹ Vgl. BR-Drs. 244/21 v. 26.03.21.

¹² Vgl. z.B. o.V. (2009, 137f) oder Loritz in Schön und Osterloh-Konrad (2010, 54).

¹³ Vgl. Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2019, 12).

Darstellung der vergangenen Reformbemühungen des Gesetzgebers Aufschluss über den aktuellen Handlungsbedarf, dem der Gesetzgeber mit dem KöMoG begegnet. In dem darauffolgenden Kapitel erfolgt eine detaillierte Beschreibung der verschiedenen Besteuerungsalternativen von Familienpersonengesellschaften, auch unter Berücksichtigung des Optionsmodells nach dem KöMoG.

Auf Grundlage der gewonnenen Erkenntnisse wird zum Zweck einer beispielhaften Ermittlung der jeweiligen Steuerlast im vierten Kapitel ein Belastungsvergleich der verschiedenen Besteuerungsalternativen einer Familienpersonengesellschaft durchgeführt. Die sich ergebenden Unterschiede geben schließlich Auskunft über die Vorteilhaftigkeit der Besteuerungskonzeptionen und ermöglichen eine Untersuchung der Stärken und Schwächen dieser. Außerdem erfolgt eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit den Auffassungen aus Sicht des Gesetzgebers, der Wissenschaft und der Praxis, die für und gegen die beiden Alternativen vorgetragen werden. Anschließend erfolgt im fünften Kapitel eine Ableitung der Ergebnisse für Familienpersonengesellschaften. Die Arbeit endet mit einer kritischen Würdigung und einem Ausblick.

2. Grundlagen

2.1. Familienpersonengesellschaften als Untersuchungsobjekt

2.1.1. Definition und Kriterien zur Abgrenzung

Eine rechtliche Definition des Begriffs Familienunternehmen, bzw. Familienpersonengesellschaft im engeren Sinne, existiert nicht.¹⁴ Grundsätzlich versteht man unter diesem Typus das Vorliegen einer Personengesellschaft, bei der die Mitunternehmer oder ein Teil dieser untereinander in einem Angehörigenverhältnis gem. § 15 AO stehen¹⁵ und einen maßgeblichen Einfluss auf das Unternehmen ausüben können.¹⁶ Es lassen sich verschiedene Kriterien ableiten, anhand derer ein Familienunternehmen abgegrenzt werden kann. Neben dem bereits genannten maßgeblichen Einfluss, welcher durch eine Tätigkeit im Rahmen der Geschäftsführung oder durch Kontroll- und Entscheidungsrechte eines Beiratsmandats begründet wird, ergibt sich als weiteres Kriterium eine Mehrheit der Familie an Stimmrechten und/oder am Kapital. Da letztere Kriterien mess- und damit objektivierbar sind, konzentriert sich die Forschung weitestgehend auf diese.¹⁷ Aufgrund des charakteristischen „Familienelements“ können bei Familienpersonengesellschaften Besonderheiten¹⁸ auftreten, die bei einer gewöhnlichen Personengesellschaft

seltener vorkommen.¹⁹ Neben des Einflusses der Familie – ausgeübt unter anderem durch Stimmrechtsmehrheit – sind Familienpersonengesellschaften häufig charakterisiert durch den stetig wachsenden Gesellschafterkreis, der sich infolge generationenübergreifender Anteilsübertragung und -vererbung häufig auf Nachkommen des Gründers beschränkt.²⁰ Die Organstruktur ist in vielen Fällen geprägt durch eine fast körperschaftliche Unterteilung in Geschäftsführung, Beirat und Gesellschafterversammlung, welche zudem eine weitere Unterteilung in Familienstämme zulässt. Eine finanzierungsseitig besondere Bedeutung für Familienpersonengesellschaften nimmt die Selbstfinanzierung ein.²¹ Abzugrenzen von der Definition der Familienunternehmen, ist die Definition von Kleinunternehmen, kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen (KMU), welche sich über quantitative Werte wie Bilanzsumme, Mitarbeiteranzahl oder Umsatz klassifizieren.²²

Für die Gründung einer Familienpersonengesellschaft gibt es verschiedene Motive, die sich in steuerliche und nichtsteuerliche Gründe differenzieren lassen.²³ Aus steuerlicher Sicht besonders relevant ist die Steuerprogressionsminderung zu nennen, die auch „Familien-Realsplitting“ genannt wird,²⁴ die bzw. das man erreicht, wenn das erwirtschaftete Einkommen auf möglichst viele Rechtssubjekte, also Familienmitglieder, verteilt wird. Die sich ergebende Steuerlast kann mithilfe der Verteilung und unter Berücksichtigung weiterer Grundfreibeträge reduziert werden.²⁵ Es bietet sich bspw. die Beteiligung minderjähriger Kinder, ggf. unter Einbeziehung eines Ergänzungspflegers, an, da diese in der Regel die Geschäftsführung durch die Eltern anerkennen.²⁶ Rechtsprechung und Steuerverwaltung begegnen Familienpersonengesellschaften aber nicht selten mit Misstrauen.²⁷ Vor allem die steuerliche Anerkennung sollte aus diesem Grund eingehend geprüft und sichergestellt werden. Häufig spielt die Familienpersonengesellschaft in der frühzeitigen Vermögensstrukturplanung²⁸ eine tragende Rolle.²⁹

von Familien- bzw. Gesellschafterinteressen im Rahmen von Pool- bzw. Stimmbindungsverträgen; Vgl. Lange (2012, Rz. 3306); Prinz und Kahle (2020, § 17 Rz. 59).

¹⁹ Vgl. Stengel in Prinz und Kahle (2020, § 17 Rz. 17).

²⁰ Vgl. Von Rechenberg et al. (2020, 56).

²¹ Siehe Kapitel 2.1.3. Einhergehend mit strengeren oder eingeschränkten Entnahmerechten und restriktiveren Kündigungsmöglichkeiten und eingeschränkten Abfindungsansprüchen für die Gesellschafter sollen Unternehmensbestand und -wachstum sichergestellt werden.

²² Vgl. Fischer (2019, 45); Institut für Mittelstandsforschung Bonn (n. d.).

²³ Aus nichtsteuerlicher Sicht finden sich Argumente wie die Sicherung der Existenz des Unternehmens, Vermögenübertragung, frühzeitige Bindung junger Familienangehöriger, Ausschluss von Einfluss Dritter, vgl. Wacker (2016, 4).

²⁴ Vgl. Hennrichs in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 10 Rz. 79).

²⁵ Vgl. Wacker in Schmidt (2021, § 15 Rz. 740).

²⁶ Vgl. Werner (2015, 254).

²⁷ Vgl. Fischer (2019, 32); Hennrichs in Tipke & Lang (2018, § 10 Rz. 79).

²⁸ Die Nutzung schenkungsteuerlicher Optionen kann die, hinsichtlich ihres Fälligkeitszeitpunkts naturgemäß unbekannte (mit großen Unsicherheiten behaftete) ErbSt, reduzieren, während künftig entstehende stille Reserven den Kindern bereits erbschaftsteuerfrei anwachsen, vgl. Stengel in Prinz und Kahle (2020, § 17 Rz. 16).

²⁹ Vgl. Münch (2015, 50).

¹⁴ So z.B. Lange (2012, Rz. 3301).

¹⁵ Vgl. Lange (2012, Rz. 3302); Mayer und Bäuml in Kanzler und Kraft (2021, § 15 Rz. 302); Söffing (2005, Kap. 14.1.1.).

¹⁶ Vgl. Von Rechenberg et al. (2020, 34).

¹⁷ Es lassen sich weitere qualitative Kriterien nennen. Die eingeschränkte Quantifizierbarkeit und differenzierte Auslegung dieser, lässt sie aber in den Hintergrund treten, vgl. Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2019, 51 f).

¹⁸ Es gibt i.R.d. Schenkungs- und Erbrechts diverse Besonderheiten, welche jedoch aufgrund ihrer unzureichenden Relevanz für diese Arbeit im Folgenden keine Berücksichtigung finden. Gleiches gilt für die Bündelung

2.1.2. Bedeutung von Familienpersonengesellschaften

Weltweit wird Familienunternehmen, als wesentliche Treiber volkswirtschaftlichen Erfolgs, eine herausragende ökonomische Bedeutung zugeschrieben.³⁰ Der relative Anteil an familienkontrollierten Personengesellschaften in Deutschland ist mit 85 % sehr hoch. Insgesamt werden 79 % der Personengesellschaften auch von ihren Eigentümern geführt, während nur 6 % auf familienexterne Geschäftsführer zurückgreifen. Beachtenswert ist, dass in dieser Betrachtung auch die Mischform der „GmbH & Co. KG“ inkludiert ist, die eine etwas geringere Quote einer Familienkontrolle von etwa 71 % aufweist. Wird die Betrachtung um diese Mischform bereinigt, zeigt sich, dass in Deutschland knapp 99 % familienkontrollierter Personengesellschaften existieren.³¹ Betrachtet man den Anteil aller Familienunternehmen sortiert nach Umsatzgrößenklassen in Deutschland, ergibt sich das Bild in Tabelle 1.

Für die Umsatz-Größenklasse bis zu einer Millionen Euro zeigt sich eine deutliche Dominanz der Familienunternehmen. Mit zunehmenden Umsätzen reduziert sich der relative Anteil zunehmend, bildet aber weiterhin die Mehrheit. Erst ab einem Umsatzvolumen von über 50 Mio. Euro entspricht der Anteil nur noch etwa einem Drittel.³²

Die wichtige Stellung von Familienunternehmen in Deutschland wird ebenfalls deutlich, wenn man die Entwicklung der Beschäftigtenzahlen betrachtet. Die 500 größten Familienunternehmen haben im Zeitraum von 2007 bis 2016 mehr Arbeitsplätze geschaffen als die DAX-Unternehmen in Summe. Insgesamt wuchs die Inlandsbeschäftigung in dem vorgenannten Zeitraum von 2,07 Mio. auf 2,54 Mio. Arbeitnehmer. Auch der Umsatz der 500 größten Familienunternehmen stieg in der Zehn-Jahres-Betrachtung um 36 % und verzeichnete damit jährlich etwa ein Prozent mehr Wachstum als die übrigen Dax-Unternehmen.³³ In den Jahren 2009 bis 2013 bestimmten Familienunternehmen etwa 42 % des Ertragsteueraufkommens in Deutschland.³⁴ Große Familienunternehmen zahlen demnach deutlich mehr Steuern als börsennotierte Konzerne. Die durchschnittliche Steuerbelastung der 500 größten Familienunternehmen liegt allein auf Unternehmensebene bei 28 %. Berücksichtigt man zudem die Steuern auf Gesellschafterebene, kommt man auf eine durchschnittliche Belastung von fast 38 %. Die durchschnittliche Steuerbelastung der Dax-Konzerne liegt hingegen bei knapp 26 %.³⁵ Familienunternehmen sind also nicht nur der dominierende Unternehmenstypus, sondern spielen eine tragende Rolle für die Beschäftigung und das Wirtschaftswachstum in Deutschland.³⁶ Folgt man den Ergebnissen einer Studie von PwC sind sich

Familienunternehmen über ihre tragende Rolle bewusst. In der DACH-Region ist diese Meinung besonders ausgeprägt.³⁷ Besonders bemerkenswert ist, dass nur etwa 10 % zustimmen, dass die Regierung alles in ihrer Macht stehende tut, um Familienunternehmen zu unterstützen.³⁸

2.1.3. Steuerrelevante Besonderheiten

Um die besonderen steuerlichen Anforderungen und Bedürfnisse von Familienpersonengesellschaften herausarbeiten zu können, bedarf es zunächst einer Charakterisierung und Auswertung der wesentypischen Merkmalsausprägungen sowie steuerrelevanter Besonderheiten dieses Adressatenkreises.

Die Interdependenz der gewöhnlich in sich geschlossenen Systeme „Familie“ und „Unternehmen“ wird in der Literatur als koevolutionäre Einheit beschrieben. Sind Familien stark personenorientiert und emotional, agieren Unternehmen funktionsorientiert und sachlich. Die Kommunikation und Interaktion zwischen diesen Systemen funktioniert in Familienpersonengesellschaften trotz der großen Diskrepanz im Aufbau.³⁹ Familienunternehmen charakterisieren sich außerdem durch langfristiges, mithin generationenübergreifendes Denken und Traditionsbewusstsein. Sie zeichnen sich aus durch Nachhaltigkeit als Art des ökonomischen Wirtschaftens verbunden mit dem Ziel, der gegenwärtigen und zukünftigen Generation eine auskömmliche ökonomische Basis zu verschaffen. Im Interesse der Gesellschafter steht dabei eine langfristige Sicherung des Unternehmens für Nachkommen.⁴⁰ Die nachhaltige Eigenkapitalbindung ist dabei naturgemäß Interessenschwerpunkt.⁴¹ Es werden oftmals wesentliche Teile des Gewinns nicht an die Gesellschafter ausgeschüttet, sondern thesauriert und in die Zukunft des Unternehmens und seiner Gesellschafter (re-)investiert.⁴² Die Gewinnthesaurierung wird mithin als wichtigste Finanzierungsquelle von Familienunternehmen bezeichnet.⁴³ Ein hoher Grad an Vermögensbindung der Gesellschafter an die Gesellschaft sorgt für eine wechselseitige Abhängigkeit,⁴⁴ die wiederum die Theorie der koevolutionären Einheit unterstützt. Vergleicht man Familienunternehmen mit Nicht-Familienunternehmen, fällt auf, dass sie solider finanziert sind, eine weniger gewinnerhöhende Bilanzpolitik ausüben und nur in einem geringen Ausmaß Steuerplanung betreiben.⁴⁵ In der Literatur wird daher die These formuliert, Fa-

„tion“, vgl. Düren und Hagemann-Milkits in BDI (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie) (2008); Goebel beschreibt Familienunternehmer als „das Herz der sozialen Marktwirtschaft“, vgl. Goebel in Fahrenschoen et al. (2015, 45); Müller beschreibt sie als „Rückgrat unserer Volkswirtschaften“, Müller in PricewaterhouseCoopers AG (PWC) (2012, 5).

³⁷ Vgl. Fischer (2019, 167).

³⁸ Vgl. Fischer (2019, 167).

³⁹ Vgl. Fischer (2019, 167).

⁴⁰ Vgl. Werner (2015, 555). Die Problematik eines Generationenwechsels ist als komplexer Prozess ertragsteuerlich weniger relevant und findet in der vorliegenden Arbeit keine Berücksichtigung.

⁴¹ Vgl. Werner (2015, 262).

⁴² Vgl. Peters, Schönberger & Partner (2018, 3).

⁴³ Vgl. z.B. Kormann (2013, 77).

⁴⁴ Vgl. Versen (2019, 38).

⁴⁵ Vgl. Brune et al. (2021, 135).

³⁰ Vgl. Brune et al. (2021, 134).

³¹ Vgl. Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2019, 12).

³² Vgl. Haunschild und Wolter in Institut für Mittelstandsforschung Bonn (2007, 20).

³³ Vgl. Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2019, 43–50).

³⁴ Vgl. Brune et al. (2021, 139).

³⁵ Vgl. Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020b, 39).

³⁶ Nach Brune haben sie eine „immense ökonomische Bedeutung“, Brune et al. (2021, 134); Der BDI titelt mit „Motor für Wachstum und Beschäf-

Tabelle 1: Anteil der Familienunternehmen nach Umsatzgrößenklassen im Jahr 2000
(Quelle: in Anlehnung an Institut für Mittelstandsforschung Bonn (2007, S. 20))

Umsatz (in Mio. EUR)	< 1	1 – 5	5 – 10	10 – 50	> 50
Anteil Familienunternehmen	96,9 %	85,4 %	74 %	58 %	33,6 %

milienunternehmen würden „vorsichtiger – möglicherweise verantwortungsvoller“⁴⁶ agieren. Dessen ungeachtet ist die relative Steuerminimierung als stark gewichtete Zielsetzung von Familienunternehmen zu benennen.⁴⁷ Entscheidender Vorteil ist außerdem, dass sich Leitung und Gesellschafter häufig überschneiden, d.h. Eigentum und Leitung nicht getrennt sind. Die aus der Neuen Institutionenökonomik bekannten typischen Prinzipal-Agenten-Konflikte zwischen Unternehmenseignern als Prinzipale und der Unternehmensleitung als Agenten spielen daher durch die geringere und teils nicht vorhandene Trennung beider Funktionen im Familienunternehmen häufig eine nur untergeordnete Rolle.⁴⁸ Kennzeichnend ist darüber hinaus eine stärkere Risikoaversion und im Gegensatz zu Nicht-Familienunternehmen ein deutlich höherer Einbezug einiger nicht-finanzieller Aspekte⁴⁹ in die Entscheidungsfindung, wie z.B. die Kontrolle über die Geschäftstätigkeit, die Reputation der Familie sowie die Sicherung des Fortbestandes.⁵⁰ Aus der für Familienunternehmen typischen unternehmerischen Kontinuität und der wertschätzenden Unternehmenskultur resultiert eine Arbeitsplatzsicherung und Zufriedenheit für die Mitarbeiter als Anspruchsgruppe.⁵¹

Während sich einige Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten eröffnen, existieren jedoch gleichermaßen einige Rechtsunsicherheiten und Problembereiche. Familienpersonengesellschaften beklagen vor allem die Komplexität, die die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG und die Gewerbesteueranrechnung nach § 35 EStG zur Folge haben.⁵² Auch im Zeitalter der globalisierten Wirtschaft erfahren Familienpersonengesellschaften einen Nachteil. Während derzeit etwa ein Drittel der Umsätze von Familienunternehmen im Ausland generiert werden – Tendenz steigend⁵³, gibt es in Deutschland ein klares Einschränkungspotential für die Unternehmensleistung auf internationaler Ebene.⁵⁴ Einerseits begründet durch einige steuerliche Fragestellungen, die mit Qualifikationskonflikten im internationalen Steuerrecht und zumeist mit dem latenten Risiko einer Doppelbesteuerung einhergehen,⁵⁵ andererseits durch eine Steuerverhaftung

im Inland.⁵⁶ Zusammenfassend lässt sich festhalten, dass sich Familienunternehmen durch charakteristische Besonderheiten gegenüber Nicht-Familienunternehmen oder gar (kapitalmarktorientierten) Konzernen auszeichnen. Sie handeln und entscheiden langfristiger als Konzerne, setzen ihr Kapital effizienter ein und wirtschaften rentabler. Oft sind sie charakterisiert durch einen immer breiter werdenden Kreis an Gesellschaftern, der sich als Ergebnis der Unternehmensnachfolge innerhalb der Familie ergibt. Eine hohe Investitionskraftkraft, aus thesauriertem Eigenkapital vorhandene Liquidität, sowie unternehmerische Flexibilität bilden weitere Differenzierungsmerkmale.⁵⁷

Unter Berücksichtigung der genannten Charakteristika lassen sich Implikationen für Anforderungen an eine Besteuerung, die die Interessen von Familienpersonengesellschaften aufgreift, ableiten:

1. Nicht zuletzt bilden die Postulate der Gerechtigkeit und Neutralität ganz grundlegende Anforderungen an ein Steuersystem.⁵⁸ Daher wundert es nicht, dass Rechtsformneutralität sogar als Kriterium für die Effizienz eines Steuersystems formuliert wird.⁵⁹ Die systemische Vermischung von Familie und Unternehmen und der stetige Einsatz vieler Familiengeschafter gehen oft mit einem starken Gefühl ungerechter Besteuerung einher. Die Folge ist ein Gerechtigkeitsempfinden, welches nicht mit dem theoretischen Prinzip eines gerechten Steuersystems konvergiert. Der Effekt wird verstärkt durch Vergleichsmöglichkeiten im In- und Ausland.⁶⁰ Als „gerecht“ dürfte die tatsächliche Umsetzung der vom Gesetzgeber intendierten Rechtsformneutralität angesehen werden, da diese auf nationaler Ebene keine Unterschiede zwischen Rechtsformtypen zulässt.
2. Das Leistungsfähigkeitsprinzip als Fundamentalprinzip, v.a. für die Einkommensteuer, findet durch den Verbund der koevolutionären Einheit kein klares Zuordnungssubjekt. Vielmehr ist die Leistungsfähigkeit der Gesellschafter an das Unternehmen gebunden. Familienmitglieder sind häufig nicht gleichwertig zu ersetzen. Da die Leistungsfähigkeit nicht differenziert werden kann, wäre eine Besteuerung auf Ebene der

⁴⁶ Für dieses Zitat keine Unterscheidung zwischen den Ebenen Unternehmen und handelnde Personen: Brune et al. (2021, 135).

⁴⁷ Vgl. Fischer (2019, 318).

⁴⁸ Vgl. Chen und Chen (2010, 27) oder Versen (2019, 37).

⁴⁹ Vgl. Brune et al. (2019, 309).

⁵⁰ Vgl. Brune et al. (2021, 142).

⁵¹ Vgl. Fischer (2019, 318).

⁵² Vgl. Fischer (2019, 316).

⁵³ Vgl. Müller in PricewaterhouseCoopers AG (PWC) (2012, 8).

⁵⁴ Werner beschreibt eine „Globalisierungsbremse“, da ein transgenerationaler Unternehmensaufbau durch Steuerverhaftung zu einem Substanzverlust führt, vgl. Werner (2015, 561).

⁵⁵ Vgl. Wehrße (2011, 1).

⁵⁶ Vgl. Werner (2015, 561).

⁵⁷ Vgl. Ahrens et al. (2019, 4).

⁵⁸ Bereits im 18. Jhd. nach Adam Smith, formuliert als „Gleichheit“, vgl. Hey in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 7 Rz. 2) und verankert im Gleichheitsgrundsatz des Art. 3 Abs. 1 GG, vgl. Hey in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 3 Rz. 110).

⁵⁹ Vgl. K. Schneider und Wesselbaum-Neugebauer (2010, 3).

⁶⁰ Vgl. Fischer (2019, 318).

koevolutionären Einheit folgerichtig. Für Familienpersonengesellschaften ist, dieser Prämisse entsprechend, bereits das Transparenzprinzip als Besteuerungskonzept vorgeschrieben. Kritisiert wird allerdings eine Besteuerung von Gewinnanteilen ohne Entnahme oder Ausschüttung, d.h. ohne Gewinnverwendung auf Gesellschafterebene. Als Anforderungen ergeben sich einerseits eine Wahrung des Transparenzprinzips zur Erhaltung der koevolutionären Einheit, andererseits aber die Berücksichtigung einer reduzierten Leistungsfähigkeit durch Thesaurierung oder Entnahmebeschränkungen.⁶¹

3. Da Familienpersonengesellschaften kein spezifisches Fachwissen im Bereich der Besteuerung unterstellt werden kann und aus einer Komplexität potenzielle Fehlinterpretationen erwachsen können,⁶² sollte die Besteuerung praktikabel und nachvollziehbar sein.⁶³
4. In einem dynamischen Umfeld sollte außerdem die Entscheidungsflexibilität der Gesellschafter gewahrt werden. Steuerliche Risiken sind wenig kompatibel mit dem typischerweise stark ausgeprägten Sicherheitsstreben von Familienpersonengesellschaften und können Entscheidungen von Gesellschaftern beeinflussen. Ertragsunabhängige Besteuerungselemente, wie z.B. Zins- oder Verlustabzugsverbote, stören die Flexibilität der grundsätzlich flexiblen Steuern wie etwa Körperschaftsteuer und Einkommensteuer.⁶⁴ Aus diesem Grund sollte die Besteuerung unter sicheren Bedingungen entsprechende Flexibilität und auch Planbarkeit bieten können.

2.2. Personengesellschaften als Besteuerungssubjekt

Trotz der weitgehenden gesellschaftsrechtlichen Anerkennung als selbstständiges Rechtssubjekt⁶⁵ bildet die Personengesellschaft kein selbstständiges Besteuerungssubjekt und ist somit weder einkommen- noch körperschaftsteuerpflichtig.⁶⁶ Stattdessen werden die aus einer Beteiligung an einer gewerblichen Personengesellschaft erzielten Einkünfte als Einkünfte aus Gewerbebetrieb den beteiligten Gesellschaftern anteilig zugerechnet.⁶⁷ Nicht zuletzt aus diesem Grund ist es als irreführend anzusehen, wenn von der „Besteuerung der Personengesellschaft“ gesprochen wird, da die eigentliche Besteuerung auf Ebene der Mitunternehmer stattfindet.⁶⁸ Diese steuerliche Behandlung ist Ausfluss des

Transparenzprinzips, da das Unternehmen für Besteuerungszwecke als „transparent“ gilt und Gewinne sowie Verluste der Personengesellschaft auf Mitunternehmer-Ebene erfasst und besteuert werden.⁶⁹ Auch bestimmen sich sämtliche Rechtsbeziehungen, wie schuldrechtliche Vertragsbeziehungen zwischen der Gesellschaft und ihren Gesellschaftern, nach den Grundsätzen des Transparenzprinzips. Daraus resultiert, dass aufgrund der zivilrechtlichen Anerkennung, Vertragsbeziehungen außerhalb des Gesellschaftsverhältnisses wie unter fremden Dritten beurteilt werden, im Anschluss aber aus steuerrechtlicher Sicht ein Einbezug in die Gewinnanteile stattfindet.⁷⁰ Dies hat zur Folge, dass Vertragsbeziehungen steuerlich nicht berücksichtigt werden, den Gewinn nicht mindern und somit vollständig der Mitunternehmerbesteuerung unterliegen.⁷¹ Anders verhält sich die Behandlung hinsichtlich der Gewerbesteuer, welche dem Objektprinzip unterliegt.⁷² Hier orientiert sich die Besteuerung nämlich nicht an der Rechtsform des Unternehmens. Die Ermittlung des zu versteuernden Gewerbeertrags erfolgt vielmehr auf Grundlage des nach den einkommen- bzw. körperschaftsteuerlichen Grundsätzen ermittelten Gewinns, der um gewerbesteuerliche Hinzurechnungen und Kürzungen korrigiert wird.⁷³

Im Gegensatz zum Transparenzprinzip steht das sogenannte Trennungsprinzip, das für die Besteuerung von Kapitalgesellschaften Anwendung findet. Konzeptionell erfolgt dabei eine unabhängige bzw. „getrennte“ Besteuerung der Kapitalgesellschaft und ihren Anteilseignern.⁷⁴ Hieraus folgt, dass Unternehmensgewinne zunächst auf Ebene der Kapitalgesellschaft mit Körperschaftsteuer belastet werden. Bei einer Ausschüttung an die Anteilseigner werden diese dann im Zeitpunkt der Ausschüttung besteuert.⁷⁵ Bei natürlichen Personen als Gesellschafter würde beispielsweise eine Besteuerung mit Einkommensteuer oder Kapitalertragsteuer vorgenommen werden. Da es sich also sowohl unter gesellschaftsrechtlichen Gesichtspunkten als auch unter steuerrechtlichen Gesichtspunkten bei der Kapitalgesellschaft und ihren Anteilseignern um zwei eigenständige Rechtssubjekte handelt, sind schuldrechtliche Verträge, soweit sie den Grundsatz und die Voraussetzungen der Fremdüblichkeit erfüllen, konträr zu der Behandlung im Rahmen der Personengesellschaft auch steuerlich maßgebend und haben als Betriebseinnahmen oder -ausgaben unmittelbaren Einfluss auf den erzielten Gewinn, welcher der Besteuerung unterliegt.⁷⁶

⁶¹ Vgl. Fischer (2019, 245f).

⁶² Vgl. Fischer (2019, 245f).

⁶³ Auch diese Anforderung gleicht einem von Adam Smith formulierten Besteuerungsgrundsatz, der „Bestimmtheit“, welche eine für „jedermann“ klare und deutliche Besteuerung umfasst, vgl. Hey in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 7 Rz. 2).

⁶⁴ Sog. „build-in-flexibility“ von Steuern auf konjunkturabhängige Einkommen, vgl. Hey in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 7 Rz. 10).

⁶⁵ Vgl. §§ 124, 161 Abs 2 HGB; §§ 14 Abs. 2, 1059a Abs. 2 BGB.

⁶⁶ Vgl. z.B. Kraft und Kraft (2018, 225); Woerz (2009, 21).

⁶⁷ Vgl. § 15 Abs. 1 S. 1 Nr. 2 EStG.

⁶⁸ Vgl. Hennrichs in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 10 Rz. 14).

⁶⁹ Vgl. Kahle in Prinz und Kahle (2020, § 7 Rz. 1); Kraft und Kraft (2018, 225).

⁷⁰ Vgl. Grützner in Lange (2012, 166 Rz. 667).

⁷¹ Vgl. Krumm in Kirchhof und Seer (2021, § 15 Rz. 229).

⁷² Vgl. Montag in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 12 Rz. 3).

⁷³ Vgl. § 7 Abs. 1 GewStG.

⁷⁴ Vgl. Böhrer (2012, 33).

⁷⁵ Vgl. Seiler in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 11 Rz. 1).

⁷⁶ Vgl. z.B. Birk et al. (n. d., Rz. 1246); Jacobs et al. (2015, 101).

2.3. Entwicklung des deutschen Unternehmensteuerrechts

2.3.1. Unternehmensteuerreformen 2000 und 2008

„Wenn wir die internationale Wettbewerbsfähigkeit der deutschen Wirtschaft erhalten wollen, ist die Modernisierung des deutschen Unternehmensteuerrechts dafür eine der wesentlichen Grundlagen“⁷⁷ – so der aktuelle Ruf der Politik nach einer grundlegenden Reform des Unternehmensteuerrechts. Doch sind diese Forderungen nicht neu, versucht die Politik die internationale Wettbewerbsfähigkeit der deutschen Wirtschaft bereits seit Jahrzehnten zu erhalten oder gar auszubauen. Dass die Notwendigkeit einer Reform und damit akuter Handlungsbedarf besteht, zeigt nicht zuletzt der internationale Trend. In den letzten Jahren haben nämlich viele europäische Staaten und wichtige Handelspartner außerhalb der EU die nationale Steuerbelastung gesenkt.⁷⁸ Um angesichts dieser veränderten Rahmenbedingungen die Attraktivität des Unternehmenstandorts Deutschland zu erhöhen, sollte daher eine entsprechende Anpassung der Steuerbelastung angestrebt werden.

Werden Unternehmensteuerreformen der Vergangenheit ausgewertet und ihre Motive analysiert, verfolgten sie ähnliche Ziele und fußen auf gleichen Missständen. Zwei Reformen in den Jahren 2000 und 2008 haben zu maßgeblichen Änderungen im deutschen Unternehmensteuerrecht geführt. Schon 1999 wurde als Grund für die hohe Arbeitslosigkeit in Deutschland eine nachlassende Wettbewerbsfähigkeit des Standorts Deutschland gegenüber dem Ausland erklärt. Verantwortlich wurde dafür die hohe tarifäre Steuerbelastung erwirtschafteter Gewinne gemacht. Die von der Brühler Kommission⁷⁹ formulierten Ziele einer Reform umfassten die Stärkung des Wirtschaftsstandortes Deutschland, die Stärkung der Investitionskraft der Unternehmen, mehr Steuergerechtigkeit in Form von Rechtsformneutralität und eine deutliche Vereinfachung des Steuerrechts.⁸⁰ Im Rahmen der Reform wurden schließlich unter anderem die Steuersätze maßgeblich verringert sowie die Ermäßigung nach § 35 EStG, auf deren Systematik in Kapitel 3.1. eingegangen wird, eingeführt.⁸¹ Von wesentlicher Bedeutung war auch das Vorliegen des Gesetzesentwurfs zu § 4a KStG-E 2000.⁸² In dem Vorschlag war nämlich ein Optionsrecht für Einzelunternehmer und Mitunternehmerschaften mit betrieblichen Einkünften vorgesehen, mit dem sie nach den Regeln einer unbeschränkt körperschaftsteuerpflichtigen Kapitalgesellschaft besteuert werden konnten. Einhergehen sollte die Option mit einer fiktiven Umwandlung. Aufgrund der hohen Komplexität und des geringen Anwendungsbereichs scheiterte dieses Modell aber im Gesetzgebungsverfahren.⁸³

Fast zehn Jahre später, formulierte die zweite Unternehmensteuerreform im Jahr 2008 im Wesentlichen die altbekannten Ziele, nämlich die Steigerung der Attraktivität des Standortes Deutschland durch die Senkung der Steuersätze für einbehaltene Unternehmensgewinne sowie die Herstellung einer Belastungsneutralität der Rechtsformen. Als wichtigste Änderung kann die deutliche Absenkung des Körperschaftsteuersatzes von 25 % auf 15 % genannt werden. Daneben wurden das noch heute relevante Teileinkünfteverfahren, sowie die Besteuerung von Einkünften aus Kapitalvermögen anhand eines pauschalen Kapitalertragsteuersatzes in Höhe von 25 % eingeführt.⁸⁴ Damit die Belastung von Kapitalgesellschaften und Personengesellschaften nicht zu weit divergierte, wurde die pauschalierte Anrechnung der Gewerbesteuer auf das 3,8-fache des Gewerbesteuermessbetrags erhöht. Darüber hinaus wurde für Personengesellschaften die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG eingeführt.⁸⁵

2.3.2. Bewertung der Reformen und aktueller Stand

Die im vorherigen Abschnitt dargelegten Bemühungen des Gesetzgebers nach einer grundlegenden Unternehmensteuerreform gelten in der Literatur insgesamt als verfehlt.⁸⁶ Untersucht man Erfolgseinschätzungen und Bewertungen der Unternehmensteuerreform 2008 erhält man hingegen ein kontroverses Bild. Die starke Meinungsdivergenz führte zu einem regelrechten „Literaturstreit“.⁸⁷ Einigkeit besteht über die Tatsache, dass auch nach der Reform Belastungsunterschiede bestehen blieben und eine Rechtsformneutralität nicht hergestellt werden konnte. Während die Reform allerdings einerseits positiv als erste Verbesserung gesehen wird, wird sie andererseits und gerade im Hinblick auf die nationale Unternehmensbesteuerung und dem Ziel einer Verbesserung der Rechtsform- und Finanzierungsneutralität als klare Verfehlung bewertet.⁸⁸ Bereits vor Einführung der Reform wurde der Einfluss dieser Postulate untersucht und es gab erste Vergleiche der Steuerbelastungen. Ertragreiche Personengesellschaften galten demnach keineswegs als Profiteure. Im Gegenteil, durch die Reform wurde die Rechtsform der Kapitalgesellschaft deutlich attraktiver und günstiger. Auch die eingeführte Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG führte nicht zu den gewünschten Ergebnissen und Wirkungen.⁸⁹

Insgesamt führte die Unternehmensteuerreform 2008 zu einer Senkung der nominalen Steuerbelastung einbehaltener

⁷⁷ Vgl. CDU/CSU-Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag (2019, 2).

⁷⁸ Teils um bis zu 13 % seit 2008 (bspw. USA), vgl. Blum et al. (2020, 56); Wacker in Schön und Schindler (2019, 2).

⁷⁹ Mit dem Ziel der Umsetzung fundamentaler Änderungen, etablierte das Bundesfinanzministerium im Jahr 1999 die sog. Brühler Kommission, welche Empfehlungen zur Reform der Unternehmensbesteuerung formulierte, vgl. Brühler Kommission (1999, Teil I).

⁸⁰ Vgl. Brühler Kommission (1999, Teil III A).

⁸¹ Vgl. Pelka (2001, 28).

⁸² Vgl. BT-Drs. 14/2683 in der Fassung v. 15.02.2000, 77.

⁸³ Vgl. Schiffers (2021, 57).

⁸⁴ Vgl. Lühn und Lühn (2007, 256).

⁸⁵ Eine detaillierte Vorstellung der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung erfolgt in Kapitel 3.2.

⁸⁶ Vgl. z.B. Balmes in Pelka (2001, 3); Krawitz in Wehrheim und Heurung (2007, 267); Seifert (2002, 113).

⁸⁷ Pfuhl (2014, 5): Auf der einen Seite stand die Forderung nach einer „Abschaffung der misslungenen Thesaurierungsbegünstigung“, federführend Knirsch, Maiterth und Hundsdoerfer (mit Zustimmung v. 34 Fachkollegen), auf der anderen Seite ein Aufruf zur Beibehaltung des § 34a EStG mit moderaten Modifikationen, Fechner und Bäuml (mit Zustimmung von 27 Steuerabteilungsleitern von Personenunternehmen und Spitzenverbänden).

⁸⁸ Vgl. Lühn und Lühn (2007, 259).

⁸⁹ Vgl. Lühn und Lühn (2007, 259).

Gewinne. Bei entnommenen Gewinnen führte sie allerdings durch veränderte Bemessungsgrundlagen nur zu einer sehr geringfügigen Senkung oder sogar zu einem leichten Anstieg der Steuerbelastung.⁹⁰ Bereits kurze Zeit nach der Reform wurde Kritik dahingehend laut, dass die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung eine reine „Tariflösung“ für ertragstarke Unternehmen sei und lediglich unter idealtypischen Voraussetzungen, nämlich wenn die Grenzbelastung des Steuerpflichtigen nahe der einkommensteuerlichen Spitzenbelastung liegt⁹¹, zu einer annähernden Belastungsneutralität führe.⁹² Statt der vom Gesetzgeber geplanten 90.000 Inanspruchnahmen, werden daher jährlich maximal 6.500 Fälle der Anwendung registriert.⁹³

Nach wie vor fehlt es also der deutschen Unternehmensbesteuerung an Rechtsformneutralität, die sich in annähernder⁹⁴ Belastungs- und Finanzierungsneutralität äußert. Die Literatur fordert v.a. eine Reform der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung⁹⁵, auch vor dem Hintergrund, dass „wenig Aussicht auf eine grundlegende Reform der Unternehmensbesteuerung besteht“.⁹⁶ Nichtsdestotrotz wird ebenso an die Idee einer umfassenden Reform angeknüpft – nicht selten in der Ausgestaltung einer Option für Personengesellschaften, sich dem Regime der Kapitalgesellschaftsbesteuerung zu unterwerfen.⁹⁷ Im Hinblick auf das KöMoG sind diese Überlegungen kennzeichnend und geben erste Hinweise auf mögliche Folgen und Auswirkungen eines Optionsmodells.

3. Besteuerung von Familienpersonengesellschaften

3.1. System der Regelbesteuerung

Wie bereits in Kapitel 2.2. erläutert, unterliegen die Einkünfte einer Personengesellschaft der transparenten Mitunternehmerbesteuerung.⁹⁸ Konkret bedeutet dies, dass die Ermittlung und Versteuerung des steuerlichen Gewinns auf Ebene der Gesellschafter stattfinden. Verfahrensrechtlich erfolgt eine gesonderte und einheitliche Feststellung des Gewinns der Personengesellschaft,⁹⁹ mithilfe derer den Gesellschaftern nach dem Gewinnverteilungsschlüssel ihr steuerlicher Gewinnanteil aus der steuerlichen Gesamthandsbilanz

zugerechnet wird.¹⁰⁰ Bestandteil der Besteuerungsgrundlagen sind außerdem sämtliche Ergebnisse der Sonder- und Ergänzungsbilanzen der Gesellschafter. Diese werden auf der zweiten Gewinnermittlungsstufe dem Gesellschafter zugeordnet.¹⁰¹ Für den Gesellschafter ergeben sich daraus im Regelfall Einkünfte aus Gewerbebetrieb.¹⁰² Relevanz findet die Einordnung der Einkünfte als gewerbliche Einkünfte vor allem im Hinblick auf die Gewerbesteueranrechnung nach § 35 EStG, welche im Folgenden näher erläutert wird.

Bei der Regelbesteuerung werden die Einkünfte mit einem progressiven Steuersatz zwischen 0 und 45 %, abhängig von den persönlichen Verhältnissen des Gesellschafters, besteuert.¹⁰³ Sofern die Einkünfte, der Gewerbesteuer unterlegen haben, ist eine Steuerermäßigung in Form einer pauschalierten Anrechnung der Gewerbesteuer auf die persönliche Einkommensteuer nach § 35 EStG möglich.¹⁰⁴ Die Gewerbesteuerermäßigung ist als Ergebnis der intendierten Gleichstellung gewerblicher und nicht gewerblicher Einkünfte (aus nichtselbstständiger Arbeit) anzusehen.¹⁰⁵ Die Bemessungsgrundlage für eine Anrechnung bildet die tarifliche Einkommensteuer, abzgl. etwaiger anzurechnender ausländischer Steuern.¹⁰⁶ Die Anrechnung ist für alle natürlichen Personen anwendbar, unabhängig davon, ob die Steuerpflicht beschränkt oder unbeschränkt vorliegt.¹⁰⁷ Hinsichtlich des Anrechnungsvolumens ist die Steuerermäßigung gleich dreimal beschränkt. Einerseits auf die Einkommensteuer, die auf die gewerblichen Einkünfte entfällt (sog. Ermäßigungshöchstbetrag), andererseits auf die tatsächlich entrichtete Gewerbesteuer und schließlich auf den 4-fachen¹⁰⁸ GewSt-Messbetrag.¹⁰⁹ Der Ermäßigungshöchstbetrag ist wie folgt zu ermitteln¹¹⁰:

¹⁰⁰Vgl. Von Rechenberg et al. (2020, 548).

¹⁰¹Vgl. Lüdicke in Lüdicke und Sistermann (2018, § 1 Rz. 59).

¹⁰²Vgl. Jacobs et al. (2015, 574).

¹⁰³Vgl. Jacobs et al. (2015, 574). Bis 2021 wurde der SolZ i.H.v. 5,5 % erhoben. Seit 2021 entfällt er für die meisten und wird ab 96.409 Euro voll erhoben, vgl. BT-Drs. 19/14103 v. 16.10.2019, 1, 7. Da das Hauptaugenmerk der vorliegenden Arbeit auf ertragreichen Familienpersonengesellschaften liegt und die Gesellschafter entsprechend hohe Einkünfte erzielen, wird der SolZ annahmegemäß weiterhin berücksichtigt.

¹⁰⁴Die Anrechnung war bis zum VZ 2019 i.H.d. 3,8-fachen und ab dem VZ 2020 i.H.d. 4-fachen GewSt-Messbetrages möglich. Die letzte Änderung basiert auf dem zweiten Corona-Steuerhilfegesetz, vgl. Corona-Steuerhilfegesetz II i.d.F v. 29.06.2020, BGBl 2020 I S.1513.

¹⁰⁵Vgl. Schindler in Kirchhof und Seer (2021, § 35 Rz. 1).

¹⁰⁶Vgl. BMF v. 03.11.2016 - IV C 6 - S 2296-a/08/10002 :003 BStBl 2016 I S. 1187, Rz. 4; Steuerermäßigungen, wie die in den §§ 34f, 34g, 35a EStG werden hingegen erst nach der Gewerbesteueranrechnung berücksichtigt.

¹⁰⁷Vgl. BMF v. 03.11.2016 - IV C 6 - S 2296-a/08/10002 :003 BStBl 2016 I S. 1187, Rz. 1.

¹⁰⁸Vgl. Corona-Steuerhilfegesetz II in der Fassung vom 29.06.2020, BGBl 2020 I S.1513.

¹⁰⁹Vgl. BMF v. 03.11.2016 - IV C 6 - S 2296-a/08/10002 :003 BStBl 2016 I S. 1187, Rz. 5-7.

¹¹⁰Vgl. § 35 Abs. 1 S. 2 EStG

⁹⁰ Vgl. Lühn und Lühn (2007, 259).

⁹¹ Vgl. Schiffers (2021, 57).

⁹² Vgl. Kessler und Pfuhl (2009, 61).

⁹³ Vgl. Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, V).

⁹⁴ „Annähernd“, da eine Belastungsidentität aufgrund der Unterschiede in der wirtschaftlichen Leistungsfähigkeit der Rechtsformen weder geboten noch gerechtfertigt ist. Vgl. Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, V).

⁹⁵ Vgl. z.B. die Idee eines „virtuellen Trennungsprinzips“ nach K. Schneider und Wesselbaum-Neugebauer (2010, 492) oder die Behandlung der Steuern als Nicht-Entnahmen nach Spengel in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2012, 138).

⁹⁶ Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, V).

⁹⁷ Vgl. z.B. Institut der Wirtschaftsprüfer (IDW) (2019); Hey in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 13 Rz. 185); Spengel in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2012, 138); Woerz (2009, 273).

⁹⁸ Vgl. Hennrichs in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 10 Rz. 1).

⁹⁹ Vgl. § 180 Abs. 1 Nr. 2a AO.

Ermäßigungshöchstbetrag

$$= \frac{\text{Summe der pos. gewerbl. Einkünfte}}{\text{Summe alle positiven Einkünfte}} \\ \times \text{geminderte tarifl. ESt}$$

Auffällig ist, dass sich der Ermäßigungshöchstbetrag lediglich aus positiven Einkünften zusammensetzt. Verluste finden hingegen keine Berücksichtigung. Allerdings versteht der BFH die „Summe der Einkünfte“ als saldiertes Ergebnis einer Einkunftsart¹¹¹, sodass eine Verrechnung mit negativen Einkünften innerhalb einer Einkunftsart möglich ist.¹¹² Die Summe der positiven gewerblichen Einkünfte soll dabei den Einkünften entsprechen, die § 35 EStG unterliegen.¹¹³ Die Summe aller positiven Einkünfte hingegen umfasst auch gewerbliche Einkünfte, die nicht gewerbsteuerpflichtig sind oder für die eine Anrechnung nach § 35 EStG ausgeschlossen wird.¹¹⁴ Gewinne, die im Rahmen der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG berücksichtigt wurden, sollten im Jahr ihrer Entstehung in die gewerblichen Gewinne einbezogen werden. Bei einer etwaigen Nachversteuerung sind die Nachversteuerungsbeträge nicht zu den begünstigten Einkünften zu zählen.¹¹⁵ Wie hoch letztlich die Belastung für einen Steuerpflichtigen mit Einkünften aus Gewerbebetrieb ist, hängt neben dem persönlichen Einkommensteuertarif entscheidend vom Gewerbesteuerhebesatz ab. Unter Berücksichtigung des Spitzensteuersatzes i.H.v. 45 % ergibt sich bei einem Gewerbesteuerhebesatz von 400 % eine Belastungsquote von rund 46,7 % während diese bei einem Hebesatz von 500 % bereits um 3,5 %-Punkte erhöht bei 50,2 % liegt.¹¹⁶

3.2. Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG

3.2.1. Ziele des Gesetzgebers

Die Einführung der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung erfolgte mit der bereits genannten Unternehmensteuerreform im Jahr 2008¹¹⁷ zusammen mit einer Senkung des Körperschaftsteuersatzes von 25 Prozent auf 15 Prozent¹¹⁸, aus der resultierte, dass die Gewinne aus Kapitalgesellschaften deutlich niedriger besteuert wurden als zuvor. Mit dem Ziel der Sicherstellung einer Belastungsneutralität wurde die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG für Personengesellschaften

umgesetzt.¹¹⁹ Das übergeordnete Ziel der Belastungsneutralität,¹²⁰ in Form einer Möglichkeit thesaurierte Gewinne tariflich vergleichbar zu dem Einkommen einer Kapitalgesellschaft zu belasten,¹²¹ steht dabei neben der Absicht, dass durch die Begünstigung nicht entnommener Gewinne, eine verbesserte Eigenkapitalbasis aufgebaut wird.¹²² Dies sollte schließlich zu einer erhöhten Investitionsfähigkeit und internationalen Wettbewerbsfähigkeit der Personenunternehmen führen.¹²³ Adressaten der Vorschrift sind vor allem ertragreiche Personengesellschaften, deren Gesellschafter mit dem Spitzensteuersatz besteuert werden.¹²⁴

3.2.2. Wirkungsweise und Anwendungsbereich

Die Begünstigung nicht entnommener Gewinne nach § 34a EStG lehnt sich analog der Besteuerung einer Kapitalgesellschaft an den Zeitpunkt der Gewinnentstehung an.¹²⁵ Verbleibt ein Gewinn in Form einer Thesaurierung auf Ebene einer Kapitalgesellschaft und wird folglich nicht ausgeschüttet, wird dieser nach dem Trennungsprinzip auch nur einmalig mit der Körperschaftsteuer und der Gewerbesteuer besteuert. Im Fall der Personengesellschaft wird – ohne die Anwendung des § 34a EStG – der Gewinn zwar auch nur einmalig besteuert, jedoch neben der Gewerbesteuer auf Ebene des Gesellschafters mit dem persönlichen Einkommensteuersatz, der für gewöhnlich deutlich über den vergleichbaren 15 % des Körperschaftsteuersatzes liegt. Bei einem Einkommensteuersatz von 42 % würde die Gesamtsteuerbelastung nach Gewerbesteuer mit etwa 44,28 %¹²⁶ in keinem Verhältnis zu der Gesamtsteuerbelastung einer thesaurierenden Kapitalgesellschaft von rund 29,83 %¹²⁷ stehen. An dieser Diskrepanz knüpft die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung an, die nicht entnommene Gewinne mit einer Steuer von 28,25 % ermäßigt belastet. Bei einer späteren Entnahme dieser Gewinne oder bei der Auslösung entnahmeähnlicher Tatbestände wird eine Nachversteuerung in Höhe von 25 % vorgenommen.¹²⁸ Bei der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung handelt es sich um ein Wahlrecht, welches auf Antrag eines beschränkt oder unbeschränkt Steuerpflichtigen beansprucht werden kann. Der Antrag ist jährlich und je Mitunternehmer¹²⁹ bei dem für die Einkommensteuerveranlagung zuständigen Finanzamt¹³⁰ – in Abgrenzung zu dem Finanzamt der Betriebsstätte, das die Feststellungserklärung erhält – zu stellen. Da es sich bei der Vorschrift nicht um eine Gewinnermittlungsvorschrift,

¹¹¹Vgl. BFH v. 23.6.2015 – III R 7/14, BStBl II 2016, 871.

¹¹²Vgl. U. Förster (2016, 1399); Staaden (2017, 184f).

¹¹³Vgl. BMF v. 03.11.2016 - IV C 6 - S 2296-a/08/10002 :003 BStBl 2016 I S. 1187, Rz. 16.

¹¹⁴Vgl. BMF v. 03.11.2016 - IV C 6 - S 2296-a/08/10002 :003 BStBl 2016 I S. 1187, Rz. 5-7.

¹¹⁵Vgl. BMF v. 03.11.2016 - IV C 6 - S 2296-a/08/10002 :003 BStBl 2016 I S. 1187, Rz. 14.

¹¹⁶Der Einfluss verschiedener Hebesätze unter der Nutzung divergierender Steuersätze ist schematisch Anhang 1 (S. 83) zu entnehmen.

¹¹⁷Vgl. UStRefG 2008, 1912.

¹¹⁸Vgl. UStRefG 2008, 1929.

¹¹⁹Vgl. Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, 1).

¹²⁰Vgl. BT-Drs. 16/5377 v. 18.05.2007, 1.

¹²¹Vgl. BR-Drs. 220/07 v. 30.03.2007, 101.

¹²²Vgl. Steinbrück, Rede vor dem BDI-Steuerkongress 26.09.2006, zitiert nach Kudert und Kaiser (2007, 1).

¹²³Vgl. BR-Drs. 220/07 v. 30.03.2007, 55.

¹²⁴Vgl. Reddig in Kirchhof und Seer (2021, § 34a Rz. 2); K. Schneider und Wesselbaum-Neugebauer (2010, 24).

¹²⁵Vgl. Kessler und Pfuhl (2009, 61).

¹²⁶Vgl. Von Rechenberg et al. (2020, 556).

¹²⁷Vgl. Von Rechenberg et al. (2020, 556).

¹²⁸Vgl. § 34a Abs. 1 S. 1, Hs. 1, Abs. 4 S. 2 EStG.

¹²⁹Vgl. Lüdike und Siermann (2018, § 1 Rz. 63).

¹³⁰Vgl. § 34a Abs. 1 S. 1f EStG.

sondern eine Tarifvorschrift handelt, wird sie lediglich natürlichen Personen zuteil, entweder in ihrer Stellung eines Einzelunternehmers oder aber als Mitunternehmer einer Personengesellschaft.¹³¹ Zu beachten ist, dass für die Anwendung als Mitunternehmer der Gewinnanteil EUR 10.000 übersteigen oder der Gewinnanteil des Mitunternehmers mehr als 10 % umfassen muss. Darüber hinaus kommen lediglich thesaurierte Gewinne in Betracht, die im Rahmen eines Betriebsvermögensvergleichs ermittelt wurden.¹³² Gewinne, die mithilfe der Einnahmen-Überschuss-Rechnung, die häufig von Freiberuflern nach § 18 EStG genutzt wird, ermittelt werden, sind somit nicht begünstigungsfähig. Beachtenswert ist, dass der Antrag jederzeit bis zur Festsetzungsfrist des entsprechenden Steuerbescheids änderbar bleibt und somit zurückgenommen werden kann.¹³³ Relevante Bedeutung könnte dies vor allem bei Verlusten in Folgejahren bekommen, da eine Entnahme ansonsten zwingend zu einer Nachversteuerung der thesaurierten Gewinne führen würde. Eine Rücknahme des Antrags stellt ein hinsichtlich des Zinslaufs nach § 233a Abs. 2a AO rückwirkendes Ereignis dar und bewirkt somit einen verzögerten Zinslauf.¹³⁴

3.2.3. Begünstigungsfähiger Gewinn als Bemessungsgrundlage

Die Bemessungsgrundlage für die ermäßigte Steuer von 28,25 % stellt der Begünstigungsbetrag dar.¹³⁵ Für diesen berechnet man grundsätzlich zunächst den begünstigungsfähigen Gewinn (= nicht entnommener Gewinn). Dieser entspricht dem anteiligen Ergebnis der Steuerbilanz vermindert um Entnahmen und erhöht um Einlagen und basiert somit auf der allgemeingültigen Definition des Mitunternehmeranteils gem. § 15 Abs. 1 Nr. 2 EStG. Einbezogen werden demnach nicht nur der dem Mitunternehmer zuzurechnende Anteil aus der Steuerbilanz, sondern darüber hinaus die Ergebnisse aus Ergänzungs- und Sonderbilanzen sowie Sondervergütungen. Das Ergebnis entspricht dem maximalen Begünstigungsbetrag. Nichtabzugsfähige Betriebsausgaben innerhalb des Gewinns werden nicht nach § 34a EStG begünstigt.¹³⁶ Vor diesem Hintergrund mindert auch die Gewerbesteuer, die gem. § 4 Abs. 5b EStG zu den nichtabzugsfähigen Betriebsausgaben zählt, den begünstigungsfähigen Gewinn. Würde man stattdessen eine Entnahme in Höhe der Gewerbesteuer verbuchen, so würde sich eine negative Auswirkung bei der Berechnung der Überentnahmen für die Folgejahre ergeben.¹³⁷ Auch die Einlage eines Betrages in Höhe der Gewerbesteuer kann den positiven Saldo aus Entnahmen und Einlagen lediglich Null werden lassen, sodass keine Kompensation der Gewerbesteuer erfolgen kann, der nicht entnommene

Gewinn gemindert wird und die Gewerbesteuer der progressiven Besteuerung unterliegt.¹³⁸ Diese Konstellation wurde lange diskutiert. Das BMF bestätigt die Auffassung, die Gewerbesteuer bei der Ermittlung der Überentnahmen nicht zu berücksichtigen.¹³⁹ Steuerfreie Einkünfte gelten als vorrangig entnommen und sind bereits ihrer Natur nach nicht Gegenstand der Tarifbegünstigung.¹⁴⁰ Bei einem negativen zu versteuernden Einkommen ist die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nicht anwendbar – auch dann nicht, wenn begünstigungsfähige positive Einkünfte vorhanden sind.¹⁴¹

3.2.4. Nachversteuerung

Wie bereits in Kapitel 3.2.1 erläutert, soll die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG die investive Einkommensverwendung fördern und mithin die Eigenkapitalbasis stärken. Infolgedessen entfällt bei Schwächungen der Kapitalbasis der Begünstigungsgrund und es wird eine Nachversteuerung vorgenommen. Dieser Vorgang lässt angesichts des 25-prozentigen Nachversteuersatzes eine Analogie zur Abgeltungsteuer auf Dividenden erkennen. Allerdings gibt es für die Nachversteuerung keine Veranlagungsoption, wie etwa die Günstigerprüfung des § 32d Abs. 6 EStG für Einkünfte aus Kapitalvermögen, mithilfe derer der Steuerpflichtige bei niedrigerer Einkommensteuer im Ergebnis, die Einkünfte der progressiven Besteuerung unterwerfen darf.¹⁴² Eine Schwächung der Kapitalbasis erfolgt durch Überentnahmen, wenn nämlich der Saldo von Entnahmen und Einlagen den Gewinn des laufenden Wirtschaftsjahres übersteigt (Entnahme-Überhang).¹⁴³ Das Konzept der Nachversteuerung wird gesetzestechnisch durch die jährliche Feststellung bzw. Fortschreibung des nachversteuerungspflichtigen Betrags erreicht.¹⁴⁴ Als maximale Bemessungsgrundlage der Nachversteuerung im folgenden Veranlagungszeitraum wird der nachversteuerungspflichtige Betrag aus dem Begünstigungsbetrag abzgl. der darauf entfallenden Einkommensteuer (ohne Berücksichtigung der Kirchensteuer), die regelmäßig 28,25 % entspricht, ermittelt. Der nachversteuerungspflichtige Vorjahresbetrag ist hinzuzurechnen, während der Nachsteuerungsbetrag des laufenden Wirtschaftsjahres abzuziehen ist. Während der nachversteuerungspflichtige Betrag jährlich festzustellen ist, findet die eigentliche Nachversteuerung erst statt, wenn ein Entnahme-Überhang über dem nach § 4 Abs 1 oder § 5 EStG ermittelten Gewinn eines Wirtschaftsjahres vorliegt. Bei der Berechnung des positiven Saldos aus Entnahmen und Einlagen sind außerbilanzielle Hinzurechnungen nicht zu berücksichtigen.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸Vgl. Streif (2014, 65).

¹³⁹Vgl. BMF v. 11.08.2008 - IV C 6 - S 2290-a/07/10001 BStBl 2008 I, 838 Rz. 28.

¹⁴⁰Vgl. BMF v. 11.08.2008 - IV C 6 - S 2290-a/07/10001 BStBl 2008 I, 838 Rz. 17.

¹⁴¹Vgl. BFH Urteil v. 20.03.2017 - X R 65/14 BStBl 2017 II, 958.

¹⁴²Vgl. Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, 1).

¹⁴³Vgl. Wacker in Schmidt (2021, § 34a Rz. 62).

¹⁴⁴Vgl. § 34a Abs. 3, 4 EStG.

¹⁴⁵Vgl. BMF v. 11.08.2008 - IV C 6 - S 2290-a/07/10001 BStBl 2008 I, 838 Rz. 26-28.

¹³¹Vgl. Kessler und Pfuhl (2009, 62).

¹³²Vgl. § 34a Abs. 1 S. 3, Abs. 2 EStG.

¹³³Vgl. BMF v. 11.08.2008 - IV C 6 - S 2290-a/07/10001 BStBl 2008 I, 838 Rz. 10.

¹³⁴Vgl. Wacker in Schmidt (2021, § 34a Rz. 41) oder Klöpping in Prinz und Kahle (2020, § 7 Rz. 123).

¹³⁵Vgl. § 34a Abs. 1 S. 1 EStG.

¹³⁶Vgl. BMF v. 11.08.2008 - IV C 6 - S 2290-a/07/10001 BStBl 2008 I S. 838 Rz. 11-16.

¹³⁷Vgl. Gragert und Wißborn (2007, Rz. 2559).

Für die Nachversteuerung gilt eine Verwendungsreihenfolge, nach der bestimmt wird, welche Gewinne als zuerst entnommen gelten. Beginnend mit den positiven steuerfreien Gewinnen, folgen die positiven steuerpflichtigen Gewinne des laufenden Jahres. Danach folgen nicht entnommene und nach § 34a EStG begünstigte Gewinne der Vorjahre (die nachversteuerungspflichtigen Gewinne der Vorjahre) und schließlich steuerfreie nicht entnommene und mit dem persönlichen Einkommensteuersatz versteuerte Gewinne der Vorjahre. Letzteres bedeutet, dass ursprünglich steuerfreie Gewinne, die nicht entnommen wurden, im Rahmen eines nachversteuerungspflichtigen Betrags, eine Nachversteuerung auslösen können. Allgemein führt die dargestellte Verwendungsreihenfolge zu einer potenziellen und kritisierten Erfassung der versteuerten Altgewinne, regelbesteuerten Gewinne und eben steuerfreien Gewinne, die nicht postwendend entnommen wurden.¹⁴⁶

3.2.5. Belastungswirkung

Mit der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung liegt grundsätzlich keine dauerhafte Minderung der Steuer vor, sondern vielmehr eine Verschiebung eines Teils der Steuerzahlung in die Zukunft. Daraus ergibt sich für den Steuerpflichtigen eine Stundungswirkung, die mit einem positiven Zinseffekt einhergeht. Nominell liegt die Steuerbelastung bei Nutzung der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung indes auf einem höheren Niveau als die Belastung mit dem Regelsteuersatz. Der eigentliche Vorteil ergibt sich daher erst, wenn der temporäre Thesaurierungsvorteil den Nachversteuerungsnachteil übersteigt.¹⁴⁷ Bevor ein Antrag für die Nutzung der Tarifoption gestellt wird, sollten verschiedene Parameter geprüft werden. Dazu zählen die zukünftige Gewinn- und Entnahmeplanung, also im engeren Sinne die Thesaurierungsdauer, die Einkommensteuerverhältnisse des Mitunternehmers, der lokale Gewerbesteuerhebesatz, die Finanzierungsstrategie der Gesellschaft sowie die interne Rendite im Betriebsvermögen. Für Zinsvorteile kommt es nicht auf die seit Jahren andauernde Niedrigzinsperiode an, sondern vor allem auf die deutlich höhere Eigenkapitalverzinsung bei Innenfinanzierung.¹⁴⁸

Tabelle 2 gibt, anhand eines einfachen Barwertvergleiches, erste Hinweise darauf, ab welcher Thesaurierungsdauer in Abhängigkeit des Einkommensteuersatzes und der internen Rendite, die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung vorteilhaft ist. Man erkennt am markierten Bereich, dass sich eine Vorteilhaftigkeit mit geringerer Thesaurierungsdauer erst unter Annahme einer nahe dem Spitzensteuersatz liegenden Steuerbelastung einstellt. Für Mitunternehmer, deren Einkommensteuersatz unter 28,25 % liegt, kann die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung naturgemäß nicht vorteilhaft sein.¹⁴⁹ Die Tabelle verdeutlicht, dass eine Inanspruchnahme der Begünstigung reiflicher Vorüberlegung bedarf und der Planungshorizont entsprechend weit reichen sollte.

¹⁴⁶Vgl. Hey (2007, 925).

¹⁴⁷Vgl. Kessler und Pfuhl (2009, 71).

¹⁴⁸Vgl. Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, 9).

¹⁴⁹Vgl. Jacobs et al. (2015, 609).

Für viele Mitunternehmer stellen die gewerblichen Einkünfte ihre einzige Einnahmequelle dar. Von einer hundertprozentigen Thesaurierung kann daher im Regelfall nicht ausgegangen werden. In der Regel werden zumindest die auf den Gewinn entfallenden Steuern, d.h. Gewerbesteuer, Einkommensteuer und Solidaritätszuschlag, entnommen.¹⁵⁰ Das Vorgehen ist zwar grundsätzlich nicht systemwidrig, widerspricht aber dem Ziel des Gesetzgebers, die Besteuerung an die der Kapitalgesellschaften anzugleichen.¹⁵¹ Da die nichtabzugsfähigen Betriebsausgaben, inkl. der Ertragsteuern, bei Kapitalgesellschaften der gleichen Steuerbelastung unterliegen wie thesaurierte Gewinne, stellt die Reduzierung des Thesaurierungsvolumens bei Personengesellschaften, einen gravierenden Nachteil dar.¹⁵²

3.3. Das Optionsmodell nach dem KöMoG

3.3.1. Ziele des Gesetzgebers

Dass die Option zur Besteuerung nach dem Regime einer Kapitalgesellschaft mit dem Ziel der Erreichung einer rechtsformneutralen Besteuerung keine neue Idee ist, belegt nicht zuletzt der Entwurf des § 4a KStG-E im Jahr 2000.¹⁵³ Trotz der damaligen Ablehnung des Gesetzesentwurfs, blieb die Grundidee attraktiv. In jüngster Zeit sprachen sich Politik und Berufsstände daher für eine Einführung eines Optionsmodells aus.¹⁵⁴

Der Gesetzgeber führt mit dem Gesetzesentwurf rechtfertigend aus, dass das KöMoG eine Stärkung der internationalen Wettbewerbsfähigkeit insbesondere für international tätige Familienunternehmen in der Rechtsform einer Kommanditgesellschaft (KG) oder offenen Handelsgesellschaft (OHG) darstellt.¹⁵⁵ Damit nimmt der Gesetzgeber Bezug auf die Tatsache, dass sich Personengesellschaften und Partnerschaftsgesellschaften¹⁵⁶ mit systematischen Diskrepanzen als auch Unterschieden des Besteuerungsverfahrens im Vergleich zu Kapitalgesellschaften konfrontiert sehen. Erhebliche Abweichungen sowohl bei Steuerbelastung als auch hinsichtlich des durch die Besteuerungskonzeption verursachten Bürokratieaufwands sind die Folge. Darüber hinaus sind die nationalen Besonderheiten der Besteuerung von Personengesellschaften auf internationaler Ebene weitestgehend unbekannt.¹⁵⁷ Während zwar die transparente Besteuerung im internationalen Rahmen von einigen Staaten praktiziert wird, ist ein zweistufiges Gewinnermittlungsverfahren inklusive der Besonderheiten von Sonderbetriebsvermögen, Sondervergütungen und Sonderbetriebsausgaben

¹⁵⁰Vgl. Kessler und Pfuhl (2009, 69).

¹⁵¹Vgl. Hey (2007, 927).

¹⁵²Vgl. Kessler und Pfuhl (2009, 69).

¹⁵³Vgl. BT-Drs. 14/2683 v. 15.02.2000.

¹⁵⁴So Bundeswirtschaftsminister Peter Altmaier, der das Optionsmodell 2019 als ein Kernelement für eine Unternehmensteuerreform betitelte, vgl. Altmaier (2019); Weitere Befürworter: IDW, vgl. Institut der Wirtschaftsprüfer (IDW) (2019); Steuerfachausschuss CDU/CSU-Fraktion, vgl. CDU/CSU-Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag (2019); Bundesfinanzminister Olaf Scholz, vgl. Scholz (2020).

¹⁵⁵Vgl. Bundesfinanzministerium (2021).

¹⁵⁶Nachfolgend vereinfachend „Personengesellschaften“ genannt.

¹⁵⁷Vgl. BR-Drs. 244/21 v. 26.03.2021, 1.

Tabelle 2: Vorteilhaftigkeit der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung (Dauer in Jahren)
(Quelle: in Anlehnung an Kessler und Pfuhl (2009, S. 72))

ESst-Satz	Rendite 5 %	Rendite 10 %	Rendite 20 %
25 %	-	-	-
30 %	69	35	18
35 %	31	16	9
40 %	15	8	4
42 %	9	5	1
45 %	2	1	1

die Ausnahme und erfreut sich wenig bis keiner internationalen Bekanntheit.¹⁵⁸ Da die Wahl der Besteuerungskonzeption nunmehr in die Disposition der Gesellschafter gestellt werden soll, soll die internationale Besteuerung vereinfacht werden. Zudem sollen Unterschiede im Hinblick auf die Steuerlast der Kapitalgesellschaft beseitigt werden.¹⁵⁹ Im Gesetz wird dies mithilfe des § 1a KStG (Option zur Körperschaftbesteuerung) verankert.¹⁶⁰ Zivilrechtlich bleibt die Personengesellschaft damit als solche bestehen, während sie materiell- und verfahrensrechtlich als Kapitalgesellschaft zu behandeln ist.¹⁶¹

3.3.2. Wirkungsweise und Folgen der Inanspruchnahme

§ 1a KStG ist, dem Gesetzeswortlaut folgend, anwendbar für Personenhandelsgesellschaften und Partnerschaftsgesellschaften.¹⁶² Neben der namentlich genannten OHG und KG, ist auch ihre kapitalistische Ausgestaltung als GmbH & Co. KG zur Option berechtigt.¹⁶³ Ausgeschlossen sind hingegen Einzelunternehmer und andere Personengesellschaften wie die GbR.¹⁶⁴ Begründet wird dies mit dem Wegfall der Auseinandersetzung mit komplexen und ggf. beratungsintensiven steuerlichen Alternativen. Unter internationalen Gesichtspunkten ist beachtenswert, dass Gesellschaften, die in dem Staat, in dem sich ihre Geschäftsleitung befindet, körperschaftsteuerpflichtig sind oder die nach ausländischem Recht zur Körperschaftbesteuerung optieren können, ebenfalls zur Option nach § 1a KStG berechtigt sind.¹⁶⁵ Ob vermögensverwaltende Personengesellschaften ebenfalls von dem Anwendungsbereich des KöMoG erfasst werden, ist bislang nicht explizit bestätigt, in der Literatur wird aber weitestgehend davon ausgegangen.¹⁶⁶

Von den Gesellschaftern ist zur Inanspruchnahme der Option ein unwiderruflicher Antrag zu stellen. Da gem. § 1a Abs. 1, S. 1 Hs. 2 KStG die sinngemäße Anwendung des § 217 Abs. 1 UmwG gilt,¹⁶⁷ müssen alle Gesellschafter einstimmig zustimmen.¹⁶⁸ Je nach Ausgestaltung des Gesellschaftsvertrags kann aber auch eine Mehrheitsentscheidung ausreichen. Diese müsste allerdings mind. 75 % der abgegebenen Stimmen umfassen.¹⁶⁹ Da es sich bei der Option wortgetreu um ein Wahlrecht handelt, besteht mithin keine Pflicht dieses auszuüben. Der Antrag muss spätestens einen Monat vor dem Wirtschaftsjahr gestellt werden, ab dem die Option in Anspruch genommen wird, sodass ein rückwirkender Antrag keine Berücksichtigung findet.¹⁷⁰ Das Optionsmodell findet erstmals Anwendung im Veranlagungszeitraum 2022.¹⁷¹ Eine zeitliche Bindung der Option sieht der Gesetzgeber nicht vor, sodass ein Wechsel grundsätzlich vor jedem Wirtschaftsjahr zulässig ist. Aufgrund des erheblichen Mehraufwands in der Umstellungsphase ist ein derartig kurzer Umstellungsrhythmus wohl als Ausnahmefall anzusehen. Auch löst der fiktive Formwechsel die siebenjährige Behaltfrist nach § 22 UmwStG aus, sodass sich ein Rückformwechsel (sog. Rückoption,¹⁷² auf die im Folgenden näher eingegangen wird) schädlich auf die Steuerneutralität auswirken dürfte. Unter Wahrung der erwartungsgemäß angestrebten Steuerneutralität ergibt sich eine Bindedauer der Option von sieben Jahren.¹⁷³ Die Gesellschaft wird im Gesetzeswortlaut zur „optierenden Gesellschaft“¹⁷⁴ und wird für Zwecke der Einkommensbesteuerung wie eine Kapitalgesellschaft und ihre Gesellschafter wie die nicht persönlich haftenden Gesellschafter einer Kapitalgesellschaft behandelt. Es gelten entsprechend grundsätzlich alle Regelungen des Körperschaftsteuergesetzes, des Einkommensteuergesetzes, des Umwandlungssteuergesetzes, des Investmentsteuergesetzes, des Außensteuergesetzes und des Zerlegungsgesetzes. Ausgenommen sind aber Regelungen, die ausschließlich von Kapitalgesellschaften erfüllt werden können. Indes bleibt fraglich, ob eine optierende Gesellschaft als Organgesellschaft

¹⁵⁸Vgl. Prinz (2019); als Ergebnis dieser Koordinationsprobleme ausländischer Fiski, lassen sich „Kopfstände“ der Rechtsprechung und des Gesetzgebers wie etwa der § 50d Abs. 10 EStG oder § 4i EStG nennen, vgl. Brühl und Weiss (2021a, 890).

¹⁵⁹Vgl. Adrian und Fey (2021, 309).

¹⁶⁰Vgl. Wiedmann (2021, 2); sowie BR-Drs. 244/21 v. 26.03.2021, 2.

¹⁶¹Vgl. Haug (2021, 410).

¹⁶²Vgl. BR-Drs. 267/21 v. 04.06.2021, Art.1; § 1a Abs. 1 S. 1 KStG n.F.

¹⁶³Vgl. Brühl und Weiss (2021a, 889).

¹⁶⁴Vgl. Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1301).

¹⁶⁵Vgl. Adrian und Fey (2021, 309).

¹⁶⁶Vgl. Haug (2021, 411); gilt nicht für nicht gewerblich geprägte vermögensverwaltende PersGes, vgl. Böttcher (2021, 170); a.A. soweit gem. § 21 UmwStG Anteile an einer KapGes zum Gesamthandsvermögen zählen: Demuth (2021, 22.243).

¹⁶⁷Vgl. BR-Drs. 244/21 v. 26.03.2021, 18.

¹⁶⁸Vgl. Prinz (2021, 917).

¹⁶⁹Vgl. § 217 Abs. 1 UmwG.

¹⁷⁰Vgl. Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1302).

¹⁷¹Vgl. Dreßler und Kompolek (2021, 302)

¹⁷²Vgl. KöMoG, Art 1, § 1a Abs. 4 S. 1 KStG.

¹⁷³Vgl. Cordes und Kraft (2021, 409).

¹⁷⁴Vgl. KöMoG, Art 1, § 1a Abs. 1 S. 1 KStG.

gem. §§ 14, 17 KStG in Betracht kommen kann.¹⁷⁵ Es gelten für die optierende Gesellschaft lediglich die Regelungen für Kapitalgesellschaften, die die Besteuerung nach dem Einkommen betreffen. Für die übrigen Gesetze besteht die optierende Gesellschaft weiterhin in ihrer Rechtsform als Personengesellschaft. Im Bereich der Erbschaft- und Schenkungsbesteuerung sowie aus grunderwerbsteuerlicher Sicht ergeben sich somit Gestaltungspotenziale.¹⁷⁶ Es bedarf in diesem Zusammenhang aber der Klärung einiger offener Fragen, wie bspw. ob das begünstigte Vermögen gem. § 13b ErbStG, auch das Sonderbetriebsvermögen einer optierenden Personengesellschaft umfasst.¹⁷⁷

Da die Personengesellschaft seit jeher ein selbstständiges Steuersubjekt für die Gewerbesteuer darstellt, wäre zunächst zu erwarten, dass sich für die optierende Gesellschaft kaum eine Änderung ergibt. Da jedoch Partnerschaftsgesellschaften bislang nicht kraft Rechtsform als gewerbsteuerpflichtig zu klassifizieren waren, aber dem Gesetzeswortlaut¹⁷⁸ folgend, auch im Gewerbesteuergesetz wie eine Kapitalgesellschaft zu behandeln sind, lässt sich bereits eine signifikante Veränderung benennen. Nach Auslegung des Gesetzes, das die steuerliche Behandlung einer Kapitalgesellschaft vorschreibt, werden außerdem der personengesellschaftliche Freibetrag für die Gewerbesteuer in Höhe von EUR 24.500 die Anrechnung nach § 35 EStG für die Mitunternehmer sowie besondere Kürzungsbetrag für Zuwendungen in den Vermögensstock von Stiftungen (§ 9 Nr. 5 Satz 9 ff. GewStG) entfallen.¹⁷⁹ Für die optierende Gesellschaft können etwaige Verluste auf Ebene der Mitunternehmer nicht mehr genutzt werden, da im Rahmen der Körperschaftbesteuerung eigene Verlustvorträge/-rückträge gebildet werden.¹⁸⁰ Verlustvorträge für Zwecke der Gewerbesteuer gehen ebenfalls unter, da sich mit der optierenden Gesellschaft das Steuersubjekt verändert.¹⁸¹ Auch die Inanspruchnahme der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG oder die flexible Übertragung von Betriebsvermögen nach § 6 Abs. 3, 5 EStG fallen weg. Sollten sich die Gesellschafter auf eine zukünftige Besteuerung als Kapitalgesellschaft verständigt

haben, findet der Übergang von der transparenten zur intransparenten Besteuerung nach den Regeln des Formwechsels (§ 1 Abs. 3 Nr. 3 UmwStG) statt. Das Ende des letzten Wirtschaftsjahres vor der Option definiert dabei den Einbringungszeitpunkt. Es gelten gem. § 25 Satz 1 UmwStG die Vorschriften über die Einbringung von Betriebsvermögen gem. §§ 20 bis 23 UmwStG entsprechend.¹⁸² Daraus resultiert einerseits die Möglichkeit, die Buchwerte der Wirtschaftsgüter der Personengesellschaft fortzuführen oder andererseits einen Teil oder die vollständigen stillen Reserven steuerlich aufzudecken. Für die Nutzung der Steuervergünstigungen der §§ 20 ff. UmwStG müssen aber zusätzlich funktional wesentliche Betriebsgrundlagen des Sonderbetriebsvermögens der Personengesellschaft übertragen werden.¹⁸³ Hiervon betroffen ist insbesondere das im Eigentum eines Gesellschafters befindliche Sonderbetriebsvermögen, welches im Wege der Einzelrechtsnachfolge gesondert zu übertragen wäre. Die Finanzverwaltung hat bezogen auf den Formwechsel bereits klargestellt, dass eine Nutzungsüberlassung der übernehmenden Gesellschaft von Wirtschaftsgütern nicht ausreichen soll.¹⁸⁴ Sonderbetriebsvermögen, welches nicht übertragen wird, stellt eine Entnahme aus dem Sonderbetriebsvermögen des Gesellschafters dar¹⁸⁵ und ist nach den allgemeinen einkommensteuerlichen Vorschriften zu behandeln. Somit müssten gem. § 6 Abs. 5 S. 2 EStG die stillen Reserven aufgedeckt werden. Eine detaillierte Identifikation des funktional wesentlichen Sonderbetriebsvermögens ist aus diesem Grund vor Ausübung der Option unumgänglich.¹⁸⁶ Darüber hinaus müssen, um eine Übertragung zu Buchwerten möglich zu machen, die Passivposten (ohne Eigenkapital) einen geringeren Wert ausmachen, als die Aktivposten.¹⁸⁷ Anderenfalls käme es auch in diesem Fall zu einer Besteuerung der stillen Reserven. Um dem System des steuerlichen Einlagekontos (gem. § 27 KStG) von Kapitalgesellschaften gerecht zu werden, wird das im Einbringungszeitpunkt ausgewiesene steuerbilanzielle Eigenkapital der Personengesellschaft zu dem Bestand des steuerlichen Einlagekontos der optierenden Gesellschaft umgeformt.¹⁸⁸ Dies umfasst in der Regel das gesamte Eigenkapital, da eine Personengesellschaft kein Nennkapital besitzt. Im Eigenkapital enthalten sind Einlagen der Gesellschafter sowie thesaurierte Gewinne, die bereits auf Ebene der Gesellschafter ertragsteuerlich berücksichtigt wurden. Eine Ausschüttung nach einer Ausübung des Wahlrechts zur Körperschaftbesteuerung muss aus dem steuerlichen Einlagekonto erfolgen. Somit lässt sich eine Doppelbesteuerung vermeiden. Anderenfalls würden die Beträge erneut einer

¹⁷⁵Einige Autoren sind der Auffassung, dass dies steuerrechtlich möglich sei, jedoch an der gesellschaftsrechtlichen Komponente eines Ergebnisabführungsvertrags (EAV) scheitern könne, Sicherheit gäbe demnach erst der Gesetzgeber oder die Finanzverwaltung, vgl. Cordes und Kraft (2021, 406); Demuth (2021, 22.248). Andere Autoren sehen kein Hindernis im EAV und halten die Organschaft für möglich, vgl. Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1308); Prinz (2021, 918).

¹⁷⁶Während die Gesellschaft ertragsteuerlich von der niedrigen Körperschaftbesteuerung profitiert, kann sie erbschaft- und grunderwerbsteuerlich als PersGes von den §§ 5, 6 GrEStG oder §§ 13a, 13b ErbStG profitieren, vgl. Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1305). Entschieden kritisiert von Wacker in Schön und Schindler (2019, 16).

¹⁷⁷Hier gehen Literaturmeinungen auseinander. Einerseits die Feststellung als weiterhin fiktives SBV, vgl. Demuth (2021, 22.252); ä.A.: Böttcher (2021, 172); Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1305); dagegen Nichtanwendbarkeit der Vorschrift, da SBV an das einkommensteuerliche BV anknüpft, vgl. Adrian und Fey (2021, 311).

¹⁷⁸Vgl. § 2 Abs. 8 GewStG-E gilt für eine „optierende Gesellschaft i.S.d. § 1a KStG“

¹⁷⁹Vgl. Adrian und Fey (2021, 309).

¹⁸⁰Vgl. Brühl und Weiss (2021a, 895).

¹⁸¹Vgl. Weggenmann (2021, M19).

¹⁸²Vgl. Dorn und Dibbert (2021, 163).

¹⁸³Vgl. BFH vom 8.6.2011, I B 15/11, BFH/NV 2011, 1748, Dorn und Dibbert (2021, 164).

¹⁸⁴Vgl. BfE, Schreiben v. 11.11.2011 - IV C 2 - S 1978 b/08/10001, BStBl 2011 I, 1314 Rz. 25.01 i.V.m. Rz. 20.06.

¹⁸⁵Vgl. BfE, Schreiben v. 11.11.2011 - IV C 2 - S 1978 b/08/10001, BStBl 2011 I, 1314, Rz. 20.08; Brühl und Weiss (2021b, 947).

¹⁸⁶Sind die Voraussetzungen des § 25 UmwStG nicht erfüllt, führt dies aber nicht zu einer gescheiterten Optionsausübung, sondern lediglich zu einer Versagung der Buchwertfortführung, vgl. Böttcher (2021, 169).

¹⁸⁷Vgl. § 20 Abs. 2, S.2, Nr 2 UmwStG.

¹⁸⁸Vgl. Art. 1 KöMoG, § 1a Abs. 2 KStG.

Besteuerung unterliegen. Variable Gesellschafterkonten sind in diesem Zusammenhang nicht als Eigenkapital zu klassifizieren. Positive Ergänzungsbilanzen werden gegen einen passiven steuerlichen Ausgleichsposten gebucht und erhöhen das steuerliche Einlagekonto. Ist die Ergänzungsbilanz negativ, werden die saldierten Werte der Wirtschaftsgüter in die Steuerbilanz eingestellt und es verringert sich der dem steuerlichen Einlagekonto zugeführte Betrag. Bei einem negativen Betrag kommt es gem. § 20 Abs. 2 S. 2 Nr. 2 UmwStG zu einer (Teil-)Aufdeckung der stillen Reserven. Es wird somit kein aktiver Ausgleichsposten gebildet und das steuerliche Einlagekonto wird nicht negativ.¹⁸⁹

Entscheiden sich die Gesellschafter nach Ausübung der Option um und wünschen eine Rückkehr zur Besteuerung nach dem Transparenzprinzip, sieht der § 1a Abs. 4 KStG eine sog. Rückoption vor. Ähnlich zur Option zur Körperschaftbesteuerung soll der Antrag einen Monat vor Beginn des Wirtschaftsjahres erfolgen, ab dem die Besteuerung wieder nach dem Transparenzprinzip erfolgen soll und kann demnach nicht rückwirkend gestellt werden. Der fiktive Formwechsel im Fall der Rückoption bemisst sich nach § 9 S.1, 2 UmwStG¹⁹⁰ (für gewerbesteuerliche Zwecke i.V.m. § 18 UmwStG¹⁹¹). Beachtlich ist, dass eine Rückoption auch automatisch ausgelöst werden kann, sofern die Voraussetzungen des § 1a KStG wegfallen. Dies ist explizit der Fall, wenn bspw. der vorletzte Gesellschafter ausscheidet, was zu einer zivilrechtlichen Beendigung der Gesellschaft führt.¹⁹² Bei den fiktiven Formwechseln der Option und Rückoption sind die Sperrfristen des § 22 Abs. 1 und 2 UmwStG zu beachten. Fraglich ist bis dato, ob die frühzeitige Rückoption selbst eine Sperrfristverletzung darstellen könnte,¹⁹³ gleichwohl sie lediglich den Ausgangsstatus wiederherstellen würde.

3.3.3. Gewinnermittlung und Besteuerung

Die Gewinnermittlung der optierenden Gesellschaft folgt den für Kapitalgesellschaften geltenden Gewinnermittlungsvorschriften des Einkommensteuergesetzes und des Körperschaftsteuergesetzes.¹⁹⁴ Abweichend zu der vorherigen Behandlung von schuldrechtlichen Verträgen als Sonderbetriebseinnahmen, gelten diese nun für die optierende Gesellschaft als steuerlich maßgebend. Als Betriebseinnahmen oder -ausgaben haben sie Einfluss auf den erzielten Gewinn, welcher schließlich der Besteuerung unterliegt. Somit

werden sämtliche Vergütungen für Tätigkeiten im Dienst der Gesellschaft, für die Gewährung von Darlehen oder die Überlassung von Wirtschaftsgütern umgewandelt in die entsprechenden Einkunftsarten: Der Mitunternehmer erhält daraus folgend, wie ein Anteilseigner einer Kapitalgesellschaft, Einkünfte aus nichtselbständiger Arbeit, aus Kapitalvermögen, aus Vermietung und Verpachtung¹⁹⁵ oder auch sonstige Einkünfte nach § 22 Nr. 3 EStG.¹⁹⁶ Analog zur Kapitalgesellschaft kann es zwischen Gesellschaft und Gesellschaftern zu verdeckten Gewinnausschüttungen oder Einlagen kommen, die das Einkommen der optierenden Gesellschaft nicht mindern, bzw. erhöhen dürfen.¹⁹⁷ Außerdem ist zu beachten, dass die optierende Gesellschaft für ihre operativ tätigen Gesellschafter aus lohnsteuerlicher Sicht zum Arbeitgeber wird und somit die Führung von Lohnkonten, die Erstellung von Lohnsteuerbescheinigungen oder auch die Abführung der Lohnsteuer notwendig werden.¹⁹⁸

Die Beteiligung selbst wird für Zwecke der Besteuerung wie eine Beteiligung an einer Kapitalgesellschaft behandelt.¹⁹⁹ Die Anteile am Gewinn werden dem Gesetz folgend zu Einkünften aus Kapitalvermögen und unterliegen der gewöhnlichen Dividendenbesteuerung. Grundsätzlich unterliegen Ausschüttungen in das Privatvermögen einer natürlichen Person der Abgeltungsteuer nach dem gesonderten Tarif des § 32d EStG i.H.v. 25 %, welche mit dem Kapitalertragsteuerabzug im Regelfall abgegolten ist.²⁰⁰ Demnach unterliegen die Gewinnanteile der Kapitalertragsteuer, sobald sie entnommen werden oder eine Ausschüttung verlangt werden kann. Aus dieser gesonderten Besteuerung resultiert der Ausschluss der Dividenden aus der Summe der Einkünfte und somit kein Einbezug in den progressiven Steuertarif nach § 32a EStG.²⁰¹ Wird die Beteiligung im Betriebsvermögen gehalten, unterliegen die Gewinnanteile dem Teileinkünfteverfahren (TEV) gem. § 3 Nr. 40 lit. d EStG.²⁰² Die Thesaurierung von Gewinnen auf Unternehmensebene wird ohne die Versteuerung auf Gesellschafterebene möglich. Auch das Wahlrecht zur Anwendung des Teileinkünfteverfahrens oder – bei Kapitalgesellschaften als Gesellschafter – die Anwendung des § 8b Abs. 1 KStG zur 95 %-igen Steuerbefreiung der Dividenden sollen für die optierende Gesellschaft möglich sein. Im Fall einer Kapitalgesellschaft als Gesellschafter sind grundsätzlich auch Veräußerungsgewinne nach den Vorschriften des § 8b Abs. 2 KStG zu behandeln. Allerdings müssen dabei die Sperrfristen des § 22 Abs. 1 S. 1 UmwStG beachtet werden. Da in den meisten Fällen die Buchwertfortführung (§ 20

¹⁸⁹Vgl. Demuth (2021, 22.246f).

¹⁹⁰Vgl. Art. 1 KöMoG, § 1a KStG

¹⁹¹Bisher gibt es keinen Ausschluss des § 18 Abs. 3 UmwStG, sodass bei Aufgabe oder Veräußerung innerhalb von 5 Jahren nach Rückoption, ein Aufgabe- oder Veräußerungsgewinn der GewSt unterliegt und keine Anrechnung nach § 35 EStG zulässig ist, vgl. Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1303).

¹⁹²Vgl. BR-Drs. 244/21, 22. Es gilt dann die Umwandlung auf den letzten verbleibenden Gesellschafter. Sollte dieser kein geeigneter Rechtsträger nach § 1 Abs. 1 Nr. 1.3.4 UmwStG sein, gilt das gesamte Vermögen als an den letzten Gesellschafter ausgeschüttet, vgl. Rätke und Tiede (2021, 486).

¹⁹³Abl. Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1305); zust. Cordes und Kraft (2021, 409); Demuth (2021, 22.245).

¹⁹⁴Vgl. Rätke und Tiede (2021, 482).

¹⁹⁵Einnahmen aus der Vermietung von Grundstücken dürften grundsätzlich nicht vorkommen, weil sie i.R.d. fiktiven Formwechsels als funktional wesentliches Sonderbetriebsvermögen auf die Gesellschaft übergegangen sein sollten, anderenfalls wäre dringend eine Betriebsaufspaltung zu prüfen, vgl. Rätke und Tiede (2021, 483).

¹⁹⁶Vgl. Böttcher (2021, 170).

¹⁹⁷Vgl. BR-Drs. 244/21, 21; Brühl und Weiss (2021a, 948); Demuth (2021, 22.249).

¹⁹⁸Vgl. Demuth (2021, 22.249).

¹⁹⁹Vgl. Art. 1 KöMoG, § 1a Abs. 3 S. 1 KStG.

²⁰⁰Montag in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 13 Rz. 8).

²⁰¹Vgl. Jacobs et al. (2015, 181).

²⁰²Vgl. § 1a Abs. 3 S. 4 KStG; Rätke und Tiede (2021, 483).

Abs. 2 S. 2 UmwStG) angestrebt werden wird, würde bei einer Veräußerung im Zweifel die Sieben-Jahresfrist verletzt werden und eine rückwirkende Besteuerung des Einbringungsgewinns I gem. § 22 Abs. 1 S. 3 UmwStG auslösen.²⁰³

4. Vergleich der Besteuerungsalternativen

4.1. Steuerbelastungsvergleich

„Steuern, die vermieden werden können, sind unnötige Kosten“.²⁰⁴ Treffend formuliert, zielt die Aussage von Haarmann auf die Bedeutung einer funktionierenden Steuerplanung zur Minimierung der Steuerlast. Dass die relative Steuerminimierung eine stark gewichtete Zielsetzung von Familienunternehmen darstellt,²⁰⁵ verwundert daher nicht. Mit einer Anpassung an die steuerlichen Rahmenbedingungen soll die Besteuerung dem Grunde, der Höhe und dem Zeitpunkt nach so beeinflusst werden, dass nach Besteuerung ein größtmöglicher Betrag verbleibt.²⁰⁶ Im konkreten Steuerbelastungsvergleich manifestiert sich schließlich das auf der Hand liegende Unterscheidungskriterium verschiedener Besteuerungsalternativen. Obschon ein Steuerbelastungsvergleich allein nicht allgemeingültig die Frage nach der besten Besteuerungsalternative beantworten kann, da er naturgemäß auf bestimmten Prämissen beruht und es nicht gelingen kann, den konkreten Einzelfall abzubilden, bildet er dennoch eine aussagekräftige Orientierungshilfe.²⁰⁷

Für den folgenden Vorteilhaftigkeitsvergleich wird für eine gegebene Datenkonstellation, die eine Familienpersonengesellschaft abbilden soll, die Grenzsteuerbelastung, differenziert nach der jeweiligen Besteuerungsalternative, berechnet. Dabei erfolgt eine Unterscheidung der Belastungswirkungen auf Ebene der Gesellschaft und der Mitunternehmer. Betrachtet werden auch Variationen der Ausgangsdaten und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Vorteilhaftigkeit. Es sollen die ertragsteuerlichen Konsequenzen der Besteuerungsalternativen einer Familienpersonengesellschaft anhand eines Belastungsvergleichs auf Basis konkreten Zahlenmaterials verglichen werden. Für den Grundfall wird von einer Regelbesteuerung des Gewinnes ausgegangen. Für die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG und das Optionsmodell nach § 1a KStG wird die Gesamtbelastung bei Thesaurierung, bei vollständiger Entnahme sowie hälftiger Entnahme des Gewinns dargestellt. Für die Vorschrift nach § 34a EStG wird außerdem der Fall der Entnahme der Einkommensteuer dargestellt, wie es in der Praxis üblich ist.

Der Grundfall ist wie folgt zu charakterisieren: Betrachtet wird eine OHG. Es erfolgt keine Differenzierung zwischen

verschiedenen Gesellschaftern.²⁰⁸ Es wird mit den Größen und Annahmen aus Tabelle 3 gerechnet.

Da die betrachteten Tarifvorschriften derzeit vorrangig ertragreiche Familienpersonengesellschaften adressieren, wird im Ausgangsfall mit einer Grenzbelastung mit dem Spitzensteuersatz i.H.v. 45 % gerechnet.²⁰⁹

4.2. Quantifizierung der Unterschiede und Analyse der Ergebnisse

4.2.1. Ausgangsfall - Entnahme der Gewinne

Im Ausgangsfall wird zunächst die Besteuerung auf Ebene der Gesellschaft simuliert. Bei der OHG entspricht die Gewerbesteuerbelastung der steuerlichen Gesamtbelastung auf Ebene der Gesellschaft. Die übrige Besteuerung findet auf Mitunternehmerebene statt. Die Gewerbesteuer und damit die Gesamtbelastung auf Unternehmensebene beträgt EUR 257.138.²¹⁰ Auf Ebene der Mitunternehmer kommt es zu einer Besteuerung mit der Einkommensteuer. Die Gewerbesteuer gilt dabei als nichtabzugsfähige Betriebsausgabe und ist aus diesem Grund Bestandteil des Gewinns. Daraus ergibt sich für diesen Fall ein zu versteuerndes Einkommen i.H.d. Gewinns der Gesellschaft. In Tabelle 7 ist die Berechnung kurz skizziert. Es wird sowohl die erste Gewinnermittlungsstufe auf Ebene der Gesellschaft ersichtlich als auch die zweite Gewinnermittlungsstufe auf Gesellschafterebene vereinfacht mit einem 100 %-igen Gewinnanteil sowie unter Berücksichtigung der Sonderbetriebsvergütungen dargestellt.

Die Einkommensteuer wird auf das gerundete zu versteuernde Einkommen berechnet. Es ergibt sich eine Bemessungsgrundlage i.H.v. EUR 1.500.000, d.h. folgende Berechnung: Tarifliche ESt: $0,45 \times 1.500.000 = 675.000$. Auf die tarifliche Einkommensteuer erfolgt im nächsten Schritt die pauschalierte Gewerbesteueranrechnung gem. § 35 EStG. Hinsichtlich des Anrechnungsvolumens ist die Steuerermäßigung einerseits beschränkt auf die Einkommensteuer, die auf die gewerblichen Einkünfte entfällt²¹¹, andererseits auf die tatsächlich entrichtete Gewerbesteuer und schließlich auf den 4-fachen²¹² GewSt-Messbetrag.²¹³ Im vorliegenden Fall stellt der pauschalierte Anrechnungsbetrag die niedrigste Größe dar.²¹⁴ Somit darf er vollständig angerechnet werden und die Berechnung der festzusetzenden ESt erfolgt: $675.000 - 207.789 = 467.211$. Die steuerliche Gesamtbelastung ergibt sich daraus wie in Tabelle 5 dargestellt.

²⁰⁸Es unterliegen alle Gesellschafter einem einheitlichen Grenzsteuersatz und eine Differenzierung hätte eine unzureichende Relevanz für die Vergleichbarkeit der Gesamtsteuerbelastung.

²⁰⁹Die Kirchensteuer und etwaige Freibeträge bleiben aufgrund unzureichender Relevanz außer Betracht, es wird allerdings der Arbeitnehmer-Pauschbetrag für Einkünfte aus nichtselbstständiger Arbeit abgezogen.

²¹⁰Eine detaillierte Berechnung der Gewerbesteuer sowie der Hinzurechnungsbeträge und Kürzungen ist dem Anhang 2 (S. 84) zu entnehmen.

²¹¹Im vorliegenden Beispiel gibt es lediglich Einkünfte aus Gewerbebetrieb.

²¹²Vgl. Corona-Steuerhilfegesetz II in der Fassung vom 29.06.2020, BGBl 2020 I S.1513.

²¹³Vgl. BMF v. 03.11.2016 - IV C 6 - S 2296-a/08/10002 :003 BStBl 2016 I S. 1187, Rz. 5-7.

²¹⁴Vergleich der drei Beschränkungen in Anhang 3, S. 85.

²⁰³Vgl. Brühl und Weiss (2021a, 949).

²⁰⁴Haarmann (2015, 26). Aus betriebswirtschaftlicher Sicht sind Steuern nichts anderes als Kosten, weshalb sie minimiert werden sollten, vgl. Taetzner in Wehrheim und Heurung (2007, 477).

²⁰⁵Vgl. Fischer (2019, 318).

²⁰⁶Vgl. Jacobs (2016, 885).

²⁰⁷Vgl. Pfuhl (2014, 157).

Tabelle 3: Parameter des Ausgangsfalls
(Quelle: eigene Darstellung)

	Summe (in €)
Gewinn v. St. (v. Abzug von Gesellschaftervergütungen)	1.500.000
Gehalt Gesellschafter-Geschäftsführer	100.000
Mietaufwendungen an Gesellschafter	22.000
Verbindlichkeiten (Darlehen) FK-Zins: 8 % p.a.	850.000
Miet-/Leasingzahlungen, davon:	590.000
- bew. WG	270.000
- unbew. WG	240.000
- Rechte (Lizenzen, etc.)	80.000
Einheitswert der Grundstücke	400.000
Gewerbesteuerhebesatz (Bochum)	495 %

Tabelle 4: Berechnung des zu versteuernden Einkommens
(Quelle: eigene Darstellung)

		Gesellschafter
Beteiligung		
Gewinn v.St. und		
vor Abzug Gesellschaftervergütungen:		1.500.000,00
– Geschäftsführergehalt		-100.000,00
– Miete		-22.000,00
= Gewinn v.St.		<u>1.078.000,00</u>
davon		1.078.000,00
+ Geschäftsführergehalt		100.000,00
+ Mieteinkünfte		22.000,00
= Einkünfte aus Gewerbebetrieb = zVE		<u>1.500.000,00</u>

Tabelle 5: Gesamtsteuerbelastung bei Regelbesteuerung
(Quelle: eigene Darstellung)

Gesamtbelastung	
GewSt	257.138
Est	467.211
SolZ	25.697
Gesamtsteuerlast	<u>750.046</u>
Steuerquote	<u>50,00 %</u>

4.2.2. Vollthesaurierung mit Thesaurierungsbegünstigung

Bei der Berechnung der Gesamtsteuerlast ist im Fall der Vollthesaurierung zu berücksichtigen, dass die Gewerbesteuer für die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG eine nichtabzugsfähige Betriebsausgabe darstellt und keine Entnahme.²¹⁵ Aus diesem Grund reduziert sich die Bemessungsgrundlage der Einkommensteuer nicht um die Gewerbesteuer, während sie den begünstigungsfähigen Gewinn selbst mindert. Bei Vollthesaurierung verbleibt der Betrag der Gewerbesteuer durch die außerbilanzielle Hinzurechnung und qualifiziert sich als Einkünfte aus Gewerbebetrieb. Im vorliegenden Belastungsvergleich, welcher Tabelle 6 zu entnehmen ist, wird die Gewerbesteuer mit dem Grenzsteu-

ersatz i.H.v. 45 % besteuert.²¹⁶

Außerdem wird der realitätsnähere Fall der Einkommensteuer-Entnahme dargestellt, d.h. dass die Einkommensteuer des Gesellschafters von dem Gewinn getragen werden soll und demnach als Entnahme die Bemessungsgrundlage der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung schmälert. Essentiell für eine Einschätzung der Vorteilhaftigkeit ist die Fragestellung, ob eine Nachversteuerung zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt ausgelöst wird. In der nachstehenden Tabelle ist einerseits die Thesaurierung, andererseits die Entnahme der Gewinne mit einhergehender Nachversteuerung unter Anwendung des

²¹⁵Vgl. Kanzler und Kraft (2021, § 34a Rz. 135).

²¹⁶Grundsätzlich wäre aber auch eine andere Tarifstufe des § 32a EStG denkbar, wenn die Gewerbesteuer in diesem Fall die einzigen Einkünfte aus Gewerbebetrieb darstellt und ihrer Höhe nach nicht mehr den Spitzensteuersatz rechtfertigt.

§ 34a EStG, dargestellt. Sehr gut ersichtlich ist die Nachteiligkeit der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung bei Auslösung einer Nachversteuerung. Die ursprünglichen 50,00 % Gesamtsteuerbelastung erhöhen sich auf 50,63 %, bzw. 50,30 % bei Entnahme der ESt. Auf der anderen Seite zeigt sich der einkommensteuerliche Vorteil, sofern die Thesaurierung erfolgt und eine Nachversteuerung ausbleibt. In diesem Fall liegt die Gesamtsteuerbelastung etwa 13 %-Punkte niedriger bei 36,80 % bzw. im realitätsnahen Fall der Entnahmen der Einkommensteuer um etwa 7 %-Punkte niedriger bei 43,69 %.

4.2.3. Vollthesaurierung mit Optionsmöglichkeit des KöMoG

Unter Berücksichtigung des Optionsmodells wird die Personengesellschaft wie eine Kapitalgesellschaft besteuert und ihre Gesellschafter wie die Anteilseigner einer Kapitalgesellschaft. Daraus ergeben sich Besonderheiten: Einerseits kommt es zu einer abweichenden Gewerbesteuerberechnung, da unter anderem der GewSt-Freibetrag für Personengesellschaften nicht mehr anwendbar ist und aufgrund des Trennungsprinzips die Bemessungsgrundlage um die ehemaligen Sonderbetriebseinnahmen gekürzt wird. Es ergibt sich eine Gewerbesteuer für die optierende Gesellschaft i.H.v. EUR 188.268.²¹⁷ Um darzustellen, wie sich das Optionsmodell einerseits bei Entnahme und andererseits bei Thesaurierung verhält, lässt sich ein ausschüttungsfähiger Gewinn berechnen, indem sämtliche auf Unternehmensebene anfallende Steuern, d.h. Körperschaftsteuer, Solidaritätszuschlag und Gewerbesteuer, abgezogen werden. Wie Tabelle 7 zu entnehmen ist, verbleibt ein Betrag i.H.v. EUR 963.605.

Da die Sonderbetriebsvergütungen nun aufwandswirksam erfasst sind und nicht der Besteuerung auf Ebene der Gesellschaft unterliegen, werden sie beim Gesellschafter mit dem persönlichen Einkommensteuersatz als Einkünfte aus Vermietung und Verpachtung sowie Einkünfte aus nicht-selbstständiger Arbeit belastet.²¹⁸ Bei einer Entnahme des ausschüttungsfähigen Gewinns wird dieser wie eine Dividende mit Kapitalertragsteuer i.H.v. 25 % belastet²¹⁹ und gilt i.R.d. Veranlagung mit der Abgeltungsteuer nach dem gesonderten Tarif des § 32d EStG mit dem Kapitalertragsteuerabzug als abgegolten.²²⁰ Auch für die Beurteilung der Vorteilhaftigkeit unter Berücksichtigung des Optionsmodells kommt es elementar darauf an, ob es zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt zu einer Entnahme kommt. Wie in Tabelle 8 dargestellt, erkennt man bei einer vollständigen Entnahme, dass sich die ursprünglichen 50,00 % Gesamtsteuerbelastung der Regelbesteuerung durch Inanspruchnahme des Optionsmodells und der Abgeltungsteuer auf 50,55 % erhöhen. Das TEV erweist sich im vorliegenden Fall als unvorteilhaft. Bei hohen Steuersätzen, wie im vorliegenden Beispiel i.H.v. 45 %, ist das Teileinkünfteverfahren grundsätzlich nicht vorteilhaft.²²¹ Wird nur ein Teil des Gewinns entnommen, erhöht

sich erwartungsgemäß der Vorteil zur Regelbesteuerung, kann hier nämlich keine anteilige Besteuerung erfolgen. Vergleicht man die Belastung bei Entnahme mit der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung, ist im statischen Vergleich aufgrund der Nachversteuerung kaum ein Unterschied zu erkennen. Betrachtet man den Fall der Thesaurierung, ist im Vergleich zum System der Regelbesteuerung, in dem die thesaurierten Gewinne voll versteuert werden, das Optionsmodell deutlich vorteilhafter mit einer Gesamtsteuerbelastung von etwa 34,38 %. Interessant ist die Erkenntnis, dass sich das Optionsmodell im vorliegenden Belastungsvergleich im Vergleich zur Thesaurierungsbegünstigung mit ESt-Entnahme bei Thesaurierung der Gewinne um über 9 %-Punkte vorteilhafter bemisst. Die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung wäre selbst, wenn die Einkommensteuer von außen zugeführt, d.h. eine Einlage getätigt wird, die nicht den Begünstigungsbetrag mindert, nicht die günstigere Alternative. Eine derartige Praxis könnte aber auch nicht als realistisch angenommen werden, sodass das Optionsmodell unter realen Bedingungen immer als günstigste Alternative zu werten ist.

4.2.4. Vergleich der Belastung bei Veränderungen der Parameter

Unter den getroffenen Annahmen lässt sich der Grundfall durch verschiedene Parameter variieren und evaluieren, unter welchen Umständen sich die Inanspruchnahme der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung bzw. des Optionsmodells aus Sicht der Steuerbelastung vorteilhaft zeigt.²²² Wie Tabelle 9 zu entnehmen ist, weist bei vollständiger Entnahme und einem persönlichen Steuersatz von 45 % häufig die Regelbesteuerung nach dem Regime der Personengesellschaften die niedrigste Gesamtsteuerbelastung auf. Bei hohen Geschäftsführer-Gehältern, welche dann mit dem persönlichen Steuersatz versteuert werden, verändert sich das Bild allerdings und die Besteuerung nach dem Regime der Kapitalgesellschaft ist vorteilhafter. Diese Beobachtung deckt sich mit Rechtsformvergleichen, welche bei besonders hohen Steuersätzen die Kapitalgesellschaft als günstigste Besteuerungsoption beschreiben.²²³

Naturngemäß ist im statischen Vergleich im Fall einer Gewinnentnahme die Besteuerung nach den Vorschriften des § 34a EStG immer nachteilig aufgrund der Nachversteuerung. Bei niedrigem Gewinn oder einem hohen Hebesatz ist die Besteuerung nach dem Regime der Kapitalgesellschaft der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung vorzuziehen – die Regelbesteuerung bleibt aber hier die vorteilhafteste Option. Im Fall eines hohen Gewinns ergibt sich für die Belastung mit dem Einkommensteuerspitzensatz eine annähernd gleiche Gesamtbelastung zwischen Besteuerung nach dem Transparenz- und dem Trennungsprinzip.

Im Fall einer Thesaurierung der Gewinne (Tabelle 10 zu entnehmen) erkennt man den klaren Vorteil der beiden Wahl-

²¹⁷Berechnung der Gewerbesteuer in Anhang 4, S. 86.

²¹⁸Es wird die Annahme getroffen, dass die Vergütungen fremdüblich sind und keine VGA darstellen.

²¹⁹Vgl. § 43a Abs. 1 S. 1 Nr. 1 EStG

²²⁰Montag in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 13 Rz. 8).

²²¹Vgl. Hey in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 11 Rz. 19).

²²²Die Nutzung des TEV ist wie bereits beschrieben bei hohen Steuersätzen, wie bspw. 42 % und 45 % nicht vorteilhaft, vgl. Hey in Tipke und Lang (2018, § 11 Rz. 19). Deswegen wurde auf die Darstellung verzichtet.

²²³Vgl. z.B. Cordes und Kraft (2021, 403f).

Tabelle 6: Belastungsvergleich Regelbesteuerung und § 34a EStG
(Quelle: eigene Darstellung)

	Regelbesteuerung		§ 34a EStG		§ 34a EStG ESt-Entnahme	
	Gewinn	Steuern	Gewinn	Steuern	Gewinn	Steuern
Gewinn v. St. (inkl. SoBil)	1.500.000		1.500.000		1.500.000	
Gewerbsteuer (HS 495%)	-257.138	257.138	-257.138	257.138	-257.138	257.138
Körperschaftsteuer						
SolZ						
Gewinn nach Steuern	1.242.862		1.242.862		1.242.862	
Unternehmensteuern		257.138		257.138		257.138
Saldo Entnahmen/Einlagen			-122.000		-707.292	
Begünstigungsbetrag			1.120.862		535.570	
tarifl. ESt	-675.000	675.000	-170.612	170.612	-433.993	433.993
ESt auf Begünstigungsbetrag			-316.644	316.644	-151.299	151.299
Anrechnung GewSt	207.788	-207.788	207.788	-207.788	207.788	-207.788
SolZ	-25.697	25.697	-15.371	15.371	-20.763	20.763
Gewinn n. St.	749.953		740.236		636.808	
Gesamtbelastung bei Thesaurierung		750.046		551.976		655.404
<i>Steuerquote</i>		<i>50,00 %</i>		<i>36,80 %</i>		<i>43,69 %</i>
Nachversteuerung/Abgeltung bei Entnahme						
1. Vollst. Entnahme			-196.701	196.701	-93.988	93.988
+SolZ			-10.819	10.819	-5.169	5.169
2. 50 % Entnahme			-98.350	98.350	-46.994	46.994
+SolZ			-5.409	5.409	-2.585	2.585
Gesamtbelastung bei Entnahme		750.046		759.495		754.561
1. Vollst. Entnahme		750.046		759.495		754.561
<i>Steuerquote</i>		<i>50,00 %</i>		<i>50,63 %</i>		<i>50,30 %</i>
2. 50 % Entnahme		750.046		655.736		704.983
<i>Steuerquote</i>		<i>50,00 %</i>		<i>43,72 %</i>		<i>47,00 %</i>

Tabelle 7: Berechnung ausschüttungsfähiger Gewinn der optierenden Gesellschaft
(Quelle: eigene Darstellung)

Gewinn v.St. und vor Abzug Gesellschaftervergütungen	1.500.000
– Geschäftsführergehalt	-100.000
– Miete an A	-22.000
zu versteuernder Gewinn	1.378.000
– KSt Tarifbelastung (15 %)	-206.700
– SolZ auf KSt	-11.369
– Gewerbesteuer	-196.327
= ausschüttungsfähiger Gewinn	963.605

rechte nach § 34a EStG und § 1a KStG. Die Regelbesteuerung, die auch bei Thesaurierung den vollen Gewinn mit dem persönlichen Einkommensteuersatz belastet, kann nicht mehr vorteilhaft werden. Vergleicht man die beiden übrigen Besteuerungsalternativen ist die Optionsbesteuerung nach § 1a EStG die vorteilhaftere Alternative.

Die Besteuerung nach § 1a KStG ist bei Thesaurierung die Option mit der geringsten Steuerquote. Nur bei einem hohen Gesellschafter-Geschäftsführergehalt, welches, qualifiziert als Einkünfte aus nichtselbstständiger Arbeit, mit dem persönlichem Einkommensteuersatz besteuert, Einfluss auf die Steuerquote nimmt, erhöht sich die Steuerquote auf über

40 %. In letzterem Fall ist die Besteuerung nach dem Regime der Personengesellschaft dennoch unvorteilhafter, da unter Nutzung der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung die (aus der Sonderbilanz) entnommenen Geschäftsführergehälter den Begünstigungsbetrag verkürzen und daher mit dem regulären Einkommensteuersatz besteuert werden. Eine wichtige Einflussgröße, die von erheblicher Relevanz ist, findet sich in den Gewerbesteuerhebesätzen.²²⁴ Doch auch die Gewerbesteueranrechnung für Personengesellschaften kann nicht

²²⁴Aus diesem Grund findet sich eine Vorteilhaftigkeitsanalyse ausgehend von GewSt-Hebesätzen in Anhang 5, Seite 87.

Tabelle 8: Belastungsvergleich Regelbesteuerung und Optionsmodell
(Quelle: eigene Darstellung)

	Regelbesteuerung		Optionsmodell Abgeltungsteuer		Optionsmodell Teileinkünfteverf.	
	Gewinn	Steuern	Gewinn	Steuern	Gewinn	Steuern
Gewinn v. St.	1.500.000		1.378.000		1.378.000	
Gewerbsteuer (HS 495%)	-257.138	257.138	-240.243	240.243	-240.243	240.243
Körperschaftsteuer			-206.700	206.700	-206.700	206.700
SolZ			-11.369	11.369	-11.369	11.369
Gewinn nach Steuern	1.242.862		919.688		919.688	
Unternehmensteuern		257.138		458.312		458.312
ESt auf Einkünfte aus ehemaligem SBV tarifl. Est	-675.000	675.000	-54.450	54.450	-54.450	54.450
Anrechnung GewSt	207.788	-207.788				
SolZ	-25.697	25.697	-2.995	2.995	-2.995	2.995
Gewinn n. St.	749.954		862.243		862.243	
Gesamtbelastung bei Thesaurierung		750.046		515.757		515.757
<i>Steuerquote</i>		<i>50,00 %</i>		<i>34,38 %</i>		<i>34,38 %</i>
Abgeltung bei Entnahme						
1. Vollst. Entnahme			-229.922	229.922	-248.316	248.316
+SolZ			-12.646	12.646	-13.657	13.657
2. 50 % Entnahme			-114.961	114.961	-124.158	124.158
+SolZ			-6.323	6.323	-6.829	6.829
Gesamtbelastung bei Entnahme						
1. Vollst. Entnahme		750.046		758.324		777.730
<i>Steuerquote</i>		<i>50,00 %</i>		<i>50,55 %</i>		<i>51,85 %</i>
2. 50 % Entnahme		750.046		637.040		646.743
<i>Steuerquote</i>		<i>50,00 %</i>		<i>42,47 %</i>		<i>43,12 %</i>

Tabelle 9: Variationen des Belastungsvergleichs bei Gewinnentnahme
(Quelle: eigene Darstellung)

Gewinnentnahme	Regelbest.	§ 34a EStG	§ 34a EStG	§ 1a KStG
			ESt-Entnahme	Abgeltungsteuer
Grundfall	750.046	759.495	754.561	758.324
<i>Steuerquote in %</i>	<i>50,00 %</i>	<i>50,63 %</i>	<i>50,30 %</i>	<i>50,55 %</i>
Variationen:				
Gewinn = 3.000.000	1.500.496	1.520.400	1.510.734	1.520.050
<i>Steuerquote in %</i>	<i>50,02 %</i>	<i>50,68 %</i>	<i>50,36 %</i>	<i>50,67 %</i>
Gewinn = 500.000	249.746	252.226	250.446	250.507
<i>Steuerquote in %</i>	<i>49,95 %</i>	<i>50,45 %</i>	<i>50,09 %</i>	<i>50,10 %</i>
Hebesatz 520 %	763.033	772.373	767.416	767.258
<i>Steuerquote in %</i>	<i>50,87 %</i>	<i>51,49 %</i>	<i>51,16 %</i>	<i>51,15 %</i>
Hebesatz 350 %	702.125	712.209	707.403	706.511
<i>Steuerquote in %</i>	<i>46,81 %</i>	<i>47,48 %</i>	<i>47,16 %</i>	<i>47,10 %</i>
GF-Gehalt = 750.000	750.046	754.016	750.046	736.831
<i>Steuerquote in %</i>	<i>50,00 %</i>	<i>50,27 %</i>	<i>50,00 %</i>	<i>49,12 %</i>
GF-Gehalt = 0	750.046	760.338	755.574	761.631
<i>Steuerquote in %</i>	<i>50,00 %</i>	<i>50,69 %</i>	<i>50,37 %</i>	<i>50,78 %</i>
Verb.: 3.000.000	751.145	760.531	755.584	763.809
<i>Steuerquote in %</i>	<i>50,08 %</i>	<i>50,70 %</i>	<i>50,37 %</i>	<i>50,92 %</i>
Verb.: 100.000	749.663	759.134	754.204	756.411
<i>Steuerquote in %</i>	<i>49,98 %</i>	<i>50,61 %</i>	<i>50,28 %</i>	<i>50,43 %</i>

Tabelle 10: Variationen des Belastungsvergleichs bei Thesaurierung
(Quelle: eigene Darstellung)

Thesaurierung	Regelbest.	§ 34a EStG	§ 34a EStG ESt-Entnahme	§ 1a KStG Abgeltungsteuer
Grundfall	750.046	551.976	655.404	515.757
Steuerquote in %	50,00%	36,80%	43,69%	34,38%
Variationen:				
Gewinn = 3.000.000	1.500.496	1.083.280	1.285.897	1.013.007
Steuerquote in %	50,02 %	36,11 %	42,86 %	33,77 %
Gewinn = 500.000	249.746	197.773	235.076	184.257
Steuerquote in %	49,95 %	39,55 %	47,02 %	36,85 %
Hebesatz 520 %	763.033	567.258	671.148	527.890
Steuerquote in %	50,87 %	37,82 %	44,74 %	35,19 %
Hebesatz 350 %	702.125	490.744	591.495	445.382
Steuerquote in %	46,81 %	32,72 %	39,43 %	29,69 %
GF-Gehalt = 750.000	750.046	666.839	750.046	608.869
Steuerquote in %	50,00 %	44,46 %	50,00 %	40,59 %
GF-Gehalt = 0	750.046	534.305	634.178	501.432
Steuerquote in %	50,00 %	35,62 %	42,28 %	33,43 %
Verb.: 3.000.000	751.145	554.391	658.084	523.206
Steuerquote in %	50,08 %	36,96 %	43,87 %	34,88 %
Verb.: 100.000	749.663	551.133	654.469	513.158
Steuerquote in %	49,98 %	36,74 %	43,63 %	34,21 %

ihre Nachteile ausgleichen. Deutlich wird anhand der Vergleiche, dass die Besteuerung nach dem Regime der Kapitalgesellschaft im Fall der Thesaurierung immer vorteilhafter ist. Begründet liegt das in Tatsache, dass die Gewerbesteuer den Begünstigungsbetrag mindert, sodass immer ein Anteil des zu versteuernden Einkommens, mithin die außerbilanziell hinzugerechnete Gewerbesteuer, mit dem (tendenziell hohen) Einkommensteuersatz und nicht mit dem Tarif nach § 34a EStG von 28,25 % besteuert wird.

4.2.5. Dynamische Betrachtung

Die vorstehenden statischen Belastungsvergleiche berücksichtigen jeweils nur ein Veranlagungsjahr und können somit gerade die für die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung relevanten Zeit- und Zinseffekte nicht abbilden – es bietet sich daher ein dynamischer Vergleich an. Unterstellt man einen Kalkulationszins i.H.v. 5 % und einen zehnjährigen Planungshorizont, ergibt sich – auf dem Konzept der Steuerbarwertminimierung basierend – das Bild in Tabelle 11.

Es lässt sich feststellen, dass der nominale Belastungsnachteil, der sich aus der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung im Vergleich zur Regelbesteuerung im statischen Modell ergibt (50,44 % bzw. 50,08 % > 50,00 %), bei dynamischer Betrachtung zu einem Vorteil wandelt (45,83 % bzw. 46,47 % < 50,00 %). Das Optionsmodell bietet indes die vorteilhafteste Alternative mit 44,32 % bzw. 44,94 % Gesamtbelastung.

Für einen dynamischen Vergleich eignet sich indes auch die Betrachtung der Mindestthesaurierungsdauern in Abhängigkeit vom Einkommensteuersatz und der internen Rendite, z.B. anhand eines Barwertvergleiches, wie er bereits in Kapi-

tel 3.2.5 dargestellt wurde.²²⁵

4.3. Beurteilung von Einzelaspekten der Besteuerungsalternativen

Die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung gem. § 34a EStG sollte die Besteuerung thesaurierter Gewinne von Personengesellschaften an die Besteuerung thesaurierter Gewinne von Kapitalgesellschaften angleichen und die Eigenkapitalbasis von Personengesellschaften stärken.²²⁶ Gleich zu ihrer Einführung wurde die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung jedoch bereits vielfach in der Literatur bemängelt²²⁷ - und auch heute noch, über zehn Jahre später, finden sich in aktuellen Beiträgen kongruente Ansichten.²²⁸ Ein häufiger Alternativvorschlag findet sich in einer Optionsmöglichkeit für Personengesellschaften sich nach dem Regime einer Kapitalgesellschaft besteuern zu lassen. Diese punktuelle Durchbrechung des Transparenzprinzips könne eine Lösung darstellen und unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Familienpersonengesellschaften die Steuermoral erhöhen.²²⁹ Im Folgenden kommt

²²⁵Hier war bereits erkennbar, dass die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung erst bei einer Steuerbelastung nahe dem Spitzensteuersatz auch bei geringeren Thesaurierungsdauern vorteilhaft ist. Selbst bei einer hohen internen Rendite von 20 % bedarf es bei einem Einkommensteuersatz von 40 % einer Thesaurierungsdauer von 4 Jahren, bis der Thesaurierungsvorteil den Nachversteuerungsnachteil übersteigen würde.

²²⁶Vgl. Steinbrück, Rede vor dem BDI-Steuerkongress 26.09.2006, zitiert nach Kudert und Kaiser (2007, 1).

²²⁷Vgl. u.a. Hey (2007, 925); Kudert und Kaiser (2007, 1); Wesselbaum-Neugebauer (2008, 33); Fischer (2019, 319).

²²⁸Vgl. z.B. Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, 8).

²²⁹Vgl. Fischer (2019, 321).

Tabelle 11: Dynamischer Belastungsvergleich bei ESt 45 % (i = 5 %, n = 10 Jahre)
(Quelle: eigene Darstellung)

	Regel- besteuerung	§ 34a EStG	§ 34a EStG ESt-Entnahme	Optionsmodell Abgeltungsteuer	Optionsmodell TEV
Thesaurierung	50,00 %	35,36 %	39,27 %	36,55 %	36,55 %
Nachbelastung (n=10)	0 %	10,47 %	7,19 %	7,76 %	8,38 %
Gesamtbelastung (n=10)	50,00 %	45,83 %	46,47 %	44,32 %	44,94 %
Minderbelastung		-4,18 %	-3,54 %	-5,69 %	-5,07 %

es zu einem qualitativen Vergleich beider Besteuerungsalternativen unter Bezugnahme von Anwendungsdivergenzen sowie verschiedener Steuerwirkungen.²³⁰

4.3.1. Adressatenkreis

Wie bereits herausgearbeitet, trägt die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung lediglich Relevanz für ertragreiche Personengesellschaften, deren Mitunternehmer einen geringen Entnahmebedarf aufweisen und simultan dem Spitzen-Einkommensteuersatz unterliegen.²³¹ Aus der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung droht v.a. für Steuerpflichtige, deren Einkommensteuersatz unterhalb des Spitzensteuersatzes von 45 % liegt, ein erhebliches Mehrbelastungsrisiko in Entnahmesituationen. Folgt man der Einschätzung verschiedener Autoren – teils bereits kurz nach Einführung der Begünstigung – resultiert vor allem hieraus eine geringe Inanspruchnahme der Vorschrift.²³² Mit dem Optionsmodell adressiert der Gesetzgeber nach eigenen Angaben größere Gesellschaften, während kleine und mittlere Unternehmen von einer weiterhin transparenten Besteuerung profitieren sollen.²³³ Als Kriterium vorrangig die Unternehmensgröße in den Mittelpunkt zu stellen, erscheint unzutreffend. Es ist viel eher damit zu rechnen, dass vor allem ertragreiche Gesellschaften, unabhängig von ihrer Unternehmensgröße, das Optionsmodell in Anspruch nehmen werden. In der Literatur wird bereits positiv gewürdigt, dass damit hoch steuerbelastete Personengesellschaften die Möglichkeit der Kapitalgesellschaftsbesteuerung erhielten und sich Nachteile im grenzüberschreitenden Kontext beseitigen ließen – ohne die Etablierung eines völlig neuen Besteuerungssystems.²³⁴ Entscheidende Schwächen ergeben sich bei verhältnismäßig großen Gesellschafterkreisen, wie sie bei Familienpersonengesellschaften häufig zu finden sind.²³⁵ Im Gegensatz zu der Inanspruchnahme der

Thesaurierungsbegünstigung, die für jeden Gesellschafter individuell und fakultativ beantragt werden kann, muss für die Anwendung des Optionsmodells ein Konsens im Gesellschafterkreis herrschen. Das Optieren ist nämlich ausschließlich für die gesamte Mitunternehmerschaft möglich und muss mit einem qualifizierten Mehrheitsbeschluss einhergehen.²³⁶ Naturgemäß wäre ein individuelles Optieren für einzelne Mitunternehmer nur schwer durchführbar, nichtsdestotrotz ist diese Einschränkung der Dispositionsfreiheit des einzelnen Mitunternehmers ein Nachteil, den die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nicht innehat. Beide Vorschriften schließen gleichermaßen Anwender der Einnahmen-Überschussrechnung aus.²³⁷ Besonders bedenklich ist, dass als Adressaten des Optionsmodells grundsätzlich ertragreiche Familienpersonengesellschaften benannt werden. Da diese bereits den primären Anwenderkreis der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung darstellen, stehen die beiden Vorschriften in Konkurrenz zueinander.²³⁸ Gleichzeitig besteht für die Anwender der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung eine enorme Hürde, die die Option nach § 1a KStG unattraktiv werden lässt: Durch den fiktiven Formwechsel, kommt es zu einer sofortigen Nachversteuerung der thesaurierten Gewinne, was angesichts der erheblichen Liquiditätsabflüsse für viele Gesellschafter eine prohibitive Wirkung haben dürfte und ein schwerwiegendes Argument gegen das Optionsmodell darstellt.

4.3.2. Tarifeffekte

Von Tarifeffekten aus steuerlicher Sicht ist die Rede, wenn der Steuerpflichtige über Handlungsalternativen verfügt und auf diese verschiedene Steuertarife angewendet werden können.²³⁹ Die Sondertarife der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG und die Besteuerung von Kapitalerträgen nach § 32d EStG, welche unter dem Optionsmodell Relevanz finden, sind fakultativ als *leges specialis* vorrangig der progressiven Regelbesteuerung nach § 32a Abs. S. 2 EStG zu behandeln.²⁴⁰ Die Wirkungen der Tarifeffekte von

²³⁰ Steuerwirkungen beschreiben den Einfluss von Steuern auf Handlungen (z.B. Unternehmensentscheidungen), vgl. D. Schneider (2014, 19); dabei basieren sämtliche Steuerwirkungen auf Verletzungen der Neutralität durch Zeit-, Bemessungsgrundlagen- und Tarifeffekte, vgl. Wagner in Bitz et al. (2005, 99f). Steuerreformen knüpfen an diesen drei Typen von Steuerwirkungen an, vgl. Knirsch und Schanz (2008, 1232). Aus diesem Grund werden Zeit-, Bemessungsgrundlagen- und Tarifeffekte in der vorliegenden Arbeit näher beleuchtet.

²³¹ Vgl. z.B. Jacobs et al. (2015, 608); Maiterth und Müller (2007, 56f); Wesselbaum-Neugebauer (2008, 5).

²³² Vgl. Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, 1).

²³³ Vgl. BR-Drs. 244/21 v. 26.03.2021, 9.

²³⁴ Vgl. Schiffers in Deutscher Bundestag (2021).

²³⁵ Vgl. Von Rechenberg et al. (2020, 56).

²³⁶ Vgl. BR-Drs. 244/21 v. 26.03.2021, 18.

²³⁷ Vgl. § 1a Abs. 3 S. 6 KStG; Bei einem Wechsel zum Betriebsvermögensvergleich, birgt das Optionsmodell als Hürde die Wirkung des Übergangsgewinns, da die gewohnte Billigkeitslösung (mit einer Verteilung des Übergangsgewinns auf bis zu 3 Wj. (R 4.6 EStR)) bei einem Formwechsel nicht anwendbar ist, vgl. Brühl und Weiss (2021b, 950).

²³⁸ Vgl. Eigenthaler in Deutscher Bundestag (2021); Hey in Deutscher Bundestag (2021).

²³⁹ Vgl. Pfuhl (2014, 101). Weiterführend zu Tarifeffekten im engeren und weiteren Sinne: Hechtner (2010, 21f).

²⁴⁰ Vgl. Wacker in Schmidt (2021, § 34a Rz. 11 (3)); Pfirrmann in Kirchhof und Seer (2021, § 32d Rz. 5).

Thesaurierungsbegünstigung und Abgeltungsteuer im Fall der Inanspruchnahme des Optionsmodells können jedoch nur schwer pauschal beurteilt werden.²⁴¹ Im Rahmen der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung ist die Beurteilung entscheidend abhängig vom persönlichen Einkommensteuersatz der Mitunternehmer. Je höher dieser ist, desto größer ist der steuerliche Vorteil des Gewinneinhalts und desto niedriger ist der Nachteil einer etwaigen Entnahme. In (Über-)Entnahmesituationen, d.h. bei Vorliegen von Nachversteuerungstatbeständen, führt die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung – im Vergleich zu privaten Kapitalerträgen als Alternativinvestition – immer zu einer höheren Steuerbelastung, wenn von identischer Rendite ausgegangen wird.²⁴² Entgegen der Absicht des Gesetzgebers führt dieser Umstand regelmäßig zu vollständigen Gewinnentnahmen, woraus naturgemäß keine Stärkung der Eigenkapitalbasis resultieren kann. Selbst bei zukünftig geplanter Inanspruchnahme des § 34a EStG bestehen aufgrund der Verwendungsfiktion Anreize, vorhandenes Eigenkapital zuvor zu entnehmen.²⁴³ Werden die Gewinne hingegen thesauriert, weil liquide Mittel in der Gesellschaft benötigt werden, so ergibt sich automatisch keine Alternativanlage im Privatvermögen. Die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung kann in diesem Fall unter der Annahme hoher Steuersätze und bei hohem Zins vorteilhaft sein. Wenn die Gesellschafter hingegen auf Fremdmittel zur Finanzierung von Investitionen angewiesen sind und die Rendite der Investition lediglich gering oberhalb der Kapitalmarktverzinsung liegt, kann die Inanspruchnahme sehr vorteilhaft sein. Der niedrigere Steuersatz für thesaurierte Gewinne vermindert den Umfang des benötigten Fremdkapitals, sodass Zinszahlungen vermieden werden und letztlich das Endvermögen ansteigt – mitunter der Zinseffekt relevanter wird.²⁴⁴ Bei Einkommensteuersätzen, die unterhalb des Spitzensteuersatzes liegen, müssen Gewinne jedoch über unrealistisch lange Zeiträume thesauriert werden, um einen Vorteil zu erzielen. Die vorgenannten Tarifeffekte begünstigen v.a. Gesellschafter mit hohen Einkünften. Im Gegensatz zu den Effekten der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung vermindern die Möglichkeiten des Optionsmodells wie etwa die Günstigerprüfung nach § 32d Abs. 6 EStG oder die Anwendung des Teileinkünfteverfahrens negative Tarifeffekte. Ein weiterer positiver Aspekt ist, dass es lediglich unter Zuhilfenahme des Optionsmodells und mit § 32d EStG möglich ist, nicht vorbelastete Unternehmensgewinne wie etwa Zinsen in die begünstigte Besteuerung (Abgeltungsteuer) zu inkludieren und Arbitragegewinne zu erzielen. Die Nutzung der Steuersatzdifferenzen birgt Gestaltungspotenziale und kann letztlich einen entscheidenden Optimierungsfaktor darstellen, indem Einkünfte in den An-

wendungsbereich der Normen verlagert werden.²⁴⁵ Es lässt sich dennoch keine pauschalierte Aussage zur vorteilhafteren Besteuerungsalternative formulieren, da der Einfluss des individuellen Regelsteuersatzes sehr groß ist.

4.3.3. Bemessungsgrundlageneffekte

Von Bemessungsgrundlageneffekten ist die Rede, wenn es durch verschiedene zur Entscheidung stehenden Alternativen zu einer Abweichung der steuerlichen Bemessungsgrundlage einer Steuerart kommt.²⁴⁶ Für Zwecke einer Analyse der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG und des Optionsmodell nach § 1a KStG, ist zu differenzieren zwischen der Ermittlung des zu versteuernden Einkommens eines Gesellschafters und der Bemessungsgrundlage, für die die Sondertarife des § 34a EStG und für den § 1a KStG, den § 32d EStG anzuwenden sind. Zunächst lässt sich für die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung festhalten, dass die einkommensteuerliche Bemessungsgrundlage, d.h. das zu versteuernde Einkommen, unberührt bleibt. Zwar unterliegt der begünstigt besteuerte Gewinn nicht der progressiven Besteuerung, er bildet aber dennoch für andere steuerliche wie außersteuerliche Zwecke einen Teil der Summe der Einkünfte.²⁴⁷ Damit kann die Inanspruchnahme auch nicht den Abzug von Sonderausgaben oder außergewöhnlichen Belastungen gefährden.²⁴⁸ Die Bemessungsgrundlage für die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung wird als Begünstigungsbetrag²⁴⁹ separat ermittelt. Hier sind aufgrund des Steuerbilanzgewinns als Grundlage, die nichtabzugsfähigen Betriebsausgaben außer Acht zu lassen, was zu einem der Hauptgründe führt, an dem die Literatur das Scheitern der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung festmacht. Wie bereits beschrieben wird die Berücksichtigung der Gewerbesteuer als nichtabzugsfähige Betriebsausgabe besonders vehement diskutiert. Die Behandlung führt nach h.M. zu einer nicht gerechtfertigten Ungleichstellung einer Personengesellschaft im Vergleich mit einer Kapitalgesellschaft.²⁵⁰ Die Finanzverwaltung und Rechtsprechung stimmen darin überein, dass die nichtabzugsfähigen Betriebsausgaben und damit die Gewerbesteuer weiterhin nicht von der Bemessungsgrundlage abzugsfähig bleiben und den begünstigungsfähigen Gewinn mindern.²⁵¹ Ein gegenteiliger Effekt bei etwaigen steuerfreien Einnahmen vermag diese Wirkung mitunter zu kompensieren. Es wäre aber laut Hey sachgerecht, die nichtabzugsfähigen Betriebsausgaben stattdessen zum sondertarifierungsfähigen Gewinn hinzuzurechnen – bei entsprechender Kürzung des Nachversteuerungsbetrags.²⁵² Dies entspräche einer Lösung, wie sie bei Kapitalgesellschaften und damit auch in Zukunft bei optierenden Gesellschaften einschlägig ist. Demnach werden

²⁴¹Die Höhe der Differenzen hängt dabei maßgeblich vom individuellen Einkommensteuersatz, dem Zinssatz und der geplanten Thesaurierungsdauer ab, vgl. Jacobs et al. (2015, 608); Kudert und Kaiser (2007, 20).

²⁴²Rumpf et al. (2008, 44); Knirsch und Schanz (2008, 1247).

²⁴³Im Folgenden mehr unter dem Punkt „Lock-In-Effekte“; vgl. z.B. Beckmann und Schanz (2009, 18); Hey (2007, 929); Knirsch und Schanz (2008, 19).

²⁴⁴Knirsch und Schanz (2008, 19).

²⁴⁵Vgl. Pfuhl (2014, 107).

²⁴⁶Vgl. Ott (2012, 7); Wagner in Bitz et al. (2005, 455).

²⁴⁷Vgl. Reddig in Kirchhof und Seer (2021, § 34a Rz. 15).

²⁴⁸Vgl. Schiffers (2008, 1806).

²⁴⁹Siehe Kapitel 3.2.3.

²⁵⁰Vgl. z.B. Wesselbaum-Neugebauer (2008, 15).

²⁵¹Vgl. BMF v. 11.08.2008 - IV C 6 - S 2290-a/07/10001 BStBl 2008 I, 838 Rz. 28.

²⁵²Vgl. Hey (2007, 928).

die nichtabzugsfähigen Betriebsausgaben auf Ebene der Gesellschaft gewinnerhöhend erfasst. Da sie aber naturgemäß nicht ausgeschüttet werden können, unterliegen sie auf Ebene der Anteilseigner nicht der Einkommensteuer, bzw. der Abgeltungsteuer. Eine Steuerplanung darf unter Inanspruchnahme der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung demnach nicht allein auf die Handels- oder Steuerbilanz fußen, sondern muss sämtliche Besonderheiten, die sich hinsichtlich Einlage- oder Entnahmeregelungen ergeben, berücksichtigen.²⁵³ Bei der Besteuerung einer optierenden Gesellschaft kommt hingegen die Abgeltungsteuer nach § 32d Abs. 1 EStG zur Anwendung. Im Gegensatz zu § 34a EStG werden die Einkünfte aus Kapitalvermögen jedoch nicht zum zu versteuernden Einkommen hinzugerechnet und sind somit auch nicht Teil der einkommensteuerlichen Bemessungsgrundlage. Ausnahmen bilden § 32d Abs. 2, 6 EStG, mit denen die Einkünfte einerseits zu dem zu versteuernden Einkommen hinzuzurechnen und somit in die progressive Besteuerung oder andererseits anteilig nach dem Teileinkünfteverfahren zu inkludieren sind. Das Teileinkünfteverfahren gewährt konträr zur Abgeltungsteuer eine Teilentlastung der Bemessungsgrundlage. Betrachtet man hingegen die Bemessungsgrundlage für die Besteuerung der Gesellschaft, kann es je nach Ausgangslage zu starken Veränderungen kommen. Durch die neue Anwendung des Trennungsprinzips und dem Wegfall der zweistufigen Gewinnermittlung, kommt es zu einer steuerlichen Berücksichtigung sämtlicher fremdüblicher Vertragsbeziehungen der Gesellschafter, d.h. Geschäftsführer-Gehälter, Pachten, Mieten und sämtliche darüber hinaus existierende Sonderbetriebseinnahmen schmälern die Bemessungsgrundlage für die Körperschaftsteuer und werden als Einkünfte des Gesellschafters einkommensteuerlich berücksichtigt. Es ergeben sich entsprechend aus beiden Vorschriften Vor- und Nachteile, deren Auswirkungen einzelfallbezogen evaluiert werden müssen und maßgeblich davon abhängen, inwiefern der Gesellschafter die Einbeziehung sonderartifizierter Einkünfte anstrebt.

4.3.4. Zeiteffekte

Zeiteffekte oder auch Steuerstundungseffekte resultieren aus einer Verschiebung des Besteuerungszeitpunkts in die Zukunft.²⁵⁴ Dies kann durch Divergenzen hinsichtlich der Fälligkeiten von Steuerzahlungen auftreten, basierend auf abweichenden zeitlichen Strukturen der Bemessungsgrundlagen.²⁵⁵ Wird die Steuer erst zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt fällig, ist der Steuerbarwert geringer als der Nominalwert der Steuerzahlungen.²⁵⁶ Ursächlich lässt sich das auf einen Zinseffekt zurückführen. Naturgemäß tritt ein Zeiteffekt lediglich bei mehrperiodig ausgestalteten Fällen auf. Aus diesem Grund war er lange Zeit den Kapitalgesellschaften und ihren Anteilseignern vorbehalten. Erst mit Einführung der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung wurde dieser Vorteil auch

Personengesellschaften zuteil.²⁵⁷ Zu beachten ist, dass die Begünstigung nach § 34a EStG keinen fortwährenden Vorteil einräumt, sondern auf dem thesaurierten Gewinn eine „latente“ Steuer lastet, welche bei Entnahme zu einer Belastung in der Zukunft führt. Die Verschiebung der Steuer senkt den Barwert mit zunehmender Thesaurierungsdauer. Der eigentliche Vorteil besteht in dem Zinseffekt, welcher sich aus der Stundungswirkung ergibt.²⁵⁸ Sonderregelungen können den Steuerstundungseffekt indes noch erweitern.²⁵⁹ Die Ausführungen zur Vorteilhaftigkeit der Thesaurierung lassen sich ähnlich auf die optierende Gesellschaft übertragen, führt auch für sie ein thesaurierter Gewinn zu einem Aufschub der Steuerzahlung (i.d.R. Abgeltungsteuer) in die Zukunft, einhergehend mit zinslosen Steuerstundungseffekten. Bei einer thesaurierenden Kapitalgesellschaft erscheinen Steuerstundungseffekte also zwangsläufig,²⁶⁰ was mit einem temporären Liquiditätsvorteil einhergeht und Investitionsanreize schaffen kann.²⁶¹ Die Steuerstundungseffekte beider Besteuerungsalternativen wirken also zunächst positiv und affirmieren die Zielsetzung einer relativen Steuerbarwertminderung. Jedoch sollte immer im Einzelfall nach den Grundsätzen der Barwertberechnung geprüft werden, ob der Zeiteffekt aus dem Steuersatzvorteil bei Thesaurierung größer ist, als die Steuersatznachteile bei Entnahme.²⁶² Daneben sind Lock-In-Effekte der Thesaurierung zu beachten, welche im Folgenden näher erläutert werden.

4.3.5. Lock-In-Effekte

Bereits die Zielsetzungen des Gesetzgebers hinsichtlich der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung, aber auch des Optionsmodells lassen Zweifel im Hinblick auf die Vorteilhaftigkeit einer investiven Einkommensverwendung mittels Thesaurierung zu. Mit einer Stärkung der Eigenkapitalbasis geht ein vom Gesetzgeber gewünschter steuerlicher Lock-In-Effekt²⁶³ einher, welcher naturgemäß die Effizienz mindert und eine Verhinderung der besten Kapitalallokation durch den Kapitalmarkt zur Folge hat.²⁶⁴ Vielmehr sollte aber eine Entscheidungsneutralität, ermöglicht durch eine Steuerlastgleichheit der Finanzierungswege, d.h. Selbst-, Beteiligungs- und Fremdfinanzierung, intendiert werden.²⁶⁵ Sowohl im Hinblick auf das Optionsmodell und der damit einhergehenden Abgeltungsteuer als auch im Hinblick auf die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung und der Nachversteuerung unterliegen

²⁵³Vgl. Schiffers (2008, 1806).

²⁵⁴Vgl. Knirsch und Schanz (2008, 1232).

²⁵⁵Vgl. Pfuhl (2014, 108).

²⁵⁶Vgl. Hechtner (2010, 22).

²⁵⁷Vgl. Pfuhl (2014, 108).

²⁵⁸Vgl. Knirsch und Schanz (2008, 1232).

²⁵⁹Z.B. die nachversteuerungsunschädliche Entnahme von Schenkung-/Erbschaftsteuer (§ 34a Abs. 4 S. 3 EStG), die Übertragung des nachversteuerungspflichtigen Betrags bei der Überführung von WG (§ 34a Abs. 5 S. 2 EStG) oder die zinslose Stundung in Härtefällen (§ 34a Abs. 6 S. 2 EStG), vgl. Pfuhl (2014, 109).

²⁶⁰Vgl. Siegmund (2006, 160).

²⁶¹Vgl. Schanz et al. (2008, 1706).

²⁶²Vgl. Pfuhl (2014, 111).

²⁶³Eine steuerliche Einsperrwirkung von Gewinnen, hervorgerufen durch eine Diskriminierung oder Bestrafung von Gewinnausschüttungen/Entnahmen, vgl. Pfuhl (2014, 115f).

²⁶⁴Vgl. Kudert und Kaiser (2007, 1); Rumpf et al. (2008, 45).

²⁶⁵Vgl. Wesselbaum-Neugebauer (2008, 5).

Gewinne bei Entnahmen einer zusätzlichen Besteuerung. Betrachtet man das Konzept rein statisch, ist die Thesaurierung von Gewinnen immer vorteilhafter zu beurteilen, als eine Ausschüttung.²⁶⁶ Dabei wird allerdings übersehen, dass eine private Kapitalanlage oft vorteilhafter ist, als das „Einsperren“ von Gewinnen im Unternehmen. Nur in Fällen in denen eine Investition im Unternehmen eine höhere Rendite verspricht als die Anlage am Kapitalmarkt (im Privatvermögen), ist die Thesaurierung lohnenswert.²⁶⁷ Mit der Einführung der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung und der Vorschrift des § 32d EStG „hat der Gesetzgeber die zuvor halbwegs gegebene Finanzierungsneutralität (...) zerstört, die angestrebte Rechtsformneutralität grob verfehlt (...)“²⁶⁸ und die Bemühungen zur Stärkung der Eigenkapitalbasis teils in eine gegenläufige Richtung verkehrt.²⁶⁹ Ebenfalls für Kritik sorgt die Verwendungsfiktion der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung, der die Berechnung des Entnahmeüberschusses unterliegt.²⁷⁰ In Jahren, in denen steuerfreie Gewinne realisiert werden oder Altrücklagen erstmals begünstigt besteuert werden sollen, ist dem Gesellschafter zu einer Entnahme geraten, da es anderenfalls zu einer Einsperrwirkung kommen kann. Dies entspricht indes nicht dem gesetzgeberischen Ziel der Eigenkapitalstärkung.²⁷¹ Diese Kritiken treffen jedoch letztlich beide Besteuerungsalternativen gleichermaßen, wenn auch die normimmanente Verwendungsreihenfolge der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung ein Hindernis darstellt, welches das Optionsmodell in dieser Form nicht kennt.

4.3.6. Rechtsformneutralität

Für die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung gilt das verfehlt Ziel einer Rechtsformneutralität als häufig bemängelter Kritikpunkt.²⁷² So lässt sich bei dem Einkommensteuerspitzenatz von 45 % die Thesaurierung ohne spätere Entnahme, also bspw. im Fall der Reinvestition der Gewinne, mit einer um etwa 6 %-Punkte niedrigeren Belastung immer noch günstiger in der Rechtsform der Kapitalgesellschaft durchführen.²⁷³ Erst ab einem Einkommensteuersatz, der weniger als 30 % beträgt, liegt die Belastung bei Thesaurierung und unter Anwendung der Tarifbegünstigung etwa auf dem Belastungsniveau der Kapitalgesellschaft. Verglichen mit der Regelbesteuerung ergeben sich aus der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung allerdings bei Spitzeneinkommensteuersätzen Belastungsvorteile von etwa 10 %-Punkten, sodass sich bei längerfristiger Einbehaltung der Gewinne Zinsvorteile ergeben.²⁷⁴ Die Anwendung der Tarifvorschrift führt also unter Umständen zu einer Besserstellung und präsentiert sich

demnach als ein Schritt in Richtung Rechtsformneutralität. Das Optionsmodell zeichnet nun erneut den Versuch, die bisher nicht erreichte Besteuerungsneutralität verschiedener Rechtsformen umzusetzen. Objektiv betrachtet sollte das Optionsmodell nicht nur zu einer Neutralität, sondern vielmehr zu einer völligen Belastungsidentität führen, welche aber nach Hey aufgrund der Unterschiede in der wirtschaftlichen Leistungsfähigkeit der Rechtsformen weder geboten noch gerechtfertigt ist.²⁷⁵ Dennoch gibt es einige Befürworter, die nicht zuletzt die Rechtsformneutralität als wesentlichen Vorteil benennen. Während der Anhörung von Sachverständigen im Bundestag am 3. Mai 2021 zum KöMoG-E befürworteten Schiffers und Kelm den § 1a KStG als einen wesentlichen Schritt zur Rechtsformneutralität.²⁷⁶ Auch Förster führt aus, dass – nicht zuletzt weil das Optionsmodell den Nachteil, der im Rahmen der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung kritisierten Entnahmen von Gewerbe- und Einkommensteuer, beseitigt – das Optionsmodell zu einer verbesserten Rechtsformneutralität beiträgt.²⁷⁷ Schließlich führen beide Modelle zu einer verringerten Steuerbelastung. Die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung führt zumindest annähernd zu einer rechtsformneutralen Besteuerung, während das Optionsmodell naturgemäß in einer Steuerbelastung mündet, die identisch mit der einer Kapitalgesellschaft ist.

4.3.7. Verlustfall

Eine nachhaltige steuerorientierte Betrachtung sollte neben dem Gewinnfall auch die Verlustsituation berücksichtigen. Dies ist gerade für Tarifnormen relevant, für die ein besonderer Steuersatz gilt, da es hier regelmäßig zu Einschränkungen in der Verlustverrechnung kommen kann.²⁷⁸ Vorweg ist festzuhalten, dass gewerbesteuerliche Verluste aufgrund der Steuersubjekteigenschaft der Familienpersonengesellschaft für Zwecke der Gewerbesteuer von der Familienpersonengesellschaft selbst vorgetragen werden.²⁷⁹ Gemeinhin werden aber im Regelfall Verluste infolge des Transparenzprinzips und unter Berücksichtigung etwaiger Verlustverrechnungsbeschränkungen²⁸⁰ auf Ebene der Gesellschafter mit anderen Einkünften saldiert, d.h. in den Verlustausgleich und -abzug einbezogen.²⁸¹ Eine Ausnahmesituation zeigt sich in den Sonderfällen des § 34a EStG und des § 1a KStG. Gerade in volatilen Geschäftssituationen, in denen Verluste in den Folgejahren nicht ausgeschlossen werden können und eine Stärkung der Eigenkapitalbasis für etwaige folgende Verluste sinnvoll erschiene, ist von einer Nutzung der

²⁶⁶Vgl. Jacobs et al. (2015, 174).

²⁶⁷Vgl. Kessler und Pfuhl (2009, 75f).

²⁶⁸Homburg et al. (2008, 45).

²⁶⁹Vgl. Kessler und Pfuhl (2009, 75f).

²⁷⁰Vgl. z.B. Wesselbaum-Neugebauer (2008, 15).

²⁷¹Vgl. Hey (2007, 925).

²⁷²Vgl. u.a. Hey (2007, 925); Kudert und Kaiser (2007, 1); Wesselbaum-Neugebauer (2008, 33); Fischer (2019, 319).

²⁷³Vgl. schematische Berechnung von Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, 10). Im Belastungsvergleich der vorliegenden Arbeit um etwa 3 %-Punkte.

²⁷⁴Vgl. Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, 10).

²⁷⁵Vgl. Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, V).

²⁷⁶Beachtenswert, dass Kelm in diesem Zusammenhang ebenfalls die Empfehlung platziert, die Vorschrift der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG zu reformieren für einen praxisgerechteren und zielgerichteteren Anwendungsbereich.

²⁷⁷Vgl. G. Förster (2021).

²⁷⁸Vgl. Pfuhl (2014, 181).

²⁷⁹Allerdings haben diese ohnehin weniger Relevanz aufgrund der Anrechnung nach § 35 EStG, vgl. z.B. Pfuhl (2014, 182).

²⁸⁰Bspw. bei Einkünften aus Kapitalvermögen nach § 20 Abs. 6 EStG oder Beschränkung des § 15a EStG.

²⁸¹Vgl. Jacobs (2016, 681).

Vorschrift des § 34a EStG abzusehen. Die Thesaurierungs-begünstigung ist bei negativen Einkünften weder sinnvoll, noch überhaupt anwendbar, da der Anwendungsbereich des § 34a EStG auf den Gewinnfall beschränkt ist. Ein Verlust löst per se bei bereits thesaurierten Beträgen keine Nachversteuerung aus. Allerdings könnte ein Verlust, der Entnahmen dieser Beträge nötig werden lässt, zu einer Nachversteuerung, wie es auch bei herkömmlichen Entnahmen vorgesehen ist, führen.²⁸² Auf Mitunternehmerebene können negative Einkünfte nur mit regulär besteuerten Gewinnen saldiert werden, d.h. dass für die begünstigt besteuerten Einkünfte des § 34a EStG kein (horizontaler oder vertikaler) Verlustausgleich, -abzug, oder -rücktrag zulässig ist.²⁸³ Auch ein Verlustausgleich mit dem Nachversteuerungsbetrag ist ausgeschlossen, da dieser nicht Teil des zu versteuernden Einkommens wird.²⁸⁴ Sollten Verluste aus anderen Einkünften dazu führen, dass der begünstigungsfähige Betrag das zu versteuernde Einkommen übersteigt, kann dieser nur bis zur Höhe des zu versteuernden Einkommens mit dem besonderen Steuersatz von 28,25 % besteuert werden.²⁸⁵ Zwar ist der Verlustrücktrag nach § 10d Abs. 1 S. 2 EStG auf bereits thesaurierte Gewinne ausgeschlossen, allerdings räumt § 34a Abs. 1 S. 4 EStG die Möglichkeit ein, den Antrag auf die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung – bis zur Unanfechtbarkeit des Einkommensteuerbescheides des nächsten Veranlagungszeitraumes – zurückzunehmen.²⁸⁶ Besondere Relevanz gewinnt diese Regelung, wenn die Vorschrift erstmals im Jahr vor Verlustentstehung ausgeübt wurde, da so eine Zunahme des nachversteuerungspflichtigen Betrags verhindert werden kann.²⁸⁷ Bei einer optierenden Gesellschaft hingegen kommt es aufgrund der designierten Besteuerung nach dem Regime der Kapitalgesellschaft zu einer Abschirmwirkung für die Mitunternehmer. Verluste verbleiben in der Sphäre der Gesellschaft und werden dort abgezogen.²⁸⁸ Darüber hinaus wird es den Gesellschaftern nicht mehr möglich sein, die Gewinnausschüttungen, sofern sie nach dem Optionsmodell der Abgeltungsteuer unterliegen, mit anderen negativen Einkünften zu verrechnen.²⁸⁹ Unter Nutzung des Teileinkünfteverfahrens bleibt ein Verlustausgleich aber weiterhin möglich. Besonders interessant ist die Behandlung bestehender Verlustvorträge einer Personengesellschaft, die optieren möchte. Da die Inanspruchnahme der Option einem fiktiven Formwechsel (im Sinne des § 1 Abs. 3 Nr. 3 UmwStG) entspricht,²⁹⁰ sind sämtliche Vorschriften des UmwStG anzuwenden. Obgleich das Gesetz regelmäßig die Steuerneutralität der Umwandlung in den Vordergrund stellt, wird schnell

klar, dass die Nutzung von Verlusten und Verlustvorträgen regelmäßig unzulässig ist – auch in Fällen, in denen es zu einem Wechsel des Besteuerungsregimes kommt.²⁹¹ Man könnte annehmen, dass vorhandene Verlustvorträge auf Mitunternehmerebene verbleiben. Da sie aber häufig als verrechenbar i.S.d. § 15a EStG gesondert festgestellt werden und nach Auffassung der Finanzverwaltung bei einem Formwechsel nicht übergehen,²⁹² werden sie voraussichtlich auch im Rahmen des fiktiven Formwechsels untergehen.²⁹³ Aufgrund des Wechsels des Besteuerungssubjekts kommt es ebenso zu einem vollständigen Untergang etwaiger Gewerbesteuererlustvorträge. Grundsätzlich zeigt sich die Besteuerung als Personengesellschaft im Verlustfall positiver als die einer Kapitalgesellschaft. Dieses Potential kann aber durch die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung deutlich eingeschränkt werden. Da die Verluste von thesaurierenden Gesellschaften nicht den nachzusteuernden Betrag senken, wie es bei einer optierenden Gesellschaft analog zur Kapitalgesellschaft erfolgt, ist im Vergleich das Optionsmodell günstiger. Aber auch hier ist der Einzelfall entscheidend. Bestehen bspw. Verlustvorträge, ist im Regelfall von der Optionsausübung aufgrund des Untergangs dieser abzuraten.

4.3.8. Komplexität

Der zweite Grund, den die Literatur für das Scheitern der Vorschrift § 34a EStG verantwortlich macht, liegt in der erheblichen Komplexität und teils schwierigen Verständlichkeit der Vorschrift,²⁹⁴ die aufgrund einer „erheblichen Komplizierung des Steuerrechts“²⁹⁵ kritisiert wird. Es ergibt sich daraus, dass die Vorteilhaftigkeit der Tarifvorschrift nur schwierig abgeschätzt werden kann und erhebliche Planungsrisiken bestehen. Ungeplante und ungewollte Entnahmen, die eine Nachversteuerung auslösen würden, in der Zeit nach der Inanspruchnahme bilden ein Steuerrisiko, sodass Entnahmen und Einlagen wirtschaftsjahr- und mitunternehmerbezogen geplant und überwacht werden müssen.²⁹⁶ Aber auch der „rudimentäre“²⁹⁷ Entwurf des Optionsmodells – auch kritisch betitelt als „Beschäftigungsprogramm für Steuerberater“²⁹⁸ führt zu einer komplizierteren Rechtsmaterie und bedarf einer Vielzahl von notwendigen Anwendungsschreibern.²⁹⁹ Dass nun - zumindest im Übergang - beide Besteuerungsregime, das der Personen- und das der Kapitalgesellschaften beherrscht werden sollten, muss zu Komplizierungen führen.³⁰⁰ Die Gesellschafter müssen aufgeklärt werden über die abweichende Behandlung von Einlagen und Entnahmen, sowie den

²⁸²Vgl. Wacker in Schmidt (2021), § 34a Rz. 61)

²⁸³Vgl. Reddig in Kirchhof und Seer (2021), § 34a Rz. 82).

²⁸⁴Vgl. G. Förster und Förster (2021, 699); Wacker in Schmidt (2021), § 34a Rz. 64).

²⁸⁵Vgl. Reddig in Kirchhof und Seer (2021), § 34a Rz. 82).

²⁸⁶Gem. § 34a Abs. 8 EStG; vgl. Bäuml in Kanzler und Kraft (2021), § 34a Rz. 416-419); Reddig in Kirchhof und Seer (2021), § 34a Rz. 17, 82).

²⁸⁷Vgl. G. Förster und Förster (2021, 700).

²⁸⁸Nach den Vorschriften des § 8 Abs. 1 KStG i.V.m. § 10d EStG bzw. § 10 GewStG.

²⁸⁹Jacobs et al. (2015, 681).

²⁹⁰Vgl. Art. 1 KöMoG, § 1a Abs. 2, S. 1 KStG.

²⁹¹Vgl. Watermeyer in Prinz und Kahle (2020, § 8 Rz. 95).

²⁹²Vgl. FM Schleswig-Holstein v. 7.4.2020, VI 307-S 2241 a-087, DStR 2020, 1573.

²⁹³Vgl. Brühl und Weiss (2021a, 895).

²⁹⁴Vgl. Bäuml (2021, 1281); Reddig in Kirchhof und Seer (2021), § 34a Rz. 2).

²⁹⁵Maiterth und Müller (2007, 57).

²⁹⁶Vgl. Schiffers in Prinz und Kahle (2020, § 1 Rz. 185f).

²⁹⁷Eigenthaler in Deutscher Bundestag (2021).

²⁹⁸Jarass in Deutscher Bundestag (2021).

²⁹⁹Vgl. Eigenthaler in Deutscher Bundestag (2021).

³⁰⁰Vgl. Wacker in Schön und Schindler (2019, 12).

Steuerrisiken einer verdeckten Gewinnausschüttung,³⁰¹ die für Personengesellschaften keine Relevanz haben. Darüber hinaus bedarf es Spezialwissen und einer vorausschauenden Beratung im Rahmen des fiktiven Umwandlungsprozesses. Im Ergebnis sind beide Modelle in ihrer Komplexität wohl nicht wesentlich zu unterscheiden, jedoch ergibt sich beim Optionsmodell ein noch komplexerer Planungsaufwand, da sämtliche zivil- und gesellschaftsrechtlichen Auswirkungen zu prüfen sind.

4.3.9. Sonstige normimmanente Aspekte

Ein Aspekt, der bei Inanspruchnahme der Option nach § 1a KStG nicht vernachlässigt werden sollte, betrifft das Sonderbetriebsvermögen. Damit sich keine Nachteile ergeben, sollten die Besteuerungswirkungen vor Ausübung der Option eingehend geprüft werden. Im Rahmen des fiktiven Formwechsels sollte es möglichst zu keiner Aufdeckung und damit Besteuerung stiller Reserven kommen, weshalb das Sonderbetriebsvermögen vorweg in das Gesamthandsvermögen eingebracht werden muss.³⁰² Der Zeitpunkt der Einbringung sollte dabei im zeitlichen Einklang mit dem fiktiven Formwechsel stehen. Sehr gründlich ist vor allem mit funktional wesentlichem Sonderbetriebsvermögen umzugehen,³⁰³ da beispielsweise etwaige relevante Sperrfristen nicht verletzt werden dürfen. Darüber hinaus könnte für einige Familienpersonengesellschaften mit internationalem Gesellschafterkreis die Wegzugsbesteuerung nach § 6 AStG, die zu einer eingeschränkten Flexibilität führt, einen entscheidenden Nachteil darstellen. Während Gewinne der Mitunternehmer von Personengesellschaften auch nach einem Wegzug der inländischen Besteuerung gem. § 49 Abs. 1 Nr. 2a EStG unterliegen,³⁰⁴ führt ein Wegzug in ein Nicht-EU/EWR-Mitgliedstaat bei Beteiligungen an Kapitalgesellschaften grundsätzlich zu der Aufdeckung und Besteuerung der stillen Reserven. Diese Behandlung würde auch der optierenden Gesellschaft zuteilwerden.

4.3.10. Außersteuerliche Aspekte

Die steuerliche Option zur Kapitalgesellschaftsbesteuerung geht mit dem erheblichen Vorteil einher, dass sich die Gesellschaft zivilrechtlich unverändert als Personengesellschaft klassifizieren lässt. Diese Tatsache bietet einige relevante außersteuerliche Gestaltungspotenziale, die gerade für große Familienpersonengesellschaften relevant sein dürften. So lässt sich etwa eine Publizitätspflicht vermeiden. Darüber hinaus kann die unternehmerische Mitbestimmung von Arbeitnehmern unterbunden bzw. eingeschränkt werden.³⁰⁵

³⁰¹Dazu mehr: Schiffers in Prinz und Kahle (2020, § 1 Rz. 188).

³⁰²Vgl. KöMoG-E, BR-Drs. 244/21 v. 26.04.2021, 20; KöMoG BT-Drs. 19/29843 v. 19.05.2021, 49.

³⁰³Höchstrichterlich ist bspw. noch nicht entschieden, ob der Formwechsel einer PersGes in eine KapGes als Einbringung des Betriebs der PersGes oder des jeweiligen Mitunternehmeranteils der einzelnen Gesellschafteranzusehen ist. Weiterführend zur Einbringung des funktional wesentlichen Sonderbetriebsvermögens: Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1309).

³⁰⁴Vgl. Schiffers (2021, 60).

³⁰⁵Vgl. Bäuml (2021, 1281); Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, 12); Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1306).

4.4. Kritische Zusammenfassung von Literaturmeinungen

4.4.1. Thesaurierungsbegünstigung

Aus der Literatur lassen sich im Ergebnis drei Thesen ableiten, weshalb nur wenige Gesellschaften auf die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung zurückgreifen:

1. Einerseits, weil keine Vorteilhaftigkeit zur regulären Besteuerung besteht,³⁰⁶ da entweder ein sehr langer Thesaurierungszeitraum unterstellt werden oder der Einkommensteuersatz im Bereich der 45 %-Spitzenbesteuerung liegen muss. Letzteres trifft nur etwa ein Prozent der Steuerpflichtigen³⁰⁷, was den stark eingegrenzten Anwendungsbereich verdeutlicht.
2. Die zweite These formuliert eine geringe Anwendung aufgrund des Risikos zukünftiger Belastungsnachteile bei Entnahme oder bei Erfüllung von Umwandlungstatbeständen des Unternehmens. Um Nachteile zu vermeiden, sind langfristige Prognosen erforderlich, es sei denn, ein Gesellschafter kann mit hoher Sicherheit davon ausgehen Gewinne zu erzielen und auch weiterhin der 45-prozentigen Besteuerung zu unterliegen, was aber nur in Ausnahmefällen möglich sein dürfte. Die Ausschüttung aus den Rücklagen im Notfall zieht eine erhebliche Nachversteuerung mit sich, die die Nutzung der Begünstigung unattraktiv werden lässt.³⁰⁸ Auch etwaige Umwandlungsplanungen schließen eine Thesaurierungsbegünstigung gänzlich aus, da es in diesem Fall zu einer Nachversteuerung der thesaurierten Gewinne führen würde. Dies ist besonders relevant im Hinblick auf den fiktiven Formwechsel, der mit dem Optionsmodell des KöMoG einhergeht.
3. Die dritte These setzt an der erhöhten Komplexität³⁰⁹ und dem Bürokratieaufwand an, die schließlich die sich ergebenden Belastungsvorteile übersteigen könnten.³¹⁰ Dabei ist zu unterscheiden, ob sich die Komplexität aus der gesellschafterindividuellen Begünstigung ergibt oder eher aus den Schwierigkeiten, die mit den ersten beiden Thesen einhergehen.³¹¹

4.4.2. Optionsmodell nach dem KöMoG

Die Umsetzung des Optionsmodells zur Vereinfachung der Unternehmensbesteuerung wird kontrovers diskutiert. Neben einigen Autoren, die das Optionsmodell begrüßen,³¹² gibt es zahlreiche kritische Stimmen. Zusammenfassend lassen sich die folgenden Kritikpunkte nennen:

³⁰⁶Vgl. Streif (2014, 5).

³⁰⁷Vgl. Maiterth und Müller (2007, 56).

³⁰⁸Vgl. z.B. Kormann (2013, 77).

³⁰⁹Vgl. z.B. Brähler et al. (2012, 124); Rätke und Tiede (2021, 477) oder Streif (2014, 76).

³¹⁰Vgl. Kormann (2013, 76); Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, 11f).

³¹¹Vgl. Hey in Stiftung Familienunternehmen (2020a, 11f).

³¹²Z.B. als steuerliche Chance für Unternehmen, die lediglich aus zivil- und handelsrechtlichen Gründen die Rechtsform der Kapitalgesellschaft nicht führen wollen, vgl. Cordes und Kraft (2021, 410); als Bereicherung des Steuerrechts, vgl. Dorn und Dibbert (2021, 165); oder um sich „das Beste aus zwei Welten“ in Form von Gestaltungen zunutze zu machen, vgl. Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1310).

1. Ein relevanter Kritikpunkt, der zu Zweifeln an der Attraktivität des Gesetzes führt,³¹³ findet sich im Adressatenkreis. Kritisiert wird insbesondere die Konkurrenz des Optionsmodells zur Thesaurierungsbegünstigung. Das Außenvorlassen von einigen Rechtsformen, das kaum gerechtfertigt werden kann, sei darüber hinaus negativ zu bewerten.³¹⁴ Auch würden kleine und mittlere Unternehmen des Handwerks aufgrund des eher aufwändigen Systems der Körperschaftsteuer das Optionsmodell nur in geringem Umfang nutzen.³¹⁵ Eine der größten Schwächen trifft aber die direkten Adressaten der Vorschrift: ertragstarke große Familienpersonengesellschaften sind häufig Anwender der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG, da der Thesaurierungswille dieser und die Zielsetzung der Stärkung der Eigenkapitalbasis nur mit dieser Tarifvorschrift erreicht werden konnte.³¹⁶ Sofern diese allerdings ausgeübt wird, greifen für das Optieren nach dem KöMoG und dem damit verbundenen fiktiven Formwechsel die Vorschriften des UmwStG. Bei hohen thesaurierten Beträgen kann die daraus resultierende liquiditätswirksame Nachversteuerung einen entscheidenden Grund darstellen, trotz etwaiger Vorteilhaftigkeit einer Körperschaftsbesteuerung, das Optionsmodell zu meiden.³¹⁷ Hier wird von vielen Autoren dringend eine abweichende Regelung gefordert.³¹⁸
2. Ein weiterer Kritikpunkt findet sich in der Geschwindigkeit, mit der das Optionsmodell umgesetzt werden soll. Die Vorlaufzeit sei zu kurz bemessen, da sich die Verwaltung zunächst vorbereiten müsse.³¹⁹ Der künstlich erzeugte Zeitdruck, resultierend aus dem Gesetzgebungsverfahren kurz vor Ende der Legislaturperiode, lässt Zweifel zu³²⁰ und ist hinsichtlich des Ziels der Bundesregierung „Tax Certainty“ zu vermitteln, nicht zielführend.³²¹
3. Zu kritisieren sind außerdem die Risiken, die mit einem Formwechsel einhergehen. Als „rechtlicher Zwitter“ ergibt sich für Anwender die Notwendigkeit beide Rechtssysteme zu beherrschen.³²² Sowohl der Wechsel zu dem Besteuerungsregime der Kapitalgesellschaft als auch die Rückoption stellen einen fiktiven Formwechsel dar, der bei einer Bewertung unterhalb des gemeinen Wertes zu Sperrfristen führt.³²³ Das Umwandlungssteuerrecht sollte in beide Richtungen bestens bekannt sein, inklusive die schwierig kalkulierbaren Risiken einer unfreiwilligen Rückoption, bspw. durch Tod

des vorletzten Gesellschafters, welcher automatisch zu einer Rückumwandlung auf den letzten Gesellschafter führt.³²⁴ Da eine schlichte Erklärung gegenüber der Finanzbehörde ausreicht, um das Steuerregime zu wechseln und von einer signifikanten Senkung der Thesaurierungsbelastung zu profitieren, ergibt sich außerdem das Risiko einer unsorgfältigen Abwägung durch die Gesellschafter.³²⁵

4. Dass das Optionsmodell in Konkurrenz zur Thesaurierungsbegünstigung stehen wird, ist in Anbetracht des identischen Adressatenkreises erwartbar. Relevant ist jedoch die Einschätzung, dass das Optionsmodell keinesfalls die Regelung des § 34a EStG obsolet werden lässt.³²⁶ Vielmehr ist es ein offenkundiges Anliegen diese zu reformieren und in der Anwendung praxistauglich zu vereinfachen.³²⁷
5. Was die Rechtsformneutralität betrifft, verzeichnet das Optionsmodell eine geringe Eignung der Neutralitätsvorgabe gerecht zu werden, steht nicht mehr die Belastung der unternehmerischen Tätigkeiten im Mittelpunkt, sondern viel mehr eine programmmäßige „à la carte“-Besteuerung³²⁸ in der Disposition der Gesellschafter.

5. Ergebnisse und kritische Würdigung

5.1. Implikationen für Familienpersonengesellschaften

5.1.1. Thesaurierungsbegünstigung

Untersucht man die Vor- und Nachteile der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung unter der Prämisse, ob diese eine vorteilhafte Besteuerungsalternative für Personengesellschaften darstellt, ist es sinnvoll, die individuellen steuerlichen Besonderheiten von Familienpersonengesellschaften zu berücksichtigen.³²⁹ Im Sinne einer größtmöglichen Dispositionsfreiheit lässt sich positiv bewerten, dass, im Hinblick auf häufig größere Gesellschafterkreise von Familienpersonengesellschaften, die individuelle Inanspruchnahme der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung je Mitunternehmer möglich ist. So kann jeder Mitunternehmer für Zwecke seiner Einkommensbesteuerung entscheiden, ob ein Antrag auf § 34a EStG gestellt werden sollte. Vor dem Hintergrund einer wesentypisch starken Eigenkapitalbasis und der langfristigen Eigenkapitalbindung, ist die Begünstigung für thesaurierte Gewinne auf den ersten Blick ein enormer Vorteil. Dass die Gesellschafter im Gegenzug jedoch mit einer Einschränkung ihrer Flexibilität zahlen, wirkt abschreckend. Die Nachversteuerung im Fall von Entnahmen setzt nämlich eine besonders langfristige (Steuer-)Planung der Gesellschafter voraus

³¹³Vgl. Hey in Deutscher Bundestag (2021).

³¹⁴Vgl. Winnemann in Deutscher Bundestag (2021).

³¹⁵Vgl. Rothbart in Deutscher Bundestag (2021).

³¹⁶Vgl. z.B. Demuth (2021, 22.247).

³¹⁷Denkbar wäre der Verzicht auf die Thesaurierung der Gewinne der Jahre 2019/2020/2021, vgl. Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1300).

³¹⁸Vgl. z.B. Bäuml (2021, 1281).

³¹⁹Vgl. Eigenthaler in Deutscher Bundestag (2021).

³²⁰Vgl. DStV, Deutscher Steuerberaterverband e.V. (2021, 1).

³²¹Vgl. Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1300).

³²²Vgl. Rätke und Tiede (2021, 487).

³²³Vgl. Brühl und Weiss (2021b, 954).

³²⁴Vgl. Rätke und Tiede (2021, 487).

³²⁵Vgl. Wacker in Schön und Schindler (2019, 14).

³²⁶Vgl. G. Förster (2021).

³²⁷Vgl. Hey in Deutscher Bundestag (2021); Mayer und Käshammer (2021, 1303).

³²⁸Wacker in Schön und Schindler (2019, 12).

³²⁹Siehe Kapitel 2.1.3.

und schränkt Umstrukturierungen durch z.B. Umwandlungen stark ein. Das erhebliche Risiko einer Nachversteuerung, die mit erheblichen und existenzgefährdenden Liquiditätsabflüssen einhergehen kann, ist für viele Gesellschafter ein Grund dafür, die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nicht in Anspruch zu nehmen. Für Familienpersonengesellschaften, die nicht sicher mit zukünftigen Gewinnen rechnen können, ist die Option aufgrund der Konsequenzen im Verlustfall ungeeignet. Auch für Gesellschafter, die unter dem Spitzensteuersatz von 45 % liegen, ist die Nutzung der Tarifvorschrift nur relevant, wenn mit sehr langen Thesaurierungszeiträumen gerechnet werden kann. Dieser große Nachteil impliziert bereits, dass die Vorschrift nur für einen kleinen Teil der Familienpersonengesellschaften überhaupt Relevanz zeigt. Eine gerechte Besteuerung im Sinne einer Rechtsformneutralität wird für die meisten Familienpersonengesellschaften mit der Vorschrift des § 34a EStG nicht ermöglicht. Der Belastungsvergleich zeigt, dass sich lediglich bei einem hohen Geschäftsführergehalt (in Verhältnis gesetzt zum Gewinn), eine vorteilhaftere Besteuerung als die nach dem Regime der Kapitalgesellschaft zeigt. Betrachtet man Familienpersonengesellschaften als koevolutionäre Einheit, unterstützt die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung die Stärkung dieser Einheit durch eine Wahrung des Transparenzprinzips,³³⁰ was grundsätzlich zu begrüßen ist. Unter den Gesichtspunkten der Praktikabilität und Nachvollziehbarkeit zeigt die Vorschrift Verbesserungspotenziale, ist die Komplexität der Vorschrift seitens der Literatur ein häufig bemängelter Kritikpunkt. Es lässt sich zusammenfassen, dass die Thesaurierungsbegünstigung für Gesellschafter von Familienpersonengesellschaften vorteilhaft sein könnte, die mit dem Spitzeneinkommensteuersatz besteuert werden und die bereit sind, unter Berücksichtigung einer zuverlässigen Steuerplanung der folgenden Jahre eine Beschränkung ihrer Flexibilität hinzunehmen.

5.1.2. Optionsmodell nach dem KöMoG

Betrachtet man das Optionsmodell unter Berücksichtigung der steuerlichen Besonderheiten von Familienpersonengesellschaften, lassen sich ebenfalls einige Vor- und Nachteile ableiten. Als erster kritischer Punkt lässt sich der qualifizierte Mehrheitsbeschluss, der für die Inanspruchnahme des Optionsmodells verlangt wird, nennen. Da eine Vielzahl an Unsicherheiten über die Entwicklungen auf Gesellschafts- und Mitunternehmerebene zu berücksichtigen sind,³³¹ kann gerade in großen Gesellschafterkreisen, wie sie typisch für Familienpersonengesellschaften sind, dieser Umstand zu Konfliktpotenzialen und Dissens führen. Die im Vergleich zur Regelbesteuerung deutlich günstigere Besteuerung thesaurierter Gewinne im Optionsmodell stellt einen immensen Vorteil für Familienpersonengesellschaften dar und unterstützt den Aufbau einer starken Eigenkapitalbasis, was für viele Familienpersonengesellschaften als

zentrales Ziel verstanden wird. Die künftige Anwendung des Trennungsprinzips steht allerdings im Gegensatz zur koevolutionären Einheit, da die Leistungsfähigkeit ab Ausübung der Option differenziert nach Gesellschaft und Gesellschafter bewertet und besteuert wird. Es stellt sich aktiv gegen die Grundentscheidung einer transparenten Besteuerung, die ein „tradiertes und im Kern bewährtes Fundament unseres Ertragsteuerrechts“³³² ausmacht. So lässt es Gestaltungen wie eine frühzeitige Beteiligung von Familienmitgliedern weniger reizvoll erscheinen, spielen – bei der Thesaurierung von nur mit Unternehmensteuern belasteten Gewinnen und einer einheitliche Abgeltungsteuer auf die Entnahmen – die persönlichen Einkommensteuern keine Rolle mehr. Insbesondere im Bereich der inhabergeführten Familienpersonengesellschaften stehen rechtsformspezifische, außersteuerliche Gründe der Rechtsform einer Kapitalgesellschaft entgegen.³³³ War es bislang – für eine Besteuerung mit der Körperschaftsteuer – notwendig, eine Kapitalgesellschaft „vorzuschalten“, einhergehend mit einer Verkomplizierung der Unternehmensstruktur, ist der Schritt des verhältnismäßig einfachen Optierens eine begrüßenswerte Alternative.³³⁴ Bewertet man das Optionsmodell hinsichtlich seiner Praktikabilität und Nachvollziehbarkeit, lässt sich auf den ersten Blick festhalten, dass rein steuerlich die optierende Gesellschaft zu einer Kapitalgesellschaft wird und dieses System der Besteuerung durchaus ein erprobtes System darstellt. Da sie aber zivilrechtlich Personengesellschaft bleibt, kommt es zu einem Querstand, der zu „nicht vernachlässigbaren Komplizierungen“ führen muss.³³⁵ Auch die spezifischen Kenntnisse des Umwandlungssteuerrechts mit diversen Sperrfristen bei steuerneutraler Umwandlung (sofern diese überhaupt erreicht wird, dürfte das Sonderbetriebsvermögen erwartungsgemäß häufig eine Hürde darstellen) sollten abschreckend wirken. Aus dem fiktiven Umwandlungsvorgang ergibt sich außerdem eine Einschränkung der Entscheidungsflexibilität, deren Erhaltung die meisten Familienpersonengesellschafter als gewichtig bewerten. Mit Inanspruchnahme des Optionsmodells sind sie bspw. über einen Zeitraum von sieben Jahren an das Regime der Körperschaftbesteuerung gebunden. Auch ein Wegzug in Drittstaaten ist ohne ein Auslösen häufig gefürchteter Wegzugsbesteuerung nicht möglich. Der Verkauf von Anteilen oder Beteiligungen löst ebenfalls innerhalb einer Sieben-Jahres-Frist eine rückwirkende Besteuerung des Einbringungsgewinns I aus.³³⁶ Für Familienpersonengesellschaften, die bereits die Tarifvorschrift des § 34a EStG nutzen, ist das Optionsmodell in seiner derzeitigen Ausgestaltung nur schwierig nutzbar, dürfte eine Nachversteuerung des thesaurierten Betrags in den meisten Fällen keiner in

³³²Wacker in Schön und Schindler (2019, 12).

³³³Siehe Kapitel 2.1.3.

³³⁴Vgl. Cordes und Kraft (2021, 403).

³³⁵Vgl. Wacker in Schön und Schindler (2019, 12).

³³⁶Weitere Sperrfristen, die zu prüfen sind: Behaltefristen nach § 6 Abs. 5 S. 4, 6 sowie § 16 Abs. 3 S. 3 EStG, Sperrfristverstoß i.S.d. § 6 Abs. 3 S. 2 EStG, Auflösung von Abzugsbeträgen nach § 7g EStG, Auslösen eines Veräußerungsgewinns nach Einlage eines Grundstücks § 23 S. 5 Nr 1 EStG.

³³⁰Angesichts der starren Steuersätze kommt es zwar zu einer Durchbrechung der synthetischen ESt, die Begünstigung nach § 34a EStG bleibt aber strukturell in der Grundidee der Transparenz eingebunden, vgl. Wacker in Schön und Schindler (2019, 17).

³³¹Vgl. Wacker in Schön und Schindler (2019, 12).

Betracht zu ziehenden Möglichkeit entsprechen. Für Familienpersonengesellschaften mit kleinem Gesellschafterkreis und unproblematisch zu übertragenden Sonderbetriebsvermögen, die dem Spitzensteuersatz von 45 % unterliegen und über einen Zeitraum von mindestens sieben Jahren keine strukturellen Veränderungen vornehmen möchten, ist das Optionsmodell bestens geeignet, die Steuerbelastung zu reduzieren. Dabei sollten aber sämtliche Risiken und Pflichten, die sich aus der Nutzung des Regimes ergeben, bekannt sein und berücksichtigt werden. Unter Betrachtung der vielen unsicheren Prämissen, ist insgesamt mit einer geringen Inanspruchnahme zu rechnen.

5.2. Kritische Würdigung und Ausblick

Die Steuerbelastung zählt – neben Haftungs- und Nachfolgefragen - zu den zentralen Einflussfaktoren bei der Rechtsformwahl.³³⁷ Diese nach bereits erfolgter Rechtsformwahl erneut in Disposition zu setzen, eröffnet sowohl Chancen als auch Risiken. Dass durch das Optionsmodell, mithilfe einer schlichten Erklärung gegenüber der Finanzbehörde das Steuerregime gewechselt werden kann, ergibt das Risiko einer unsorgfältigen Abwägung durch Gesellschafter, ist es kein Zufall, dass ein „echter“ Formwechsel aufgrund seiner Tragweite grundsätzlich einer notariellen Beurkundung bedarf.³³⁸ Lag der Fokus der Kritik der Personengesellschaftsbesteuerung in den vergangenen Jahren auf der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung, ist das Echo, welches als Resultat auf den Gesetzesentwurf KöMoG folgt – ausgenommen vereinzelter Ausnahmen – eindeutig: Das Optionsmodell sei nicht ausgereift, zu kompliziert und stehe in Konkurrenz zum § 34a EStG, welcher - nun als „bewährtes“³³⁹ und „wirkungsvolles Instrument“³⁴⁰ beschrieben - reformiert werden sollte.³⁴¹ Es wurde im direkten Vergleich deutlich, dass § 34a EStG eine höhere Flexibilität bietet und trotz unzweifelhaft vorhandener Komplexität mit einem geringeren Beratungsaufwand als im Falle des Optionsmodells zu rechnen ist. Die Bedürfnisse von Familienpersonengesellschaften, als primäre Adressaten des § 1a KStG, sollten deutlicher berücksichtigt werden. Das Optionsmodell bietet grundsätzlich eine spannende Alternative zur Regelbesteuerung und der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung nach § 34a EStG. Doch wird die Umstellung des Besteuerungsregimes in der derzeitigen Ausgestaltung von zu vielen Unsicherheiten begleitet, deren Berücksichtigung einen erheblichen Mehraufwand für die Familienunternehmen und ihre steuerlichen Berater bedeuten. Die Literatur sieht zu Recht dringenden „Nachbesserungsbedarf“³⁴² für die Nutzer der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung und verlangt eine „Übergangsmöglichkeit“ der thesaurierten Beträge ohne

Nachversteuerung.³⁴³ Eine Belastungsneutralität zwischen optierenden Gesellschaften und Kapitalgesellschaften sollte sich einstellen, unterlägen sie in Zukunft dem gleichen Besteuerungsregime. Allerdings und in Anbetracht der erschwerten, unsicheren Rahmenbedingungen wäre sicher mit einem kleinen Anwenderkreis zu rechnen. Mit § 34a EStG verfügt der Gesetzgeber über ein Instrument, welches - ohne erheblichen Mehraufwand – Belastungsunterschiede reduzieren könnte. Wünschenswert wäre eine Beseitigung der genannten Nachteile der Tarifvorschrift, um die Akzeptanz zu erhöhen und mit deutlich geringeren Hürden als das Optionsmodell eine Neutralität der Belastung von thesaurierten Gewinnen zu erreichen. Da in der vorliegenden Arbeit die Vor- und Nachteile auf nationaler Ebene betrachtet wurden und diese Betrachtung auch in den bisherigen Veröffentlichungen im Schrifttum im Fokus steht, ergibt sich Forschungsbedarf im internationalen Kontext. Gerade im Hinblick auf internationale Sachverhalte und abkommensrechtliche Auswirkungen des Optionsmodells stellen sich für den Adressatenkreis wichtige Fragestellungen. Die Option der Körperschaftsteuer ist bereits in einigen Staaten (z.B. Spanien oder Amerika) erprobt, sodass sich hier ein Vergleich der Systeme anbieten würde. Eine Stärkung der internationalen Wettbewerbsfähigkeit von Familienpersonengesellschaften könnte ein aussagekräftiges Argument für die Vorteilhaftigkeit des Optionsmodells darstellen.

Insgesamt ist die gesetzgeberische Fokussierung auf die Bedürfnisse von Familienpersonengesellschaften eine erfreuliche Entwicklung und unter der Berücksichtigung des Mittelstands, als treibende Kraft der deutschen Wirtschaft, positiv zu würdigen. Das seit jeher formulierte Postulat nach einer rechtsformneutralen Besteuerung wird allerdings voraussichtlich nicht verklingen. Die Instrumente nach § 34a EStG und § 1a KStG können in ihrer derzeitigen Ausgestaltung diesem Ziel nicht gerecht werden und bieten enorme Hürden für ihre Anwender. Die Zielverfehlung des Optionsmodells wird sich, ähnlich wie es bereits bei der Thesaurierungsbegünstigung zu beobachten war, in einer geringen Inanspruchnahme äußern. Berücksichtigt man die Tatsache, dass das Optionsmodell nicht die breite Masse adressiert, fällt das Urteil unter Umständen positiver aus, kommt aber keineswegs dem Wunsch nach einer umfassenden Unternehmensteuerreform nach. Umso wichtiger erscheinen weitere Reformmaßnahmen, die geeignet sind, eine, nach praktischen und wissenschaftlichen Maßstäben, steuerliche Belastungsgleichheit herzustellen.

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³³⁷Vgl. Jacobs et al. (2015, 6).

³³⁸Vgl. Wacker in Schön und Schindler (2019, 14).

³³⁹Rothbart in Deutscher Bundestag (2021); Mayer und Kāshammer (2021, 1303)

³⁴⁰Eigenthaler in Deutscher Bundestag (2021)

³⁴¹Einige Reformierungsvorschläge formuliert Wacker in Schön und Schindler (2019, 19).

³⁴²Vgl. Demuth (2021, 22.247).

³⁴³Vgl. Cordes und Kraft (2021, 403). Z.B. „durch die Überführung des nachversteuerungspflichtigen Betrages in die Regelungsmechanik der §§ 27ff. KStG“, Demuth (2021, 22.247).

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Impact of CSR on Firm Performance: The Moderating Role of Family Ownership in Individualistic & Collectivistic Countries

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to have a cross-country examination of the moderating role of family ownership on the corporate social responsibility (CSR) - financial performance (FP) relationship, also understanding how the moderating effect is influenced by cultural dimensions of collectivism and individualism. The study thereby incorporates views from both the Stakeholder theory and the Institutional theory. The study employs the one-way fixed effects regression analysis. Firm-year observations for the period of 2013 to 2022 of 439 firms across 35 countries are included. The magnitude of the interaction term is then inspected across the deemed collectivistic and individualistic cultures. The study finds that the degree of family ownership positively moderates the CSR-FP relationship and this moderation effect is stronger for collectivistic countries. The study is a novel approach to taking the CSR-FP subject with the family ownership moderating effect in a cross-country setting and it uniquely measures family ownership, not as the usual binary or subjective construct. The results of the study yield an interesting insight on the appropriate ownership structure for family members, and the status of legitimacy and trust family businesses can leverage with CSR to improve FP.

Keywords: collectivism; corporate social responsibility (CSR); family ownership; financial performance (FP); individualism

1. Introduction & Motivation

This is a cross-country study of family ownership in businesses in Collectivistic and Individualistic nations to see how it moderates the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on Firm Performance (FP). Recently, tensions between stakeholders and managers have increased as a result of the belief that profits should be the only goal. To counter the

conflicts, in recent years, a new pattern has emerged in the capital markets that coalesces profit-making with upholding connections with the other stakeholders (He et al., 2015). This new pattern of CSR could be referred to actions that apparently serve some social good, over and beyond the company's objectives and the law's requirements; therefore, not discriminating against women and minorities might not be suggestive of a CSR initiative but merely abiding the law (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001).

Strategies intended to highlight CSR are receiving more attention (Brown & Dacin, 1997) as for instance, some businesses prioritize corporate philanthropy, employing and cultivating a diverse workforce, community involvement, and sponsorship of cultural events. Some noteworthy examples of CSR initiatives include progressive HR administration, non-animal testing practices, recycling, alleviating pollution and supporting local companies (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Owing to the 'focused on customers' point of view of CSR, companies that actively support CSR are assumed to

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be more reliable and to provide higher quality goods, particularly those in the case of food products¹ (McWilliams & Siegel, 2000).

With more than two-thirds respondents of a comprehensive global study (EnviroNics International, 1999)² stating that they would like businesses to support societal purposes other than shareholder income, CSR has grown in prominence as a societal concern (Kitzmueller & Shimshack, 2012). The function of trust and alternatively opportunistic behavior³ in corporate interactions, and in particular how trust might reduce problems with information asymmetries, are topics that have been extensively studied in the literature in economics, strategic management, and organization theory; CSR in this light is a sign of a morally upright attitude (Flammer, 2018).

Unlike in the extant literature on CSR-FP relationship, rather than framing a discussion to choose one between social and economic responsibility, priority must be given to impactful and meaningful fulfilment of both, to avoid incurring agency costs (Shammari et al., 2022). Managers are frequently under pressure to allocate resources to CSR by various stakeholder groups viz. customers, employees, governments and particularly institutional shareholders (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). While some businesses heed these demands of CSR, there are others which resist, claiming that doing so would conflict with their goals of increasing profits (McWilliams & Siegel, 2000). If businesses believe that investing in 'green' initiatives will increase the wealth of their owners, they are likely more to do so (Cordeiro & Tewari, 2015); in contrast, the absence of a strong correlation between FP and sustainability numbers is more likely to discourage businesses and also impede the transition to a sustainable future.

One of the most discussed subjects among the many studies on a variety of topics in the context of CSR is the CSR-FP relationship (He et al., 2015). Customers prefer relationships and transactions with socially responsible enterprises because such a reputation is valued in and of itself (Roberts & Dowling, 2002). Many businesses have developed compensation-related reporting systems for environmental, safety and health issues (Baron, 2008); companies' social performance incentives inevitably interact with their FP incentives. Baron (2008) opines that incentives for FP, for instance, affects the incentives for social performance if CSR spending has an impact on consumer demand for a company's goods. Conversely, providing incentives for social performance could have an impact on FP as well as on the business' operations consequently.

Prior research suggests that family and non-family businesses have different business characteristics and management styles, particularly for Asian businesses⁴; while non-family controlled businesses aim to maximize profits, family-controlled businesses prioritize preserving the company's existence for descendants; also, the top manager is responsible for determining whether and how much the company will participate in CSR, and a family-controlled business will have an impact on the relationships between the top manager traits and CSR success (He et al., 2015). Managers who perceive oneself and/or their families to be strongly identified with the firms they own and manage may be more willing to promote CSR than those who think they can labor and enjoy firm benefits in an anonymous manner and need not accept accountability for the firm's poor behavior (Dyer & Whetten, 2006). This study thereby focusses on the examining the family owned firms' propensity of engaging in CSR and whether that affects the firm's financial performance.

For this study, panel data for a period between 2013 to 2022 entailing various aspects which indicate the penchant of a firm for CSR initiatives like ESG Score, presence (or absence) of a CSR Committee, CSR Strategy Score and amenity of ESG based compensation for executives are collated along with financials like Tobin's Q (a parameter indicative of a firm's FP), Revenue, Leverage, Asset size, Market Capitalization, Return on Assets for 439 firms across 35 countries. Each firm is evaluated for the degree of family ownership and then a panel data regression analysis provides an empirical overview of the moderating effect of the family ownership on the CSR-FP relationship. A more detailed overview of the variables, method adopted and rationale behind the choice of variables or the period of analysis for this study is mentioned in the section of Methodology, Data & Model.

Over the past few decades, the global economy has undergone significant upheaval. Emerging economies have experienced a rapid integration into the international economic system, including India (Q. Wang et al., 2016). Additionally, for instance, the Companies Act of 2013 in India requires that big, profitable companies invest 2% of their net income in CSR initiatives (Cordeiro et al., 2023). Moreover, the motivation to engage in CSR is rooted in social pressures and conventions within geographic communities, even if the key pressure groups in most cases appear to be employees, consumers, and even activists and governments (Kitzmueller & Shimshack, 2012). Therefore, this stakeholder theory-based analysis would then be extended to be viewed with the lens of Normative institutions under Institutional theory.

The resource-based benefits of family businesses may be strengthened by cultural traits of collectivism/individualism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (Dow & McGuire, 2016). Individualism, according to Hofstede, is the degree to which individuals feel independent rather than interdependent as parts of bigger wholes (collectivism). Given that CSR promotes social good, the cultural aspect of collectivism

¹ Products marketed as "free range" meat are said to be of superior quality and also signify a more humane treatment of animals (McWilliams & Siegel, 2000).

² EnviroNics International (1999) was the global survey cited by authors Kitzmueller and Shimshack in their article "Economic Perspectives on Corporate Social Responsibility" (2012).

³ Opportunistic behavior or Opportunism according to Oliver E. Williamson is the term for a lack of honesty in business dealings, including the cunning pursuit of one's own interests (Gorringe, 1987).

⁴ This is an important point to consider counting towards analysis from the normative institutions point of view, the second part of this study.

is likely to be connected to the three primary aspects of management values important to CSR decision making i.e. shareholder, stakeholder and community welfare (Waldman et al., 2006).

Y. Wang et al. (2020) posit that there is a variance in the attitudes of employees regarding CSR as per their respective national culture and that the association between perceived social responsibility and job contentment, and innovation is positively moderated by a collectivistic culture. A company's product reviews are improved by a good CSR linkage, according to consumer's cognitive associations, and more favorable reviews should result in higher revenues for the firm (Brown & Dacin, 1997). These cognitive associations of CSR are more positive in collectivistic countries (Hur & Kim, 2017).

This study therefore looks at the aforementioned tendency of family-owned enterprises to engage in CSR, in the context of how this interaction term (CSR*Family Ownership) differs in the nations classified as collectivistic and individualistic, given the rationales of family businesses striving for pride and reputation in general, the positive perceptions of employees and consumers regarding CSR in collectivistic nations and an overall 'We before Me' attitude of collectivism. For this, countries of the firms (based on origin/headquarters) were categorized into individualistic (or collectivistic) countries by means of comparing the global collectivism practice score and the respective country's collectivism practice score. The country wise interaction terms are then presented on a map plot view to have an outlook of how culture affects the moderating role of family ownership on CSR-FP relationship.

Further, terms like family-controlled company, family firm, family business, family-owned company and terms in similar lines indicating that a firm is owned and managed by a family are interchangeably used.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility and Financial Performance

Amongst numerous investigations over a long period of time in the broader spectrum of CSR context literature, the topic of the effect of CSR on FP has drawn the interest of many researchers (Yeon et al., 2021). One of the conclusions of the study by J. Lee and Roh (2012) is that the companies which evidently reflect a socially responsible behavior, makes them less likely to encounter events which could be detrimental to the company affairs. Extant literature on this CSR-FP relationship provides us with findings which generally show a positive correlation, however the overall insights reveal mixed results (Petrenko et al., 2016).

The focus of researchers Roberts and Dowling (2002) was on comprehending how business reputation affects the trajectory of future financial performance. According to them, corporate reputation is a general organizational characteristic that shows how much the firm's external stakeholders perceive it as 'good' rather than 'bad'. They break down each

company's reputation into two parts: a financial reputation component that is predicted by its prior FP, and a residual reputation component that is 'left over'. The evidence for a lasting reputation is then taken into account. They assert that, because *ceteris paribus*, employees desire to work for high reputation organizations and should thus put in more effort or accept lesser pay, a company with a good reputation may also have a cost advantage. Additionally, as suppliers are less concerned about contractual risks when doing business with reputable companies, having a good reputation should also result in cheaper contracting and monitoring expenses. Their analysis suggested that reputation building initiatives (like Phillips' anti-smoking campaign or McDonald's homes for sick children) might not necessarily improve the current FP of the firm, they are still very important as they create reputational assets that enable superior profits to last over time.

Brown and Dacin (1997) attempted to distinguish between two different categories of corporate affiliations, one being the firm's ability to produce output (product or service) and the other was the CSR aspect of the firm, and explore the potential effect that each might have on the assessments of new products by a consumer. The results state that, the consumers primarily use their knowledge of the firm's manufacturing ability to evaluate a product, especially the level of sophistication or the extent to which the product reflects the latest technological advancements. However, consumers also use their CSR perceptions of the firm to fill out the gap created by missing product attributes, more specifically when the product is new. The authors conclude that positive CSR associations result in better evaluations of the product and logically, the negative CSR perceptions are detrimental.

Extending the above discussion, Kitzmueller and Shimshack (2012), who sought to synthesize the economic perspectives on CSR, and Baron (2008), whose study is about the remuneration structures that take social performance into account, argue that when consumers reward CSR, the increased demand for social goods strengthens managers' profit incentives and that their remuneration will be positively connected with social expenditure. As a result, managers are driven to spend money on the community because demand, profits, and their income will all increase. Further, the ability of managers to balance CSR and earnings is also rising. Kitzmueller and Shimshack (2012) also assert that firms utilize CSR to differentiate, have better product positioning or foster brand loyalty. Lastly, in the absence of customer choices, shareholder preferences govern CSR.

Further, the organizational research by Shammari et al. (2022), on 137 S&P 500 publicly listed firms from 2004 until 2013 in North America states that the influence of CSR on FP is positive. The findings imply that the highest performing organizations are those with a high degree of social and economic accountabilities as well as status. Importantly, this research gauged a company's skills in R&D, operations, and marketing using stochastic frontiers analysis. The study elaborates on the CSR-FP relationship to be stronger for higher levels of R&D.

Yeon et al. (2021) also indicate that in context to researches having looked on the lack of a distinct and unilateral CSR-FP relationship, academics have begun to think about the possible variables that could affect this association.

2.2. Important attributes that affect the CSR-FP relationship

Although the CSR-FP link is a long talked about topic, the prior empirical researches reflect indefinite inferences (J. Chen & Liu, 2022; Cordeiro & Tewari, 2015; Q. Wang et al., 2016). Especially in the light of investor reactions, firm characteristics are an important parameter to be considered in order to better understand the CSR-FP relationship, like the bigger firms have more visibility and probably they benefit more (better FP) from CSR (Cordeiro & Tewari, 2015). Cordeiro and Tewari (2015) recorded investor response to the Newsweek Green Rankings⁵ of 2009, hereby employing event study. The researchers' findings support the notion that rating services like Newsweek provide useful informational service by helping investors in higher ranked companies anticipate higher future cash flows as a result of more favorable responses from environmentally conscious clients, staff members, NGOs, and regulators, resulting to the companies' stocks rising in value. The authors further add that superior rankings are more advantageous to larger companies, given their heightened visibility and susceptibility to shareholder influence.

The firm characteristics affect company's ability to engage successfully in CSR and reaping improved FP benefits by minimizing the issues tied to institutional voids (Cordeiro et al., 2023). The authors of the study examine whether family ownership (ownership structure and governance aspects in that sense) in businesses could help overcoming the institutional voids in Indian firms. Interestingly, the results indicate that even in the face of institutional voids, Indian businesses that consistently gain the influence of stakeholders eventually persuade the stakeholders of the benefits of their CSR initiatives, which raises the FP. They also advise managers to consider long-term measurement of their CSR investments on their FP as CSR requires initial investments that are likely to decrease the FP in short term, bearing fruits in the more later stages.

Petrenko et al. (2016) contend that a leader's individual desire for spotlight and image reinforcement could be met by CSR. However, according to their study, which used a unique media-based gauging technique that leverages third-party ratings of characteristics of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies via endorsed psychometric scales, narcissistic CEO traits weaken the CSR-FP link. The authors also say that CEOs may draw attention to themselves through the CSR initiatives of their companies, just like celebrities do by taking part in charity events. Moreover, when it comes to the social actions of their companies, CEOs are frequently the target of compliments or criticism.

⁵ Newsweek Green Rankings is a noteworthy, multifaceted development in rating companies' environmental CSR performance in the recent years (Cordeiro & Tewari, 2015).

For decisions on Environmental protection especially, He et al. (2015) argue that it is important to consider the academic background of the Top managers (as compared to work experience, as this seldom affects the governance aspects) to better gauge the CSR performance. Their study overall suggests that the CSR performance of organizations will be linked to the educational backgrounds, professional experiences and family or non-family oriented organizational cultures of their top managers. Additionally, their findings based on the study of firms in Taiwan, imply that family controlled businesses are not always negative structures, and that the favorable impact of highly educated top manager in a family controlled firm on its CSR performance is considerably stronger.

A family that owns a business with its name being the identity of the business may find it more difficult to give away the controls and may thus feel more pressure to make sure the company doesn't do anything to harm the family's reputation (Dyer & Whetten, 2006).

2.3. Family Ownership

As it maintains their general interests in corporate reputation and long-term direction, CSR is especially important to family businesses (Yeon et al., 2021). Rees and Rodionova (2015) in their investigation on the effect of family equity positions on the three pillars (ESG rankings) of a company's CSR reflect upon the extant literature that family owners can dodge governance and preserve their influence irrespective of the governance system; family owners have a long term outlook and are concerned about their relationships with stakeholders to ensure survival. Further, the difference(s) in the CSR intensity between family-controlled firms and the counterpart is mainly because family owned companies are projected to be under the influence of emotional relationship(s), attributes, status and family norms (He et al., 2015).

Comparing family firms and non-family firms, J. Chen and Liu (2022) in their meta-analysis of 58 related studies state that a family firm is believed to accept the norms of a socially responsible behavior, which aligns with the stakeholders' desire of a humane-oriented culture. The researchers aimed at synthesizing the evidence on the impact of family ownership on CSR of the firm and how the respective national culture moderates this relationship. Overall, their meta analysis reflects that the CSR performance of family firms is better as compared to the non-family firms. They also highlight that family firms are more considerate of the cultural factors because of the social and capital advantages they have over their counterparts.

Authors Miller et al. (2013) have examined Fortune 1000 companies from institutional and strategic viewpoints, and their main contention is that whoever owns and manages a company will have a significant impact on its performance and competitive strategies. The significance family enterprises attach to Socioemotional wealth (SEW)⁶ can be used

⁶ Socioemotional wealth (SEW) are representative of the non-economic externalities resulting from informal institutions (J. Chen & Liu, 2022).

to analyze the institutional justification for family involvement in ownership and management. SEW can manifest in a variety of ways, including the capacity to secure careers and financial stability for both present and future generations, social standing and visibility, and even tranquility within the family.

Also, family firms strive for long-term continuity and practice the 'know-how' to ensure the same (Konopaski et al., 2015). The authors Konopaski et al. (2015) in their research attempt to answer the question on endurance and survival mechanisms family businesses employ to maintain continuity across generations. The interview transcripts of the respondents from family businesses in Canada helped the authors to interpret that family businesses pave way for their survival through strong family ties and most importantly via inter-generational participation where the new members start at the periphery and slowly gain legitimacy. More importantly, acknowledging the fact that family members automatically may not acquire the abilities, competence and conduct that give rise to fruitful business practices. Lastly, they assert that this strive for continuity and endurance is a result of them having a better understanding of how their family business runs, its conventions, customs, commitments as supposed to giving it all in the hands of a non family member.

Furthermore, a family's influence in the firm, the propensity to pass the torch to the next generation, to create a positive image for the family are the factors that strengthen the family-firm identity fit and the corporate reputation focus (Block & Wagner, 2014).

2.4. Influence of Family Ownership on the CSR-FP relationship

The effect of Family ownership on CSR performance is positive and the effect is strong in CSR aspects that are significant to a family's identity and small or non-existent in CSR dimensions that are less relevant (Block & Wagner, 2014). This study by Block and Wagner (2014) gathered relevant evidences from large US firms to study the effect of family ownership on the various dimensions of CSR. The authors argue that the family firms can be both responsible and irresponsible when it comes to executing CSR initiatives. Their results indicate that there is a negative correlation between family ownership and community-related CSR performance but the impact of family ownership is positive when it comes to diversity, environment and employee related aspects. The largest positive effect however, is seen for product related components.

The reputation of a firm is one of its intangible assets that influences other perspectives within the company, as examined by organizational researchers (Yeon et al., 2021). Yeon et al. (2021) state that the literature on the moderating role of family ownership on CSR-FP relationship is very scant, however, their study of hospitality sector in the US in the period between 1994 to 2018 finds that family ownership (along with management and degree of family members in the board of control) positively moderates the CSR-FP relationship. They also refer to the agency theory in concluding

that a higher involvement of family members could prevent exploitation of CSR initiatives by the non-family member executives for their own gain and hence reduce agency cost, which subsequently could lead to better FP. Further, they also state that the positive moderating effect of the family ownership on the CSR-FP relationship is simply due to family owned businesses outperforming their counterparts in CSR initiatives. Finally, they also implicate a perspective supporting involvement of family members in strategic decisions since there is in fact a positive effect because of their involvement in CSR based decisions on FP.

The slightly greater impact of family ownership on ESG scores at higher levels of ESG suggests that there is causality from ownership to ESG (Rees & Rodionova, 2015). Rees and Rodionova (2015) have categorized the firms they studied into a CME-LME classification to also understand the effect of institutional systems. The authors infer that Family ownership has a slight negative correlation with ESG, however in the coordinated market economies (CMEs) as opposed to the liberal market economies (LMEs)⁷, the negative effect is far less pronounced.

2.5. How culture affects in this scenario?

Kitzmueller and Shimshack (2012) postulate that the institutional context and widely held standards, opinions, and values are what could compel businesses to behave in a particular way. Additionally, cultural-cognitive forces, social-normative forces, as well as institutional forces are variables that may be influencing the type and the degree of CSR in a society. Baron (2008) adds to this discussion by giving an example from one of his prior researches. Let's take Firm A which takes voluntary action to remove externalities caused by its output, charging a higher price to draw customers who value externality mitigation. Firm B on the flip side, is a self-interested company, which would only resolve the externalities when put under undue pressure, charging a lower price, drawing customers who do not value the expenses on moral actions highly. One of the two firms may be the target of citizen-funded activism using social pressure, and if the public doesn't distinguish between moral management and CSR brought on by social pressure, Firm A, because of its eagerness to act ethically would be a more vulnerable target than Firm B.

Waldman et al. (2006) in their longitudinal study analyzed data from 561 companies across 15 countries to examine the values that managers use to guide their decision making, together with cultural and leadership factors. They contend that managers in societies with greater institutional collectivistic ideals place an emphasis on long-term relationships with stakeholders viz. clients and employees and also they acknowledge that they would consider the welfare of the community when making choices.

⁷ CMEs are types of economies which have a high emphasis on society welfare in general as compared to LMEs striving for investor protection and stakeholder activism (Rees & Rodionova, 2015).

Thanetsunthorn (2015) looked at how several cultural factors, such as power distance, masculinity, individualism, and uncertainty avoidance, affected the CSR performance of the corporations. The results indicated that companies with a higher power distance are much worse at CSR as evidently people accept disparity and are more willing to tolerate it. Additionally, businesses with headquarters in societies that are characterized by an individualistic culture - where people tend to prioritize their own interests over those of the group - and that are biased towards masculine values like assertiveness and material rewards, tend to perform less in terms of CSR. Conversely, companies in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to have better CSR ratings.

Marques et al. (2014) investigate whether the degree of engagement in CSR activities is based on values, like that of collectivism, by examining the heterogeneity of family enterprises using SEW and stewardship theory. The aforementioned ideals like collectivism (and altruism for that matter) have been linked to the distinctive behavior of family businesses, specifically their business strategies, including the CSR components. In their meta analysis, J. Chen and Liu (2022) too find that the CSR-FP relationship is significantly affected by cultural norms, particularly as their results on CSR-FP were heavily moderated by humane orientation, in-group collectivism and a long term orientation. The authors also point out that the moderating effects of cultural values were stronger where there was low cultural tightness⁸.

Culturally tight workplaces scored low on team creativity too and this was more evident in cultures with low levels of collectivism (Gedik & Ozbek, 2020). Gedik and Ozbek (2020) assert that collectivism nourishes the practices of achieving a common objective through collaboration and consensus and not just one individual trying to stand-out, as the latter thought also discourages risk taking and divergent thinking.

One more point relevant to the context of institutional theory is that given the lack of community awareness and engagement in CSR, firms in countries like India may also bear the corrective expenses of information provision (Cordeiro et al., 2023).

3. Theoretical Foundation & Hypotheses

3.1. Corporate Social Responsibility and Financial Performance

For firms to pursue innovative and sustainability based strategies, internal stakeholders' perceptions of CSR are critical; L. Lee and Chen (2018) posit that top managers take steps to improve CSR in order to satisfy their employees' psychological needs, which consequently exerts positive effects on individual employee performance. Positive CSR perceptions with a high level of fulfilment of Relatedness, Existence and Growth needs amongst the employees leads to

high job satisfaction rate and retention intention. By taking the Resource Based View (RBV) theory's developing insights, a firm's CSR could help it form and sustain healthy relationships with a number of stakeholders. Such relationships based on trust, consequently reduce transaction costs and improve gains (Shammari et al., 2022).

Elongating this point further, J. Lee and Roh (2012) argue that social responsibility being one of the four attributes⁹ of corporate reputation contributes positively to a firm's inimitable assets that enhances market and financial performance. Businesses that do better have a better likelihood of continuing to perform well over time if they also have generally positive reputations (Roberts & Dowling, 2002). Higher social spending and strong FP are positively associated, and that even if the shareholders may not appreciate social expenditures, they are nonetheless made since they enhance FP when customers reward the company for its social actions (Baron, 2008).

In context to 'E' amongst the three pillars of ESG, Cordeiro and Tewari (2015) conclude that according to the owners of the company, i.e. the stockholders, taking part in environmental CSR does appear to benefit businesses in terms of their market performance. There would be no conflict between the pursuit of shareholder value and the pursuit of environmental CSR, despite the fact that the size of the market reaction (to the CSR initiatives) might not be very large when compared to mergers, earnings announcements and other significant corporate events. They also suggest that firms could leverage from the positive reactions on their CSR performances to compensate for any inferiority in their legitimacy in the financial market¹⁰.

According to taxonomic views on CSR by Kitzmueller and Shimshack (2012), the more the cause (any CSR initiative) suits a company's primary markets, products and service, the greater the marketing benefits will be. When CSR is a good fit, it can prevent halo effects and protect the company from bad PR and activist activity. The benefits of CSR help a company to not only distinguish their products (or services) alongside establishing a positive reputation but also help steer clear of any criticism from private politics like activists, NGOs, etc. Further, CSR could also be used to invoke the cyclical nature of enforcement and regulation, i.e., to enhance regulatory relations today in order to obtain preferential treatment tomorrow, such as ease of getting licensed or less prosecution from the relevant agency.

Building on the public politics and governments' POV, Flammer (2018) asserts that a number of factors such as a firm's reputation and other credible signals of a firm's trustworthiness affect governments' perspective of trust and consequently the firm's prospects of winning government contracts. CSR acts as an indication of reliability and therefore as

⁸ Culturally tight countries can be identified with rigorous and strong norms, and low tolerance on deviance (Gedik & Ozbek, 2020).

⁹ The other three attributes of Corporate Reputation according to J. Lee and Roh (2012) are innovativeness, quality of products and services, and overall reputation.

¹⁰ This legitimacy is a measure that is based on previous financial results (Cordeiro & Tewari, 2015).

a component in building assurance and trust. Thereby, Flammer (2018) posits that, with all other factors being equal, businesses with better CSR have a higher probability of being awarded government contracts. Thus, from both Kitzmüller and Shimshack (2012) and Flammer's (2018) assertions, one can deduce that CSR not only would ensure that a business is safeguarded from the negative press, which consequently could lead to stable (if not better) sales alongside being less affected by changes in regulations, but also increase in the propensity of getting more contracts from governments too, ensuring better FP.

Findings from another meta analysis of 42 studies on CSR-FP link by Q. Wang et al. (2016) reflect a positive CSR-FP association. Operating efficiencies, risk management, capital market advantages, higher-quality profitability, fewer lawsuits and several other stakeholder-derived advantages, all have links to CSR as per recent researches (Cordeiro et al., 2023).

3.2. Advantages of family ownership

Out of the possible attributes while considering family ownership, the focus here is firstly to understand that the construct of family ownership is not binary for this study, like whether a firm is family owned or not, but more about what is the ownership status (in percentage or voting rights, etc.) and thereby to what extent does the founding (and running) family still influence the decisions. This is unlike a few studies in the extant literature where researchers depict that the construct had been defined in a subjective way (whether the general population feels if a firm is family owned or not), a Yes/No situation (Yeon et al., 2021). There are arguments attributing to superior performance of family-controlled firms that can be referred through researches in agency theory, transaction cost perspectives, the RBV and stewardship theory; family-controlled firms benefit from lowered agency costs and the resource-based perspectives of social, human & financial capital give them an advantageous position (Danes et al., 2009; Dow & McGuire, 2016).

According to systematic studies, family owned businesses really outperform their public counterparts in a variety of ways (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2003); they benefit from adaptability, internal cohesiveness, continuity and external connections. These benefits work together to give the family owned firms a competitive edge as well as tremendous adaptability and ambidexterity. Family owned enterprises have prospered for decades, outperforming their rivals and altering not only the business environment but also fundamental business practices. Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2003) deduce an argument for this thrive which are as follows:

Adaptability: the presence of an independent command, the leader, due to ownership and family ties, has an abundance of power and status. The leaders are more liberated and determined to act in a way that will benefit both internal and external stakeholders in the long run

as there are no number obsessed stockholders or managers with the capacity to stifle innovation or compel uniformity.

Continuity: families continue to operate for generations due to their family passion, like a mission which could be intimately tied to family ethics, values, or even religion, with family members often considering this family passion a 'sacred duty'.

Internal Cohesiveness: family businesses function as clans, with employees being motivated by shared ideals than by short-term financial rewards. These are more focused on values, more caring of their employees and indoctrination concerned.

External relationships: family businesses prioritize connections over transactions. They are aware that when they make a commitment, their family's future and generations worth of reputation are at risk, they are also believed to reliably safeguard partners' secrets.

3.3. Degree of family ownership & its interaction with CSR propensity

Miller et al. (2013) assert that family executives engaged as prominent public figure heads are not uncommon in major public enterprises and that the family name or reputation being linked to the business can also be a strong deterrent to strategically non-conforming behaviors. They also found support for their hypothesis that many family leaders are convinced that the appropriate behavior is essential to their own security and reputation, especially for the next generations. Owing to this, family firms strongly adhere to the industry norms and practices than non-family firms.

In their study, Dyer and Whetten (2006) very briefly conclude that families which are bothered about their name and image would prefer to avoid being branded as being socially irresponsible, as such business practices frequently end-up in newspapers and television. Such negative press or prominent lawsuits can seriously harm the family's reputation, tarnish a carefully constructed image and most importantly, the family is dragged in the public court, regardless of the outcome of the lawsuit. Such a reputational blowback can have detrimental effect on the family's fortune and hence to maintain their good name family businesses act in a socially responsible manner. Comparing this behaviour to their counterparts, the authors state that since the reputation of their families and their personal image would not be affected to the same extent by society appraisals of the actions of the companies they manage, managers in non-family organizations are less likely to be concerned about these factors.

Yeon et al. (2021) hereby argue that understanding the governance structure is crucial as top executives who are not a member of the business owning family may use CSR activities as a way to strengthen their own personal interests and reputations, trying to make a stronger claim for holding on to that position, whereas, family members executives have a long term vision regarding the CSR activities and they like

to enhance the brand positioning and reputation, which further contribute to yield better FP. Marques et al. (2014) contend that higher family ownership has been linked to higher CSR participation as greater family participation increases the SEW worries and a loss-aversion behavior, which ultimately encourages CSR – to prevent losses in SEW caused by failing to meet stakeholder demands.

Investigators using data from rating services have found that family firms have fewer CSR concerns as compared to their counterparts but interestingly, the family firms are no different to the non-family firms regarding the count of CSR initiatives (Block & Wagner, 2014). Block and Wagner (2014) also argue that the their (owing family's) pride in the firm and the efforts to maintain a positive image amongst the masses positively influence a family firm's CSR performance. In contrast to their non-family counterparts, family firms show a curvilinear CSR-FP relationship (Cordeiro et al., 2023) as family firms are more likely to invest at or above the Stakeholder influence capability (the capacity of an organization to spot, seize and benefit from opportunities to utilize CSR to enhance stakeholder relationships) threshold as well as to experience a positive financial return on their investment.

It is thus hypothesized that:

H1. The CSR-FP relationship is positively moderated by higher degree of family ownership.

3.4. Role of culture in the CSR-FP relationship

Kim and Kim (2010) in their study of the effect of Hofstede's cultural dimensions on the perceptions of CSR in South Korea imply that although conscience or business ethics may not always imply active CSR engagement, active CSR can be viewed as a type of ethical action on the part of firms. Social responsibility refers to shared ethical principles, and it is closely related to the vital role that public relations practitioners play in assisting businesses in becoming more socially responsible. People from various cultures and countries must have varied social responsibility policies and perspectives on the responsibility that firms play in the society. Their analysis showed that while individualism was negatively correlated to the CSR models, collectivism, confucian dynamism, femininity were all inextricably linked with CSR models.

The role of national culture is of immense importance in relevance to corporate decisions on CSR strategies as it significantly 'influences the attitudes' behind the decisions, also corporations located in different geographies exhibit differences in their CSR performance (Thanetsunthorn, 2015). Governance in a family corporation entails both the administrative and the resource baskets, and country specific circumstances moderate how these baskets offer a competitive advantage to the firm (Dow & McGuire, 2016).

Family firm's propensity to participate in CSR is moderated by the national culture and that the effect of the cultural values are stronger for family firms as compared to the non-family firms, this is primarily out of the Socioemotional wealth (SEW) concerns of the family firms (J. Chen &

Liu, 2022). MNCs risk public relations catastrophes if they disregard the local ethical standards upheld by their cross-cultural collaborators, suppliers, financiers, distributors and customers (Q. Wang et al., 2016).

3.5. Collectivism versus Individualism and their effects on the above hypothesis.

Stakeholder relations and state welfare CSR concerns are more favorable in societies that place a strong emphasis on collectivistic principles (Waldman et al., 2006); this is due to the fact that managers in cultures that value collectivism (especially institutional collectivism) emphasize deferring present demands or fulfilment in favor of future objectives and concerns, and they encourage the consideration for managerial decisions which relate to greater community causes.

Building on L. Lee & Chen's (2018) viewpoint of focussing on employees' satisfaction, Y. Wang et al. (2020) in their meta analysis of 65 studies focussed on the effect of individualism (alongside age and gender) on employees' perceived CSR. They find that employees from nations with a low level of individualism tend to resonate with CSR initiatives, be more attentive towards the firm's benefits and are more willing to go the extra mile to fulfil their responsibilities, as compared to highly individualistic country employees. Their findings also suggest that employees in collectivistic countries had more strengthened relationship between perceived CSR and job satisfaction, creativity, organizational citizenship behavior and overall performance.

According to the study on the quality of CSR disclosure in the Asia-Pacific by Jian et al. (2017), individualistic societies have lower than average CSR disclosure quality. The authors posit that according to the legitimacy and stakeholder theory, stakeholders from societies with a high individualism culture, being more self-oriented and prioritizing self-interests, do not have high expectations for and put little pressure on businesses regarding CSR initiatives, which ultimately has a negative impact on the quality of businesses' CSR disclosure. A national culture that leans more towards collectivism is crucial to improving the standards of CSR disclosure.

The relationship between the family firms and CSR is strengthened by ingroup collectivism, humane and future orientation, further, the embedded collectivistic culture is in line with the stakeholders' desire of CSR, as being beneficial to all involved (J. Chen & Liu, 2022). Owing to the topic of how the consumers perceive a company, Hur and Kim (2017) argue that collectivistic consumers have positive impressions of the companies practicing CSR because of their innate values for community solidarity. Corporations in more individualistic nations perform less in terms of workforce-related, community-related and environment-related CSR (Thanetsunthorn, 2015).

Dekker and Hasso (2016) in their study about family firms in Australia, a less collectivistic country (GLOBE Project, 2020), infer that the family firms have lower environmental performance focus than non-family firms. However, this propensity of being considerate towards environmental

performance is conditional to the degree of social embeddedness of the firm within its local vicinity. Interestingly, when compared to non-family enterprises with high social embeddedness, family firms with higher social embeddedness exhibit more environmental performance focus.

Findings on the study of Austrian (an individualistic country as per GLOBE Project) firms by Kuttner et al. (2021) show that family enterprises rarely comply with social, environment, and economic criteria within the idea of CSR solely because the term of CSR wasn't widely used. The family firms have lately made conscious efforts to use the term CSR when working in a socially or environmentally responsible manner.

On the other hand, Yu et al. (2015) in their study about CSR in Taiwan, a more collectivistic country (GLOBE Project, 2020), state that the family firms outperform the non-family firms in CSR performance. The authors posit that theoretically, governance structures are interwoven with SEW as a force that catapults family principles towards non-economic results. In accordance with the financial computation logic, non-family firms may minimize spending to maximize financials whereas, family firms typically give more consideration to social consequences in order to maintain SEW, as also stated in the above sections by J. Chen and Liu (2022), who also have re-inforced the fact that family firms on the outset are more inclined towards collectivism in general.

L. Chen et al. (2021) in their study of Family businesses in China (a collectivistic country as per GLOBE Project (2020)), write that even though the number of family firms that have successfully completed a line of descent is not very significant because many family businesses there only emerged after the country's economy was liberalized, family businesses (operating independent from state control) provide the most economic contribution. Family firms tend to have higher environmental pollution control levies as a percentage of sales than their non-family counterparts. One major factor could be that family firms receive a very significant amount of limelight which makes them perceive a central space in the society, family's long term orientation and the willingness to pass it down to the generations.

It is thus hypothesized that:

H2. The moderating role of family ownership in the CSR-FP relationship is stronger in Collectivistic countries as compared to the Individualistic ones.

4. Methodology, Data & Model

4.1. Data and variables

The annual data of publicly traded firms all across the globe has been used in this study. Specifically, top grossers from the Thomson Reuters (Refinitiv) database have been worked upon. As this is a panel data regression study, variables (see Table 2) for the past decade (from FY 2013 to FY 2022) are extracted using the Screener feature of the Refinitiv Eikon Database ("ESG Scores Methodology Document", 2022). The rationale behind choosing the recent decade is

not only influenced by the fact that there would be a better chance of complete financials of companies being available (especially, ESG scores) but also due the aspect of culture. Recent analyses reveal that within a span of 10 years, socio-economic developments have resulted in increase in individualistic practices (Henri et al., 2017). Therefore the period of the data analysis is consistent with the second hypothesis of this study.

The first elimination check for companies in the list of the top grossers is referring to the Period End Date of Balance Sheet. Companies with closures before that of FY 2022 are struck off from the list. The elimination criterion then checks for SOE – State Owned Companies. These are also struck off the list to eliminate any influence of Government control in the study. A more robust analysis of the ownership of each of the company is done to check for any direct influence of Government control. The final elimination criterion is to check for Blanks or N/A fields. These 3 steps ensure a total of 439 companies across the globe (end period date of FY 22, no government influence and no blanks) for this study and thus, a total of 4390 firm-year observations have been analysed. These also account for 35 countries with a diverse set of industries.

The variable to track the CSR performance in this study is the 'ESG Combined Score'. This a consolidated score across the three pillars of Environmental, Social and Governance. Further, these scores are adjusted for the controversies in the market, thereby a good grasp of the overall social reputation of the firm, a term heavily discussed until now, especially for family firms. Further, the industry specific benchmarks for Environmental and Social scores with country specific scoring for Governance ("ESG Scores Methodology Document", 2022), means that a firm for instance, from mining sector, simply because of its 'controversial nature', would not necessarily have a lower score than other sector firms. Thereby, this study attempts to provide important insights into the landscape of CSR performance by taking into account a wide range of sectors, making it relevant for a large audience.

The variable to denote family ownership is not a binary construct, as discussed before in this study. Instead, a score from 0 to 4 is assigned to the variable depending upon the ownership status of the founding (and running) family in the firm (as detailed in Table 1). Family Ownership is not available in the Screener template of Refinitiv Eikon as a readily downloadable time series data. However, the ownership tab of each and every company is referred to. The ownership status, although primarily indexed using the Refinitiv Database, cross-referencing is done with Bloomberg.com and the Global Family Business Index (Robertsson et al., 2023). The Global Family Business Index is a joint study on world's largest family businesses, released every 24 months by Ernst & Young (EY) along with University of St.Gallen, a triple accreditation university.

The Global Family Business Index (Robertsson et al., 2023) considers that a publicly listed firm is deemed a family firm only if atleast 32% of the decision making authority is with the family, in case otherwise the influence isn't very

Table 1: Family Ownership Score

Ownership Score	Criteria
0	If the business is not family owned OR even if the business was started by the family, it is no longer influenced by it.
1	Family Ownership 30 % or less.
2	Family Ownership between 30 to 55 %.
3	Family Ownership between 55 to 80 %.
4	Family Ownership 80 % or more.

substantial. In continuation with the same notion and as the family ownership construct isn't binary, the score of 1 is assigned to those family owned companies who do own 30% or less stakes and therefore aren't deemed directly as non-family (a score of 0), as also argued by L. Chen et al. (2021).

Further, degree of family ownership can significantly modulate various aspects of decision making in a firm, given the fact that a firm with 80% or more stake with the owning (& managing) family will have a very different point of view regarding the firm's approach to risk taking, strategic decisions (and non-economic results like that of CSR), and most importantly succession planning, as compared to a firm with around 50% family ownership, as with the dilution of the stakeholding there is a room for stronger negotiations and interventions from external (non-family) investors, who might not have the same long term view and risk averse behavior (especially reputation wise) like that of the family members (Dyer & Whetten, 2006; Rees & Rodionova, 2015). As more dilution takes place towards 30% or less family ownership, one can deduce that not only the influence of the family and thereby the urge to serve its pride on the decision making will reduce but also the risk taking might increase and more importantly the leadership transitions would see a stronger fight for a merit-based succession than a lineage based succession. In lines similar to that of family's long term goals as against personal accomplishments (by non-family members), analysis by Yeon et al. (2021) indicated that the propensity of a firm to engage in CSR increases with the number of family members in the top executive positions and by having more control of the board. The managerial implications section of this study also provides support to this approach of measuring the degree of family ownership.

Results from the research of Marques et al. (2014) showed that the intensity of CSR initiatives in a firm was more in firms with higher degree of family involvement stating that greater family participation increases SEW oriented behaviors which subsequently increases CSR practices to avoid dissatisfaction of the stakeholders.

Therefore, this study intends not to view the construct of family ownership as a binary variable to avoid neglecting the interventions and voting rights effects of other non-family owners.

4.2. Method

4.2.1. For *H1*: CSR-FP relationship moderated by Family Ownership

To fulfil the objective of the current study, the study examines the relationship between CSR & FP using panel data regression analysis. For robustness, the study runs two regression tests, one to confirm the historic influence with Revenue as the dependent variable and the other as a predictive model with Tobin's Q as the dependent variable. The rationale here is basically to check whether the companies have had any impact on the year-on-year revenues and also trying to predict the CSR-FP relations with a more dynamic variable like Tobin's Q. Tobin's Q is arguably the more suited variable for the predictive analysis as it being an expression of the market value and the replacement costs of the assets for a firm Hayes et al. (2021), is a reflection of both the current and the future market perspectives (Lang & Stulz, 1994).

Models (as also referred from Yeon et al. (2021)) for analyses are as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Tobin's } Q_{(it)} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{CSR}_{(it)} + \beta_2 \text{Family Ownership}_{(it)} + \\ & \beta_3 \text{CSR}_{(it)} * \text{Family Ownership}_{(it)} + \\ & \beta_4 \text{Market Cap}_{(it)} + \beta_5 \text{Total Assets}_{(it)} + \\ & \beta_6 \text{Revenue}_{(it)} + \beta_7 \text{ROA}_{(it)} + \beta_8 \text{Leverage}_{(it)} + \\ & \beta_9 \text{CSR Strategy Score}_{(it)} + \\ & \beta_{10} \text{ESG Based Compensation}_{(it)} + \\ & \beta_{11} \text{CSR Committee}_{(it)} + \varepsilon_t. \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Revenue}_{(it)} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{CSR}_{(it)} + \beta_2 \text{Family Ownership}_{(it)} + \\ & \beta_3 \text{CSR}_{(it)} * \text{Family Ownership}_{(it)} + \\ & \beta_4 \text{Market Cap}_{(it)} + \beta_5 \text{Total Assets}_{(it)} + \\ & \beta_6 \text{CSR Strategy Score}_{(it)} + \\ & \beta_7 \text{ESG Based Compensation}_{(it)} + \\ & \beta_8 \text{CSR Committee}_{(it)} + \varepsilon_t. \end{aligned}$$

The variable $_{(it)}$ denotes the value of the variable for firm i in the year t .

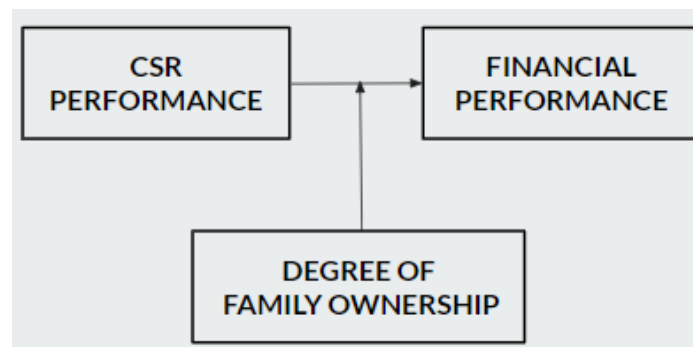
The Model with Tobin's Q being a predictive model and the dependent variable encapsulating the investors' viewpoints, has the independent variables CSR (in terms of ESG Scores) & Family Ownership with the interaction term

Table 2: Variables for this study

Variable	Classification	Type	Meaning / Remark
Tobin's Q	Dependent	Continuous	Market Cap / Book Value of Assets (Investopedia)
ESG Score	Independent	Continuous	Consolidated ESG score adj. for Controversies
Famil Own.	Independent	Categorical	Scale of 0 to 4 (refer Table 1)
Market Cap	Control	Continuous	In Bn USD, counting for Company size ^a
Total Assets	Control	Continuous	In Bn USD, counting for Company size
Revenue	Control ^b	Continuous	In Bn USD
ROA	Control	Continuous	% Return on Assets
Leverage	Control	Continuous	Debt to Asset ratio, accounting for the risk factor
CSR Committe	Control	Categorical	Available as True(False) taken 1(0) if the firm has (no) a CSR Committee in the board.
CSR Strategy Score	Control	Categorical	Available as A+ (to D-), taken as 4 (to 0), with 4 (A+) accounting for highest scores.
ESG based Compensation	Control	Categorical	Available as True(False) taken 1(0) if the firm has (no) such a policy for executives

^a Market capitalization is considered (alongside Total Assets) to account for the size of the firms, especially the ones with high intangible assets.

^b Revenue (in Bn USD) is taken as a control variable to account for earnings and growth factors for the Predictive Model, however, the study also checks for Historic Influence of CSR on FP with Revenue as the dependent variable.

**Figure 1:** Model for Regression Analyses

CSR*Family Ownership to be main focus of the study. Alongside, to also account for firm size (for both firms with high tangible assets and intangible assets) the study has considered Market Size and Total assets; Revenue & Return on Assets (ROA) account for the sales / profitability / growth factors and, Leverage tracking the Debt to Assets ratio considers the solvency and risk factors.

As the study is focussed on propensity of CSR activities, fields like whether a firm has a CSR Committee in the board and whether there are incentives for executives for higher ESG scores have very high importance as control variables to gauge personal motivations of the top manager (family or non-family member) (Yeon et al., 2021). Similarly, Refinitiv CSR Strategy Scores have been included in similar lines, focussing also on governance aspects of both family and non-family firms.

However, for the model checking the Historical influence, the events in the past with Revenue as the dependent variable, the factors like solvency (Leverage) are excluded. Further, the causality is from revenue to ROA and not the other

way and therefore, ROA has been excluded from this regression model.

Before the regression analysis, the data is checked for the Linear Regression assumptions of Linearity, Heteroscedasticity, Normality and Multicollinearity. All other assumptions except for Normality are met. For instance, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is used to check for Multicollinearity. All the variables have the VIF score of less than 4 which is statistically well under the concern limit (10 or more). The Data is then using log transformations normalized, categorical data which contained values like 0 are normalized using the 'normalize' function in the R Studio statistical software. The study then also focusses on identifying and eliminating outliers and following the study of Yeon et al. (2021), the firm-year observations which have absolute studentized residuals greater than 3 are removed from the model. This step results in a total of 4327 firm-year observations for the predictive model and 4350 firm-year observations for the model checking Historic Influence.

The models are consistent with the 'within-firm' relationships model, where the company and year fields are dummy coded and are of no particular interest (Bliese et al., 2020), as the focus is more about understanding the relationship between CSR-FP and moderating effect of the Family Ownership. The Hausman test is referred to conclude whether a fixed-effects model or a random-effects model is to be chosen for the panel data regression. According to Hausman (1978), the choice should be via two considerations, one logical (what fits the theory best) and the other statistical. Hausman (1978) has suggested that for any model where the independent variable is questionable on violating the orthogonality criterion, the fixed-effects model is more consistent. Further, the model in the study may be susceptible to omitted variables and the fixed-effects model is a consistent estimator (Bliese et al., 2020). Statistically, with $p < 0.05$ for both the models, the one-way fixed-effects model was considered for this study¹¹.

4.2.2. For H2: Collectivism vs Individualism and their effect on the interaction term

For the second hypothesis, the study incorporates a categorical classification of the countries of the firms (based on the origins & country of headquarters) into collectivistic and individualistic ones using the GLOBE Project with some cross referencing with the one of the six Dimensions of National culture from Hofstede. The average of the two scores of Institutional collectivism¹² practice and In-group collectivism¹³ practice of the firm is compared to the Global averages from the GLOBE Project. The rationale for choosing the practice score as against the score for value is that practices reflect more the current perspectives whereas the values represent an ambition (Waldman et al., 2006), thereby an indication of what a specific culture has actually been following. Countries with the average score very close to the mid-range or for which data is not available from the Globe study are cross-referenced with the Hofstede Dimension scores and then classified as either Individualistic or Collectivistic. The Global average thereby is found to be 4.69 and with this rationale, Germany with a score of 4.04 is classified as an Individualistic country and South Korea with a score of 5.37 is classified as a Collectivistic country (country-collectivism score).

The average of the interaction term of the $CSR_{(it)} * \text{Family Ownership}_{(it)}$ were then compared to infer on H2.

¹¹ The Two-way fixed effects model also yielded a p-value < 0.05 for the Historic Influence Model but the R2 value with One-way fixed effects was superior and thus explained more variance and, thereby selected.

¹² Institutional collectivism is defined as "the degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action" (GLOBE Project, 2020).

¹³ In-group collectivism is defined as "the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families" (GLOBE Project, 2020).

5. Results

5.1. Precursor – Effect of Family Ownership and other control variables on ESG Scores

Before running the panel data regression analysis for H1, the study would first view the effect of variables like Family Ownership and Leverage along with the other variables inherently indicating a firm's penchant for CSR initiatives viz. CSR Strategy Score, ESG Based Compensation for executives (Yes/No?) and presence of a CSR committee. The results of the Hausman tests for this precursor analysis, also consistent with the models for H1 prompted the analysis to be conducted by the Fixed effects model ($p < 0.05$) and a better R-squared result made way for the One-way fixed effects model to be used.

The regression result indicates that unlike in the literature review and the theoretical foundations, the ESG scores are negatively correlated to the degree of Family Ownership with although a weaker statistical significance of $p < 0.1$. One plausible reason for this as stated by Rees and Rodionova (2015) could be that families that have invested private capital in the company and which have long-term adherence to this investment will be motivated more by personal rewards and less by ESG considerations, deeming ESG investments as value destroying since it doesn't bring personal benefits. Further, although the significance is not very strong for the negative correlation between heavy debts incurred by the firm and the ESG propensity, the relationship is very immanent and understandable as any firm with a high burden of debt might first look to spend only as far as operations demand. The positive correlations between ESG intensity and the presence of CSR Committee, whether a firm has ESG based compensations for executives and the CSR Strategy Score are also very intrinsic and with very strong statistical significance.

5.2. For H1 – One Way Fixed effects model regression analysis for Historic Influence Model

The regression results indicate that Revenue is positively correlated to the ESG scores, however the effect is not statistically significant. Further, the grossings of the firms show a reduction when the family ownership increases and this is statistically significant with a $p < 0.005$. Finally, the Revenue is seen to be positively correlated to the interaction term of $CSR * \text{Family Ownership}$ with a co-efficient of ~ 0.25 and with a statistical significance of $p < 0.01$. The co-efficient although seems a small one at the onset but is substantial considering that the revenue has been plotted in units of Bn USD. Further, the Revenue is also seen to be positively moderated when the firm has a CSR Committee in place and has governance ensuring stronger fits for CSR strategies. The variable ESG based compensation policy also affects the dependent variable in similar lines. It is therefore definitely evident that firms have grossed high when the ESG Scores are high and the interaction term has positively moderated the CSR-Revenue relations.

Table 3: Regression results for ESG and Family Ownership

Residuals:	Min.	1st Qu.	Median	3rd Qu.	Max.
	-0.381846	-0.060879	0.006614	0.065216	0.372383
Coefficients:					
	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	Pr(> t)	
Fam Own	-0.0828617	0.0478351	-1.7322	0.0833093	
CSR Strategy Score	0.2207281	0.0104293	21.1642	< 2.2e-16 ***	
ESG Based Comp?	0.0207392	0.0060487	3.4287	0.0006127 ***	
CSR Committee?	0.0559976	0.0081309	6.8870	6.603e-12 ***	
Leverage	-0.0108519	0.0286264	-0.3791	0.7046447	
Significance codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1					
Total Sum of Squares: 55.12			Residual Sum of Squares: 45.324		
R-Squared: 0.17772			Adj. R-Squared: 0.085406		
F-statistic: 170.57 on 5 and 3946 DF			p-value: < 2.22e-16		

Table 4: Regression results for Historic Influence Model

Residuals:	Min.	1st Qu.	Median	3rd Qu.	Max.
	-3.8132215	-0.0776350	0.0053377	0.0818204	1.2263768
Coefficients:					
	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	Pr (> t)	
ESG	0.0271331	0.0346816	0.7823	0.434057	
Fam Own	-0.3128582	0.0999777	-3.1293	0.001765 **	
Market Cap	0.1800848	0.0094603	19.0358	< 2.2e-16 ***	
Total Assets	0.5356015	0.0130416	41.0686	< 2.2e-16 ***	
CSR Committee?	0.0315868	0.0150549	2.0981	0.035960 *	
CSR Strategy Score	0.1321866	0.0206959	6.3871	1.889e-10 ***	
ESG Based Comp?	0.0203645	0.0111567	1.8253	0.068030	
ESG: Fam Own	0.2449253	0.0908046	2.6973	0.007021 **	
Significance codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1					
Total Sum of Squares: 323.15			Residual Sum of Squares: 148.98		
R-Squared: 0.53896			Adj. R-Squared: 0.48654		
F-statistic: 570.626 on 8 and 3905 DF			p-value: < 2.22e-16		

5.3. For H1 – One Way Fixed effects model regression analysis for Predictive Model

The regression results indicate that the Tobin's Q is negatively correlated to the ESG scores however the effect is not statistically significant. Further, the FP shows a reduction when the family ownership increases and this is statistically significant with a $p < 0.05$. Finally, the FP is seen to be positively correlated to the interaction term of CSR*Family Ownership with a co-efficient of ~ 0.0002 and with a statistical significance at threshold of $p < 0.05$. The co-efficient although seems a small one at the onset but is substantial considering that the Tobin's Q is a future oriented market perspective (Lang & Stulz, 1994) and that many other factors like R&D expenses (Petrenko et al., 2016), characteristics of the top manager (He et al., 2015; Shammari et al., 2022) and marketing communications enveloping CSR initiatives (Hur

& Kim, 2017) also play a crucial role in investor's perspectives.

It is therefore not incorrect to argue that firms could have high Tobin's Q when the ESG Score are high and the interaction term positively moderates the CSR-FP relation.

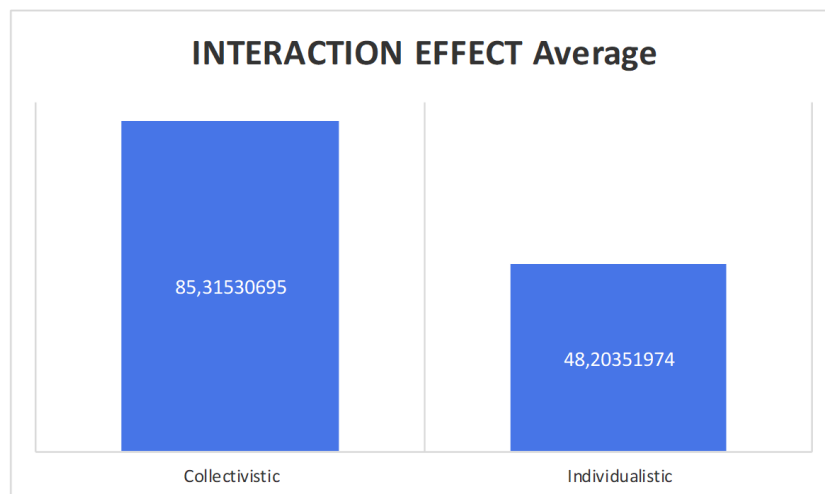
Cumulatively, results from the Historical influence model and the predictive model support H1.

5.4. For H2 – The CSR*Family Ownership interaction for Collectivism vs Individualism

Figure 2 denotes the average CSR*Family Ownership interaction term values for firms in collectivistic vs individualistic countries. The interaction term fairly suggests that the moderation effect is slightly more for the firms in the Collectivistic countries than for the counterpart firms.

Table 5: Regression results for Predictive Model

Residuals:	Min.	1st Qu.	Median	3rd Qu.	Max
	-3.5236e-08	-1.8463e-10	-2.4730e-12	1.8968e-10	3.3627e-08
Coefficients:					
	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	Pr (> t)	
ESG	-2.7091e-10	2.9117e-10	-9.3040e-01	0.35222	
Fam Own	-1.9259e-09	8.3044e-10	-2.3191e+00	0.02044 *	
Market Cap	1.0000e+00	8.8157e-11	1.1343e+10	< 2e-16 ***	
Total Assets	-1.0000e+00	1.3944e-10	-7.1714e+09	< 2e-16 ***	
Revenue	-1.4727e-10	1.3872e-10	-1.0617e+00	0.28846	
ROA	5.1509e-11	7.5475e-10	6.8200e-02	0.94559	
Leverage	-4.9100e-11	4.6951e-10	-1.0460e-01	0.91672	
CSR Committee?	-1.5494e-10	1.2631e-10	-1.2266e+00	0.22004	
CSR Strategy Score	2.1967e-10	1.7359e-10	1.2655e+00	0.20577	
ESG Based Comp?	3.4936e-11	9.4241e-11	3.7070e-01	0.71088	
ESG: Fam Own	1.4409e-09	7.5722e-10	1.9028e+00	0.05713	
Significance codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1					
Total Sum of Squares: 475.56			Residual Sum of Squares: 1.0257e-14		
R-Squared: 1			Adj. R-Squared: 1		
F-statistic: 1.6342e+19 on 11 and 3877 DF			p-value: < 2.22e-16		

**Figure 2:** Interaction term averages

Figures 3 & 4 give us a good measure of the map plot of the country-wise interaction terms with that of the map plot of Individualism & Collectivism from Hofstede's 6D Model of national culture webpage (Hofstede et al., n.d.). Figures 3 & 4 depict a lot of similarities in terms of the color grading, where the Individualistic countries are shaded darker and the shade gets lighter as countries score high on collectivism, the same pattern can be recognised in the interaction map plot as well. Countries scoring low on the moderating effect are dark shaded whereas the shade gets lighter as the CSR*Family Ownership interaction term increases. The study on the onset lacks data for firms from the African continent.

One very visually evident exception to the above com-

parative analysis is for China. Where on one hand China is deemed Collectivistic country, scoring high on Collectivism as compared to India for example (GLOBE Project, 2020), the shade in the interaction map plot is darker. One of the biggest possibilities for this is the fact that out of the 439 firms and 35 countries matrix (country-firm count), only 14 firms belonged to China, as compared to the count of 20 from Germany for that matter. Evidently, the number is very small considering the size of China. This study tries to find to one probable reason for this lower count of Chinese firms.

Although Family businesses are one of the most important elements of private economy in China, a very limited number of empirical studies on their overall economic contribution is

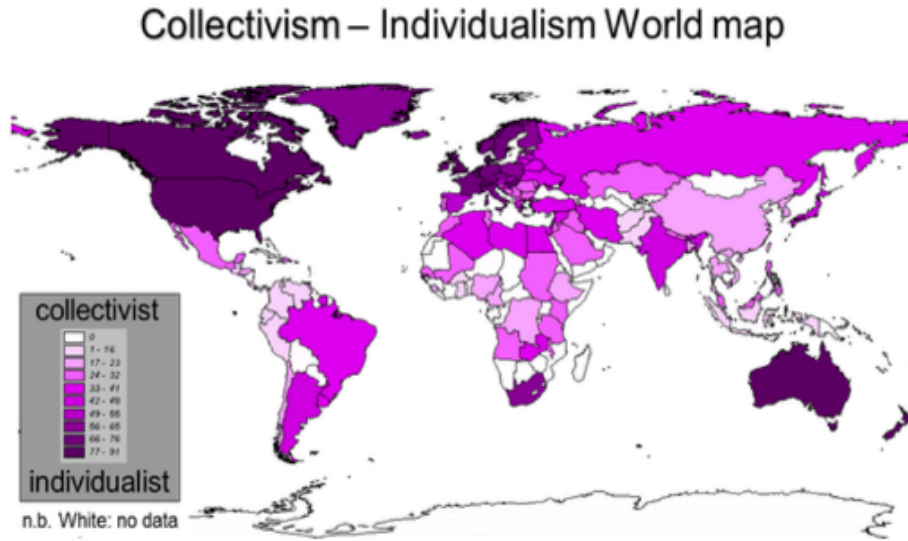


Figure 3: Collectivism-Individualism World map (Hofstede et al., n.d.)

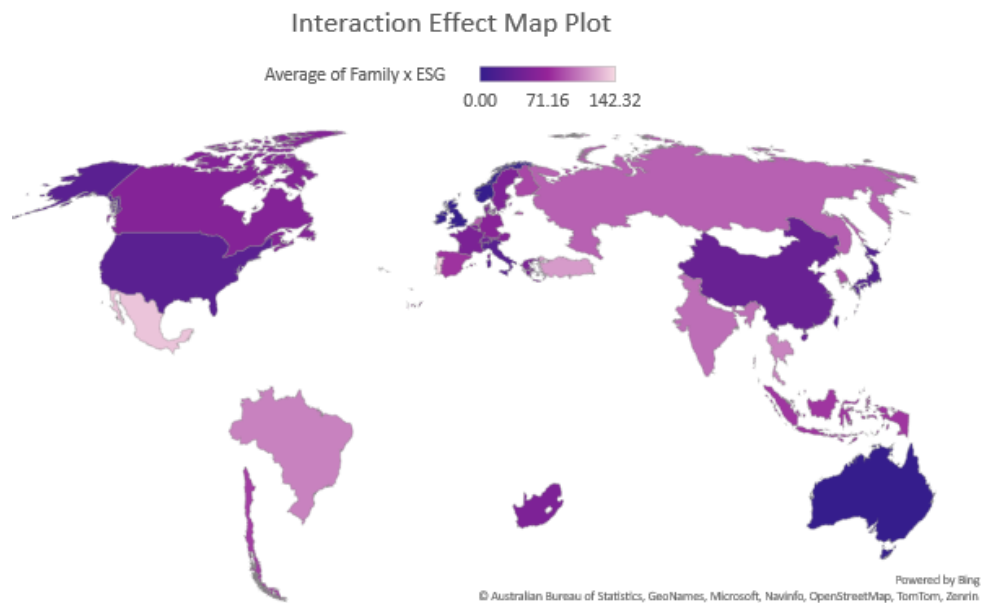


Figure 4: Map plot of the interaction term

available (L. Chen et al., 2021). The authors L. Chen et al. (2021) in the second chapter of the Book ‘Family Business in China’ state that only a few family businesses in China publicize and disclose their financial and organizational information. Astonishingly, about 90% of China’s total economy is accounted by Family firms. Another interesting fact however is that although China is the world’s largest Greenhouse Gas emitter (about 23% of global emissions), researchers say that a majority of the Chinese firms concealed environmental reports and even research on CSR strategies or reporting is very low (Weber, 2014).

Therefore, it can be argued that with the concentration of family firms in China and the amount of social (or at least Environmental) responsibilities that Chinese firms have, report-

ing and disclosing of the information should improve firstly the count of Chinese firms for research, secondly the interaction term average for China. Thereby, the map plot comparisons and the slight discussion above for Chinese firms support H2.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

6.1. Conclusion

The literature review, theoretical foundation of this study and the empirical analysis of the proposed model yield slightly contrasting results but give a very interesting insight, particularly to the interests of top managers of family owned businesses. Given the rationales of SEW, pride and

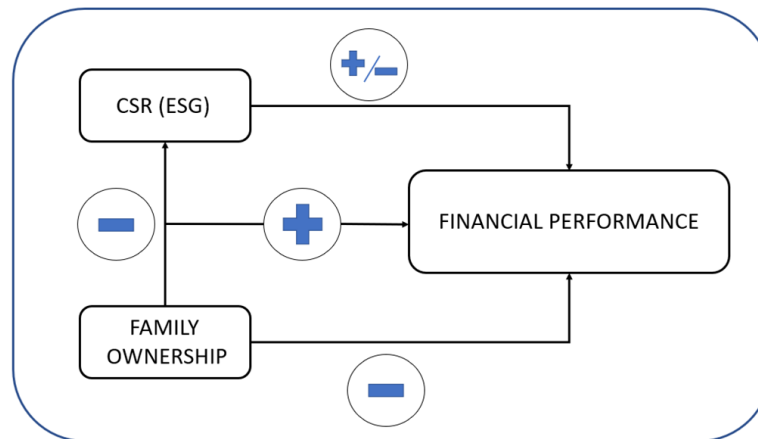


Figure 5: Interplay between Dependent, Independent & Moderating variables in H1

reputation of the firm from the literature review and theoretical foundation, a positive correlation is expected between family ownership and CSR propensity. However, the empirical analysis, although with a slightly weaker statistical significance, states that the association between degree of family ownership and CSR penchant is negative. Further, the analysis yields a mix result in the case of the CSR-FP relationship, a statistically significant and positive association with Revenue in the historic influence model and a negative link for the predictive model with Tobin's Q, for which as earlier stated, the statistical significance (weak in this case) is of a lower importance.

The relationship between the degree of family ownership and FP too is negative, with very strong statistical significance for both models. One of the attributable reasons for this negative association could be that family businesses might not be appealing to knowledgeable shareholders outside because of the overly dominant family ownership causing erosion of minority shareholders' wealth as well as over dependence on family's human and social capital could lower the firm's willingness to nurture non-family talent (Dow & McGuire, 2016). This leads to insufficient professional management, especially when people are hired on blood-ties, consequently reducing the objectivity in representing the firm's interest over that of the family (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2003).

But, most importantly, as hypothesized by the study, the moderating role of the degree of family ownership in the CSR-FP relationship is positive and for both the models.

At this juncture, the study proposes to lay an argument in the lines of trust and CSR being considered as a scrupulous practice (Flammer, 2018). The argument is that even though as empirically seen, family owned businesses might not be very interested in CSR initiatives, even a small step in this direction could be considered far more credible by the external investors, the governments too a certain extent but most importantly by the masses, when compared to non-family businesses. This is because, when for generations, a family firm becomes synonymous to a line of business, it automatically is discerned as a symbol of credibility as even the masses ap-

prehend that this specific firm might not do anything wrong to damage its own generations worth of reputation. This argument is supported by Cordeiro et al. (2023) who posit that even in the midst of institutional gaps, family businesses are more probable to overcome the negative effects of distrust, insecurity and uncertainty. Further, the investments required for CSR may also be less since family businesses' socially responsible endeavors are seen as genuine by a variety of stakeholders, given their long link with significant philanthropy.

One could also argue that family firms with already a bigger reputation might not feel the need for CSR initiatives or as Rees and Rodionova (2015) suggested that family members might feel CSR to be value destroying, to be a major reason for the CSR-Family Ownership link to be negative. However, from the above section it can be asserted that it is the interaction term, the interplay of CSR*Family Ownership that takes cognizance of trust, security, genuinity and legitimacy which amongst the consumers could create positive associations leading to higher purchases (Brown & Dacin, 1997) and with the governments to win more bids (Flammer, 2018). These consequently rate very high amongst the investors of such (family) firms leading also to better stock prices (Cordeiro & Tewari, 2015).

Finally, the literature review, theoretical foundation and analysis of the CSR*Family Ownership interaction term for H2 of this study are in harmony, thereby confirming that the interaction term is stronger for Collectivistic countries as compared to the Individualistic countries. This could be easily attributed to the inherent in-group collectivistic approach by family firms (J. Chen & Liu, 2022) which could be more immanent in collectivistic countries. Further, Dow and McGuire (2016) suggest that although overly dominant family ownership could work against the family firm, family businesses are ingrained in both cultural and other informal qualities, such as fairness, as well as in the official institutions of the capital market and regulatory settings.

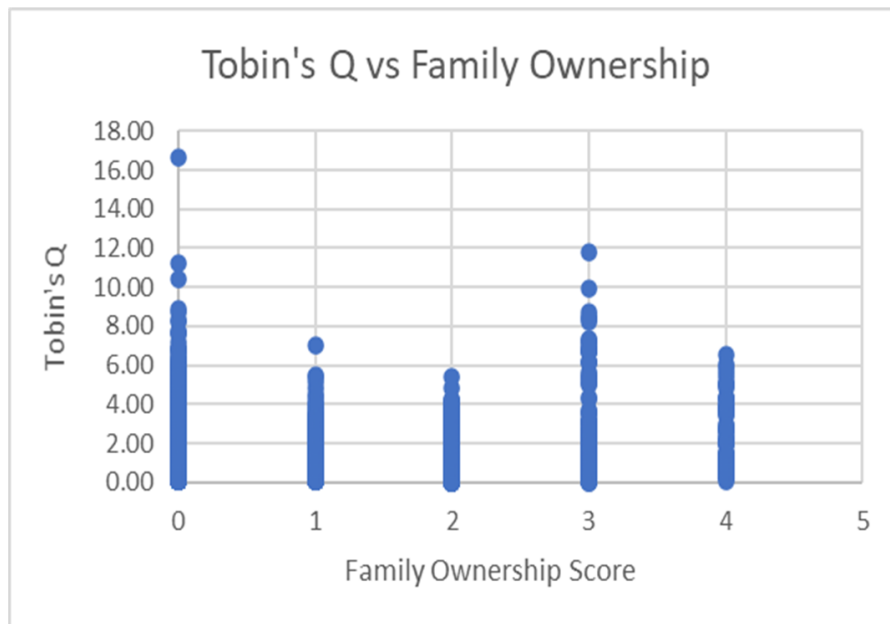


Figure 6: Scatter-plot for Tobin's Q vs Family Ownership

6.2. Managerial Implications

As evident from the above analysis, Tobin's Q is worse when the Family Ownership is more than 80% as compared to an ownership near 55% to 80%. Here, combining the conclusion about how even lesser investments in CSR by family firms are found more legitimate by the external stakeholders and consumers, and the fact that over-dominance of family ownership penalises the firm, this study proposes to insinuate a very immanent recommendation for family firms, which would be to shed-off some of their ownership to non-family members, to be supine within the 55% to 80% bracket and still be known as a family controlled firm. This could result in better negotiations, better risk-taking approaches, more objective strategy towards the benefits of the firm (over the family), merit-based selections to the top management attracting better candidates into the firm subsequently leading to innovations, attracting more wealth from outside investors, consequently improving firm's evaluations.

More importantly, (to differentiate from non-family firms, which have a similar scatter plot has score 3 firms) with the firm still being known as a family business, the firm could leverage the virtues of trustworthiness and legitimacy by boosting their CSR initiatives and thereby allowing the cognizance of the interaction term yield better FP. Also as seen in the precursor analysis, with better ESG based compensations (now with non-family member executives too), the CSR performance would further improve leading to a domino effect with better FP.

6.3. Theoretical Implications

Although there is a similar research about the moderating role of family ownership in the CSR-FP relationship by Yeon et al. (2021), their probing is limited to the hospitality sector in North America. This study not only covers a diversity

of sectors (sector-firm count) but also is across 35 countries. This inclusion of a number of sectors makes this study stimulating for an extensive readership. There is also the viewpoint of culture involved wherein the research question of the study is examined across Hofstede's cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism. This study thereby is a novel approach to combine both the Stakeholder theory as well as the Institutional theory. Also, this study aims at understanding the CSR*Family Ownership interaction term across the dynamics of culture in a very recent time period of analysis, i.e. the recent decade, counting on the claim of culture not being a steady phenomenon (Henri et al., 2017). Finally, the study considers not to measure family ownership as a binary construct but rather scores every firm on a scale of 0 to 4 depending upon the degree of family ownership, also giving room to understand at least on a surface level as to how overly-dominant family firms may face the grunt of the market, thereby providing a few take-aways for managers of family firms.

6.4. Limitations and Scope for future research

Acknowledging the limitations of the study, the first point in this regard would be the lack of availability of data from the Thomson Reuters database. The count of more than 439 firms post the different criteria of eliminations would have made the analysis more robust. Further, as earlier noted, Tobin's Q is a very dynamic variable to measure FP and thereby to control for more factors, the study also attempted to include data like R&D expenses and a more bifurcated view of expenses viz. operations, marketing, etc. However, the firm count reduced tremendously as the information, for instance, about R&D expenses for a lot of firm-year combinations were missing. Thereby to uplift the firm count to a substantial

figure, the study withdrew from considering the aforementioned variables. Similarly, the country count, especially for the African continent is very low in the study, only one (South Africa) to be precise.

Secondly, the study has considered a more dynamic measurement of the degree of family ownership instead of a binary construct. Here, a manual approach is taken to allocate the score from 0 to 4. This potentially creates room to probe the method a little as setting cut-offs for the scores (i.e. a score of 3 for 55% to 80% ownership) means clustering of data which may lead to biased results. However, as a counter-argument, this also paves way for more research on classification methods for similar constructs.

Finally, as suggested also by Yeon et al. (2021), the Tobin's Q is susceptible to Endogeneity. However, the fixed effects model used in the study could be counted as a better estimator for such variables as suggested by Hausman (1978) and by Bliese et al. (2020).

Y. Wang et al. (2020) posit that the magnitude (and/or the direction) of the effect of CSR across empirical research will systematically vary as a result of different assessment approaches for FP. This thereby presents a scope to research for another alternative to Tobin's Q to not only confirm if and how the the relationships change but to possibly eradicate any possibility of statistical issues like Endogeneity. Further, this study approached a cross-country analysis with firms and the cultures of their respective headquarters. According to Waldman et al. (2006), a global company's stakeholder-based CSR ideals and practices may be robust, which is consistent with high collectivism and low power distance. This thereby presents the opportunity to research on the mitigation strategies to not deteriorate the CSR propensity when the subsidiaries of such global firms operate in a more individualistic and high power distance cultures.

Lastly, Dekker and Hasso (2016) opine that family businesses in their budding phase may place less emphasis on the environmental responsibilities, and emphasize more on growth and development. Therefore, this study proposes an area of scrutiny in the subject of family firms, to understand how different generations of the family approach running the business, precisely around which generations do the idea of CSR, philanthropy become more prominent for branding and reputation building. One approach in this proposal would also be to interview 1st gen - 2nd gen - 3rd gen family business owners to have a qualitative understanding of their approach, especially when the dynamics of culture are involved.

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Unforeseen Succession - Identity Change Amongst Lateral Entrants in Family Firms

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Abstract

Due to the increasing globalization of today's world, descendants of family firms are often drawn to the unlimited opportunities outside their premises and no longer see their future workplace or the core of their identity within the family organization. However, this can lead to a rude awakening if so-called unforeseen events, which can range from death or illness of a family member to intra-family conflicts, changes in the business model and even financial problems, arise. This thesis examines the effects of such unexpected successions on the identity of lateral entrants in family firms and presents a roadmap with practical and theoretical action implications for unplanned successors during the pre-, initial, and post-succession phase.

The analysis of qualitative data from interviews with lateral entrants and experts revealed overlaps in identity constructs and experiences. Before the occurrence of an unforeseen event, lateral entrants already displayed entrepreneurial traits and a willingness to take risks but lacked connection to the family firm and interest in succession. During the initial succession phase, they prioritized rationality, efficient teams, and immediate action over emotional processing. After an average of three years, lateral entrants became confident family entrepreneurs. Furthermore, unforeseen successors showed great interest in arranging their own succession at an early stage in order to pass on what they had learned and counteract crisis situations preventively. In general, the interviewed candidates demonstrated a continuous process of developing their own successor identity, which did not develop disruptively but rather steadily and was characterized by specific milestones shown in the successor roadmap of this thesis.

Keywords: crisis management; family firm succession; Gioia methodology; social identity theory; unforeseen succession

1. Introduction

The sense of belonging has been one of the basic needs of human beings since the beginning of time and is nowadays commonly linked to the term of *identity*. When thinking about identification in the context of family firms, the individual elements of identity regarding the owner family and the actual firm are commonly seen as obvious intersection. Moreover, this presumed thinking automatically leads the public to consider the intergenerational succession in family firms as an implicit matter. Nevertheless, this is not always the case.

In today's fast-moving environment with high academic standards and ongoing globalization, descendants of family firm owners are drawn to the unlimited opportunities outside of their commonly reclusive facility grounds, and do not necessarily see the core of their identity in the family organization.

However, this can lead to a rude awakening as soon as sudden complications relating to predecessors or the firm itself arise. These so-called *unforeseen events* can range from death or sickness of predecessors, conflicts within the family, change of business model to financial problems of the firm. In the case of these adverse events, the next generation of family firms is often called in to take over the company and solve the occurred issue, ultimately leading to an *unexpected succession via lateral entry* of the descendants.

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1.1. Problem Definition and Objectives

When stepping into the family firm as a lateral entrant, successors enter the organization in an exceptional state of crisis. During this time, lateral entrants not only have to deal with their own emotional challenges regarding this event but also need to keep the future of the family firm, its employees, and its legacy in mind. While discovering this foreign area, unforeseen successors have to adapt quickly and experience an immensely steep learning curve, which affects their whole being and provokes an inevitable transition.

Nevertheless, this can go in both directions – unforeseen successors either thrive or fail in this unusual mission. Just recently Verena Bahlsen, who is known to be the heiress of the “biscuit empire” Bahlsen Group and joined the organization after founding her own gastronomic venture, published an official statement on the platform LinkedIn, which announced her withdrawal from the executive board of the company. In her letter to the public, she admitted to not having been the best version of herself during the succession due to feeling insecure, overwhelmed, and scared in many situations (Bahlsen, 2022). This case shows that it is not always possible for individuals to integrate and identify themselves with the family firm despite their upbringing. Therefore, the investigation of this research project focuses on the impact of lateral entry related to an unexpected event on the identity of the unforeseen family firm successor, ultimately solving the research question “How does the identity of successors in family firms change in case of a lateral entry due to an unforeseen event?”.

1.2. Course of the Investigation

In order to find an answer to the mentioned research question, I will first start by outlining the theoretical background with the help of a literature review, focusing on the succession due to unforeseen events and identity constructs in family firms. Thereby, I will give a detailed definition of unforeseen events, mention common techniques to manage and prevent these, and elaborate the way of handling such unforeseen events in terms of succession in family firms. Subsequently, I will move along to the topic of identity, starting by explaining the social identity theory (SIT), which I will afterwards further describe in a family firm context. Moreover, I will give scientific insights on how individuals form their identity while growing up and which characteristics and identity components have been shown to be of high occurrence.

As scientific literature on this topic is scarce, primary data was collected in form of interviews with suitable family firm successors to answer the research question. Therefore, the second part of this paper reveals the methodology of gaining and evaluating this data, using the approach of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) and the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) to ensure qualitative rigor and deliver trustworthy results (Guba, 1981). Furthermore, an informational table (Table 1) about the interviewees gives context about the unexpected happenings they have experienced, which could be divided into three categories.

In the third part of this thesis, I describe the findings of eleven semi-structured interviews in terms of successor's identity change induced by lateral entry due to an unforeseen event. As a result, I derive a roadmap for the evolution of successor identity and give theoretical and practical implications to ensure a smooth identity transition.

2. Theoretical Background

The following literature review will start by investigating the nature of unforeseen events, followed by general approaches of managing and preventing such events. Afterwards, the occurrence and handling of unexpected happenings in family firms will be highlighted. The second part of the literature review will focus on identity constructs in family firms, which will be related to the social identity theory and further analyzed in context of social identity in organizations and early character development within owner families.

2.1. Succession due to Unforeseen Events

Scientific research on the succession due to unexpected happenings is rather sparse, therefore this chapter focuses on merging scholarly findings about unforeseen events with the topic of unplanned succession in family firms.

2.1.1. Nature and Consequences of Unforeseen Events

According to England et al. (2008), “an unforeseen event is a surprise that causes a ‘shock’ and its occurrence remains uncertain” (p. 1043). These events can take place in various contexts, ranging from medical emergencies, for instance sickness or death, to economic or social circumstances, for instance the financial crisis in 2008 or the terror attack concerning the world trade center in 2001. However, Rundmo (2018) argues that unexpected events can have negative or positive consequences, stating that a positive outcome is usually linked to “improvements in quality of life, well-being, and happiness” (p. 56). Nevertheless, researchers have generally reached consent towards narrowing down the definition of unforeseen events to happenings with strictly negative outcomes. As a result, literature regarding unexpected events mainly focuses on management techniques and prevention models to limit the occurrence of such events as their impact extends from an individual level to whole communities.

2.1.2. General Management and Prevention of Unforeseen Events

Oftentimes, specific risk analysis, information-processing models, or interaction and communication techniques are discussed as preventive approaches regarding unexpected events. A basic concept of preventing unexpected events is simply learning from the past and linking causal factors to past happenings to obtain a pattern of reasons for unforeseen incidents. Risk analysis is taking the preventive potential one

step further by including harmful factors which could potentially happen, “irrespective of whether or not an accident has already taken place” (Rundmo, 2018, p. 58). In the case of these highly complex risk analyses, technical and operational data must be collected, maintained, and checked constantly to ensure reliability (Rundmo, 2018).

While commonly used models like the human reliability and information-processing model are not transmissible in the context of unforeseen succession, the causal sequence and process model has some attributes, which can help to mitigate crises. For instance, the domino approach, which is seen as the basis of the causal sequence and process model, examines social and environmental factors, personality, and risk behavior in connection to an unexpected event with negative outcome. Furthermore, the Event and Causal Factor Charting (ECFC) and the Event and Causal Factor Analysis (ECFA) technique can support analysts in finding sequences ultimately causing an unforeseen event (Rundmo, 2018).

A crisis management concept used in the context of unexpected happenings in mainly Scandinavian countries, primarily in Norway, is so-called *samhandling*, also referred to as *samhandling the unforeseen (SUR)* (Torgersen, 2018). The term translates to “collaboration”, “cooperation”, and “coordination” and encourages participants to include trust, assurance, clarity, and tolerance in the problem-solving process of unforeseen events (Torgersen & Steiro, 2018). *Samhandling* can be practiced in a sequential, parallel, or synchronous matter depending on the situation of crisis. Additionally, these forms of *samhandling* can be combined to reach a maximum efficiency in dealing with unexpected events. However, a higher-level management has to be included in the sequential and parallel process in order to ensure continuous information exchange and communication between teams (Carlström, 2018).

When investigating project management concepts of unexpected events, Söderholm (2008) identified four important practices to stay on course. Firstly, the ability to implement action patterns, which deal with unforeseen happenings and execute quick, short-term, and on-site problem-solving is helpful to gain time and find a solution in a swift manner. Secondly, detailed meeting schedules and short-term coordination should be used to ensure monitoring and constant information exchange between teams and team members, which simplifies problem-solving during an unforeseen event. Thirdly, detachment strategies are named as useful concept to ensure the continuation of a project or process despite difficulties due to an unexpected event. Lastly, negotiation skills to communicate and correspond clearly with stakeholders, clients, and other important parties of an organization are an important capability to preserve business despite unplanned situations (Söderholm, 2008).

However, research shows a frequent mismatch between theories and models, which may lead to unsatisfying results (Rundmo, 2018). As stated by England et al. (2008), unforeseen events can be surprising and shocking, resulting in uncertainty for the parties concerned. Generally, scientific research shows that the most common approach to manage

unforeseen events is a structural and causal analysis. The focus of these technical concepts is mainly on gathering data to develop a precise forecasting model, which is of high importance to prevent similar future events. Nevertheless, the development of action implications and hands-on step-by-step programs is often neglected or formulated in a very general manner.

2.1.3. The Case of Succession due to Unforeseen Events in Family Firms

When talking about unexpected happenings in family firms, the link between critical situations and the subsequent succession of the next generation comes to mind right away. Unfortunately, the succession process in the case of an adverse event is not executed as structured and theoretically clear-cut as successors would wish for. While 43 percent of company transfers are due to reasons of age, 57 percent are caused by unforeseen events like accidents, death, or change of occupation of the predecessor (Koeder & Saulheimer, 2015), which is a substantial amount. However, a study by Prügl and Rauschendorfer (2020) showed that only 18.5 percent of families filed a fixed successor plan in written form within their business.

While unexpected events in family firms naturally affect the respective owner family, employees, and other stakeholders, these happenings can also affect the macroeconomic environment as the presence of family firms are an impactful part of the German business landscape. With an estimated statistical number of around 3.4 million family firms in Germany (Wolter & Sauer, 2017), German family firms, and thereby succession and future outlooks of the firm, play a big part in the development of Germany’s economy. Moreover, Kay et al. (2018) assess the number of German family firms, which had to be handed over to the next generation in the time period from 2018 to 2022, to be around 150,000 with 2.4 million employees. Additionally, the Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic has raised awareness to the fact that family firm incumbents are mortal and demonstrated challenges of an unplanned, rapid succession (De Massis & Rondi, 2020). However, succession management has become more and more of a challenge in recent years as qualified successors, who are motivated to take over, are rare while the need for them is growing (Schwartz, 2018, 2019).

Managing the succession process in family firms can be challenging, especially in the case of the surprising and abrupt nature of an unforeseen event. According to Sharma et al. (2001) the succession process is defined as “actions and events that lead to the transition of leadership from one family member to another in family firms. The two family members may be part of the nuclear or extended family and may or may not belong to the same generation” (p. 6). Despite the scientific propositions on succession plans being vast and providing “regular” successors with three-, four-, five-, or even seven-step programs (Halter & Schröder, 2012), the offerings on unexpected succession plans in terms of emergency actions are scarce. While general recommendations regarding a planned succession can be translated

to unforeseen successors in some ways, this chapter focuses on scientific findings regarding unplanned succession due to unexpected happenings like the loss of a predecessor.

In literature, adverse events like a sudden departure of the predecessor due to sickness or death can be categorized as family-induced (Süss-Reyes & Fuetsch, 2018) and is often labeled as trigger point for immediate succession planning. A study by De Massis et al. (2008) identified the “unexpected, premature loss of the incumbent” (p. 188) to be one of six individual, preventive factors towards intra-family succession as the death may occur at a unfitting time for the successor. Additionally, the prerequisite to plan in advance for an effective succession process (Sharma & Rao, 2000) is not assured in case of an unforeseen event.

During the succession planning process, the importance of dealing with emotional and communicative challenges must be taken into account (Halter & Schröder, 2012). Succession in family firms can bring emotional and relational aspects into the process (Decker et al., 2016) as family members may mourn the loss of their relative, or incumbents may suffer from role loss (Brun de Pontet et al., 2007), which may elicit potential conflicts in the process of succession (Süss-Reyes & Fuetsch, 2018).

In their model from 2001, Sharma et al. depict six initial determinants of the quality of succession process in family firms, which include perceived family harmony, the fit between successor’s career interests and the business, and the trust in successor’s abilities and intentions. These determinants can be transferred to the process of unforeseen succession. Although, scientific research concerning the unforeseen succession in family firms is rare, there is a limited number of studies regarding unplanned transitions on executive levels in non-family firms, which can be considered a related topic. For instance, Hall (1995) recommends an interim administration to help with a clear strategic direction and ongoing support for the successor during the transition.

In summary, this chapter about unforeseen events in the context of family firms demonstrated management tools for dealing with unforeseen events and succession in general. As literature on adverse events in family firms is scarce, findings of the available scholarly research and of related topics were transferred to the specific case of unexpected happenings in family firms.

2.2. Identity Constructs in Family Firms

Social identification is a widely distributed concept, which is part of our everyday lives. The categorization of our social environment is a natural trait, which is linked to human instinct (Harwood, 2020). This chapter highlights the social identity theory by Turner and Tajfel, followed by a comparison of social identity in family firms versus non-family firms. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of early identity development amongst family firm successors.

2.2.1. Definition and Scope of the Social Identity Theory

The concept of the social identity theory was first established in the early 1970s, when researchers found that people have a desire to differentiate themselves from others in form of group memberships. Additionally, research participants showed their consent to sacrifice rewards if their status did not change from being superior to members of other groups (Harwood, 2020). Based on these observations, Henri Tajfel and John Turner developed the SIT in the late 1970s, which depicted the motivations and tendencies of individuals in terms of intergroup discrimination. In the course of the examination, SIT showed that individuals naturally categorize themselves and other individuals into groups, which can lead to certain feelings depending on the group membership. As soon as an individual belongs to a certain group, which is referred to as “ingroup”, this individual is keen on receiving positive feelings from that specific ingroup. This can, for instance, be attained by achieving a perceived feeling of superiority to other groups, so-called “outgroups” (Harwood, 2020). Consequently, this pursuit of differentiation automatically leads to negative links and prejudices towards the outgroups, resulting in discrimination. The cause of this behavior has been further supported by the individual’s wish for a positive self-concept and a reduction of uncertainty in terms of self-categorization and intergroup differentiation (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Harwood, 2020; Hogg, 2000).

Naturally, it can occur that individuals are not satisfied with their categorization in a certain group. In this case, there are several strategies, which were found to be used by individuals in case they wish to leave and change their allocated group. The social mobility strategy is observed when individuals leave their ingroup for a group with higher perceived social value due to their lack of identification with the prior group, permeable boundaries, or stable intergroup hierarchies (Harwood, 2020). However, not all individuals choose to leave their group instantly when feeling uncertain about their shared identity. The social change belief system, also known as social competition, enables individuals within one ingroup to collectively question the state of their group and support the advancement of the ingroup’s social hierarchical position, ultimately reaching a better standing and reinforcing the positive feelings toward the ingroup. In contrast to the social mobility strategy, the social change strategy is applied when people identify well with their ingroup, boundaries are in place and the group is seen as unstable. The social creativity strategy balances these two contrasting strategies out by meeting in the middle – this concept describes the process of individuals finding alternative skills and advantages of their ingroup in comparison to outgroups, which leaves them with a positive feeling, for instance arguing that their groups’ strength does not lie in leadership skills, however the creativity within the ingroup is higher (Harwood, 2020; Tajfel & Turner, 1978).

Aside from these strategies, the self-categorization theory can be seen as an extension of SIT according to which individuals concentrate on becoming a member of specific

groups in a specific setting or context. This can even be expanded to the so-called communication accommodation theory or ethnolinguistic identity theory, which investigates the linguistic dimensions of SIT and the reasons for emphasizing or avoiding certain accents, dialects, or communication styles (Giles, 2016; Giles & Johnson, 1987; Harwood, 2020). However, the main theory examined and applied in this research project is SIT, which focuses on intergroup behavior and integration while also including the concept of positive self-perception and self-categorization. In summary, SIT has supported the in-depth understanding of the connection between social groups and identity (Waldkirch, 2015).

2.2.2. Social Identity in Organizations – Non-Family vs. Family Firms

When examining the topic of social identity in family firms, the definition of organizational image and the correlation between organizational identity and social identity is a prerequisite. As mentioned by Zimmermann et al. (2012), the theory by Tajfel and Turner (1978) has had a strong influence on the investigation of the correlation between the identification of employees and their organization. To reach a conformity between an employee's self-concept and an organizational identity, the attributes and beliefs of both parties need to overlap (Dutton et al., 1994; Pratt, 1998; Zimmermann et al., 2012). According to Pratt (1998), employees are especially motivated to identify with their organization in case being a part of the organization presents itself to be attractive, membership increases the positive self-concept of employees, or if organizations clearly differentiate themselves from other entities. Additionally, the external image of organizations is of high importance as employees identify well with organizations which are valued by outside parties (Dutton et al., 1994).

Gioia et al. (2000) argues that organizational identity is a dynamic body, which benefits from the concept of adaptive instability in times of change as identity and image are highly complex attributes of an organization. The fluidity of identity can be distinguished into enduring identity, meaning the identity does not change over time, and continuous identity, which remains having the same core values while adapting to new interpretations and circumstances over time (Gioia et al., 2000). The concept of fluidity within identities does not only apply to organizations but also to individuals as identity on the level of individuals actively derives from interactions with other people, even resulting in individuals showing different identities in different situations and roles (Gioia et al., 2000; James, 2007; Weick, 1995).

Family firms play an interesting role in the context of social and organizational identity. As defined by Chua et al. (1999) a family firm is "a business governed and/or managed with the intention to shape and pursue the vision of the business held by a dominant coalition controlled by members of the same family or a small number of families in a manner that is potentially sustainable across generations of the family or families" (p. 25). In the case of family firms, the existence of two identities has to be taken into account,

as the interplay between identity of the firm and the identity of the family both heavily influence the main identity of the family business (Wielsma & Brunninge, 2019). This form of hybrid-identity-organization (HIO) is highly complex, usually mutually exclusive, and presents benefits such as strong, continuous organizational culture, unique values, authenticity, and distinction (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013; Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008; Whetten et al., 2014; Wielsma & Brunninge, 2019). Furthermore, family firms are often perceived to have a stable image, rooted deeply in the company's traditions and history. However, these advantages also come with potential downsides as the focus and integration of two identities can result in conflict and loss of focus (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008) in case of a discrepancy between the family identity and firm identity (Wielsma & Brunninge, 2019). Therefore, the overlap of both identities is an important factor for family firms to be successful. Additionally, the presence of so-called socioemotional wealth is a distinguishing factor of family firms as this attribute influences management processes, strategic choices, and organizational governance of the family firm (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2011).

Past literature explains the influence of owner families on family firms to be an important asset as the values and beliefs, which are a core part of the organizational identity, cannot easily be replicated by competitors (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2013; Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Wielsma & Brunninge, 2019), ultimately giving a unique competitive advantage to the family business. According to Salvato et al. (2019), the five core defining features of family firms are ownership, management and governance, transgenerational intention, generational involvement, and perceived identity. Especially the factor of perceived identity can be leveraged on an organizational level by fostering identity work, reputation, and organizational legitimacy amongst family members, non-family employees, and external stakeholders.

A literary study by Bettinelli et al. (2022) aimed to detect forms of identity in family firms found in previous scientific research. As a result, researchers found four second-order themes, ranging from individual identity to group (family), organization, and multilevel identities. When it came to the different clusters of identity work in family firms, Bettinelli et al. found that the individual identity work, identity work in leadership positions, in non-family employees, and on group and organizational level were existent. Furthermore, the study emphasized the difference between the individual identification with the family and the individual identification with the business. This showed the high complexity of identity constructs in family firms from a multi-level perspective.

In summary, this section showed that the match of family identity and firm identity in family businesses is of high importance as the dimensions of identity are way more complex than in non-family organizations. In case of a discrepancy, consequences do not only impact the owner family, but also non-family employees and other stakeholders.

2.2.3. Early Identity Development Amongst Family Firm Successors

The influence of owner families on family firms has been a frequent topic of investigation in the past. However, the influence of the family business on the development of the individual's identity, who is part of the founding family, is not to be neglected. When constructing an identity, individuals try to connect their self-perceived identity with their social identity, which can happen consciously or subconsciously. Scientific research shows that identity work is related to emotional experiences as disruptions, for instance career change, in individuals' self-perception can trigger identity changes. As a result, the process of identity work can be described as an emotional process itself (Winkler, 2018).

When investigating common identity characteristics of successors, a study by Sharma and Rao (2000) showed that certain common attributes of successors can be identified, for instance, sense of commitment, ability to gain respect, integrity, and competence in terms of education and business experience. Furthermore, family firm principals showed behavior patterns of trying to avoid risky decisions as their welfare is bound to the single entity of the family firm (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2011). Additionally, the research of Sharma and Irving (2005) focused on further commonalities in behavior and investigated specific motivations of successors in family firms. While successors showed the same focal behavior, the reasons for behavior showed fundamental differences. As a result, four commitment types, namely affective, normative, calculative, and imperative commitment, could be identified and showed different reasons of the descendants wanting to join the firm, which could be classified as internal factors related to emotions or external factors regarding career choice.

When investigating the identity development of members of the owner family, a major part of identity construction on an individual and family level is building a legacy through storytelling, which is achieved when a story is continuously passed on across generations (Stone, 1988). As a result of storytelling, family members are left with a multi-generational perspective on their ancestors' history, which can influence the identity formation and the emergence of certain identity patterns (Thompson et al., 2009). The way stories are told, which specific tales are highlighted, and how meaning is given to the individual stories reveals the underlying core values of a family while simultaneously giving insights about the individual's evaluation of certain narratives (Thompson et al., 2009). Furthermore, not only the way family stories are being told affect individuals in their identity construction, the way these family members themselves tell stories about their family and themselves are part of building their identity as well (Redman, 2005). However, it is important to note that storytelling is an ongoing subjective matter, with stories being told and recited various times over long timeframes. Furthermore, family legacies can have both a positive and negative effect on the identity construction of family members (Thompson et al., 2009).

In 2009, Thompson et al. examined the influence of fam-

ily legacies on individual and family identities on emerging adults and the intergenerational process of sustaining or modifying family stories. Their analysis of third generation family members between the ages of 18 and 25 years, showed that attributes like hardworking, care for others, and cohesion within the family were reported as positive family legacies. Additionally, participants were firm and clear in giving their answers and showed pride in these values and their identity. In contrast, negative legacies were idiosyncratic, and participants had a hard time to identify and illustrate them effectively. Thompson et al. also noted that interviewees attempted to change the narrative from negative to positive in their storytelling by emphasizing that the negative legacies eventually led to positive consequences. In their study, the researchers further mentioned the contextual factor of distance as meaningful, as all participants were young adults living apart from their families without having started their own family in the timeframe of the interviews. This was significant as the interviewees were removed from their usual family environment, which gave them the opportunity to reflect on the influence of their family legacy. When asked about the impact of the positive legacies on them, participants stated that they embraced their legacies and integrated them in their individual identity and daily lives. The attribute of working hard, for instance, was used by a participant to illustrate how this legacy positively influenced his work ethic in college. However, participants were more likely to reject negative legacies and made an effort to seek and create a new family legacy driven by opposite behavior and their individual actions.

The findings of the study by Thompson et al. (2009) demonstrate the link between family legacy and SIT. As shown by the results, individuals were satisfied with their membership in the ingroup as long as a positive legacy could be detected. As soon as a negative legacy was displayed, individuals looked for ways to enhance the legacies by extending it with positive consequences and learnings drawn from the negative story. This shows the caused distress in case of a mismatch between the individual's perceived self-concept and its environment (Wielsma & Brunninge, 2019).

Besides the potential successors' own reflections about the interplay between their identity and the family business, the wish for succession within the family is deeply rooted in the concept of socioemotional wealth in the owner family (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2011). However, potential successors have to ask themselves if they are ready and eligible to work in such a position when talking about willingness to succeed (McCarthy, 1996). Even though certain similarities in characteristics, behavior, and identity development could be detected as described above, not all successors have the desire of eligibility to become good family firm successors.

In the future, the process of non-family firm managers' socialization and the investigation of reasons why successors can or cannot identify with the family organization could be supported by combining SIT with past and future research (Waldkirch, 2015).

3. Methodology

As the goal of this investigation is to deliver findings from qualitative research true to reality, which can be used as action implications and make sense to the person studied, the grounded theory approach (Boyчук Duchscher & Morgan, 2004), which was first developed by Glaser and Strauss and then further adapted by Strauss and Corbin (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019), was applied. Additionally, the data collection, analysis, and theory development were refined by implementing the Gioia method.

3.1. Research Design

To investigate the stated research question, information was obtained by executing single, semi-structured interviews held by one interviewer with lateral entrants or industry experts in recorded one-on-one conversations or via Zoom or Microsoft Teams meetings. The general outline was given by an interview guideline, which was sent to interview candidates prior to the conversation. Furthermore, the Gioia methodology was used to include and ensure qualitative rigor (Gioia et al., 2013), which resulted in a data coding tree.

During the course of the interviews, I was keen on avoiding a detailed description of the used theoretical theories, rather emphasizing the importance of freedom of speech and transparency for the interviewees. As proposed by Gioia et al. (2013), this approach was utilized to achieve valid data and limit bias as much as possible while providing a space for new insights and concepts. The interviewees were thereby seen as knowledgeable agents, who were able to describe their thoughts and their perception of organizational realities in a way that made sense to themselves, while also being “adequate at the level of theoretical insight” (Gioia, 2021, p. 23). As a result, the systematically constructed data coding tree based on tandem reporting using a multifaceted view showed the links between informant and researcher, ultimately creating a grounded theory with granted qualitative rigor and high-quality qualitative research (Gioia, 2021; Gioia et al., 2013).

3.2. Sampling

The information was conducted by interviewing 11 candidates, nine of them being German-based successors, which experienced an unforeseen event within the family as cause of their succession, followed by a lateral entry. Additionally, two expert interviews with experienced consultants took place to ensure an outside perspective of commonly seen cases, which allowed a form of “cross-checking” statements in the analysis. The generational background ranged from second to fifth generation while the founding history of the family firms went back between 23 to 131 years. The examined companies connected to the interviewed successors (excluding the expert interviewees) had an average of 715 employees (Table 1). The candidates had a median successor experience of 14 years, depending on their year of entry.

All interviewees were linked to unforeseen events within their families and were specifically selected to ensure valuable insights. The unexpected events could be classified into 3 categories: (a) Sickness/death of parent, (b) emotional distress of predecessor, and (c) opportunity of career/business advancement. While scenario (a), which was experienced by five interviewees, is clear per description, event (b) and (c) will be further explained in the following.

The situation of emotional distress was lived through by two interviewees. In these cases, the parents of the lateral successors found themselves in a dichotomy, the first case being one parent trying to sell the company but backing out last minute each time as he could not cut the emotional ties to his business. Naturally, this led to conflicts within the family firm, which was finally taken over by the interviewee, even though she did not plan on it. The second case of emotional distress was experienced by a predecessor, who depended on the implementation of a new software system, which was vital for his business. However, he was in desperate need of someone who could build and lead a new team for this digital necessity. Therefore, his daughter, who initially had different plans, was asked to step in, and supported her father in the transformation, ultimately joining the company full-time.

The unforeseen event in terms of the opportunity to advance the successor’s career and the family firm’s business was the case with two interviewees. Both did not plan on joining the firm and followed their own career paths, respectively gaining work experience for around ten years prior to their lateral entry. However, when a chance for new establishments and expansions arose unexpectedly for the business, both candidates took the chance and joined the firm quite abruptly.

Potential interviewees were detected via existing contacts or desk research, which consisted of precisely scanning through newsletter articles, books, LinkedIn posts, and podcasts related to the research topic. Candidates were contacted via email, phone, or LinkedIn and supported the identification of further potential interview candidates in some instances, also referred to as snowball sampling.

3.3. Data Collection Methods

To gather information about the highly emotional topic of unforeseen events and succession, the interviews were structured to gain valuable insights and new perspectives from experiences of the candidates. Therefore, the interview guide consisted of a chronological sequence of questions, which started with a short introduction, followed by the pre-succession state, the happening of the unforeseen event, the initial phase of succession, and the post-initial phase of succession. In total, two interview guides were produced as the questions for successors focused on their experiences and emotions while the guide for experts aimed at gaining insights into their observations and expertise. Example questions for successors were for instance “How would you describe your relationship with the family business while growing up?”, “Were you able to quickly identify with the

Table 1: Interviewee Sampling Information

Interviewee	Position	Generation	Year of Entry	Unforeseen Event	Company	Industry	Founding Year	Employees
A	Managing director	2	1996	Sickness/ Death of parent	A	Facility management	1967	5000
B	Managing director	3	2003	Sickness/ Death of parent	B	Pharmaceuticals	1956	180
C	Managing director	3	2019	Sickness/ Death of parent	C	Office supplies and furniture retail	1975	50
D	Shareholder	2	2022	Sickness/ Death of parent	D	Property management/ Family office	2000	143
E	Managing director	4	1984	Sickness/ Death of parent	E	Gastronomy and catering	1892	380
F	Managing director Shareholder	3	1998	Emotional distress of predecessor	F	Food packaging	1938	100
G	Head of central billing preparation	5	2022	Emotional distress of predecessor	G	Medical supplies	1912	430
H	Managing director Shareholder	2	2014	Opportunity of career/business advancement	H	Real estate development	1984	70
I	Managing director Shareholder	2	2019	Opportunity of career/business advancement	I	Real estate development	1997	80
J	Chief representative (<i>Expert interview</i>)	N/A	2008	N/A	J	Consulting services	2007	14
K	Founder and CEO (<i>Expert interview</i>)	N/A	2010	N/A	K	Consulting services	2019	6

idea of being the new representative or 'face of the company?', "What were your first thoughts and feelings when you entered the facility as a successor?", and "How has your leadership style and confidence changed compared to your initial succession phase?", while example questions for experts were as follows "From your experience, what are common unforeseen events that lead to the lateral entry as successor?", "From your experience, please kindly describe the initial advisory process for lateral succession in the case of an unforeseen event.", and "When reflecting upon cases, which identity changes or changes in character of successors have you observed in the past?". All interview questions are attached to this paper as Appendix A and Appendix B.

The questions raised were aiming at not only coming to know the individual candidate's story and situation as the unforeseen events differed from case to case, but they were also designed to focus on the identity development and relationship change of the interviewee, which was elaborated in every life phase to ensure the possibility of a detailed analysis starting from early childhood to current state of mind. Despite the semi-structured design of the interviews, the interview had a common thread to enable a standardized comparison for evaluation.

The interviews had a duration between 22 and 61 minutes depending on the availability of the candidate. All interviews were conducted in German and recorded after obtaining verbal approval of the interviewees. The resulting audio files were transcribed with the software TRINT, which resulted in 118 pages of qualitative material.

3.4. Data Analysis

During the process of performing the first order analysis, the prerequisite of basing the findings and conceptualization on the informant's experience was fulfilled at all times to avoid so-called "theoretical arrogance" (Gioia, 2021). The initial classification of codes, categories, and specific terms was executed in an open coding approach according to Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan (2004), preferably using in-vivo codes, which indicate that the coding term has its origin in the data, followed by a search for similarities and differences within the specific categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Additionally, I used MAXQDA to verify codes and allocate specific statements to coding categories.

After structuring the informants' statements, I carried out a metalevel-analysis – also referred to as "gestalt analysis" by Gioia (2021) – during which I considered the first-order level of the interviewees, the second-order level of theoretical research, and the level of the larger narrative. This resulted in an informative description of the organizational phenomena and a visual data structure including first-order concepts, second-order concepts, aggregate dimensions, and informant quotes in form of a data coding tree as depicted in Figure 1 (Gioia, 2021; Gioia et al., 2013). Furthermore, the translation platform DeepL was used to translate interview statements to American English. Example translations are available in Appendix C. Due to reasons of confidentiality, the transcripts are not enclosed in the Appendix.

3.5. Trustworthiness of the Research

As mentioned by Gioia et al., the risk of "being too close and essentially adopting the informant's view" (2013, p. 19) is always present, however this was limited by cross-checking the lateral entrants' testimonies with the statements of the interviewed experts.

While working with case studies during a research project can be very insightful, the legitimacy and credibility of the findings from case studies have often been criticized in literature to be idiosyncratic and impressionistic without a qualitative rigor (Gioia, 2021). In order to emphasize the high importance of the informant's voice, Gioia (2021) suggests the usage of so-called grounded theory, which focuses on the interviewee's experience and his or her understanding of it. By using this method instead of the traditional theory-driven approach, which presupposes assumptions based on existing theories and has been found to be restrictive (Schwarz & Stensaker, 2014), the grounded theory method aims to avoid entrenched structures while enabling new insights and findings (Gioia, 2021).

In terms of evaluating findings and identifying general patterns, the thought of a limited transferability due to the high individuality of each unforeseen case comes to mind. This predicament was solved by interviewing at least two candidates per unforeseen event classification. Thereby, a detailed provision of background data and contextual factors ensured a possible transfer of results (Shenton, 2004). The remaining criteria of trustworthy research by Guba (1981), namely credibility, dependability, and confirmability were fulfilled by, for instance, verifying the eligibility of interview candidates with external sources like close acquaintances and online resources.

4. Findings

The following findings were conducted from statements of 11 interviewees taking part in the research project. From early on, the unforeseen successors showed specific character developments influenced by their situation as children of family business owners, followed by growth through pressure and challenges. Subsequently, the processes of identity change and taking control connected to the lateral entry into the family business could be observed to be a continuous process, starting right from the first day of the succession and lasting to the ongoing post-initial succession phase today. The evaluation of the interviews showed various parallels in the experiences, behavior, coping mechanisms, aspirations, and identity phases of lateral successors, which are further described in the following chapters.

4.1. Growth Over Time

The findings of this chapter represent the tremendous influence of growing up in the entrepreneurial environment of a family firm. This not only led to the development of specific characteristics but also showed the evolutionary process of the relation between lateral entrant and family firm in the

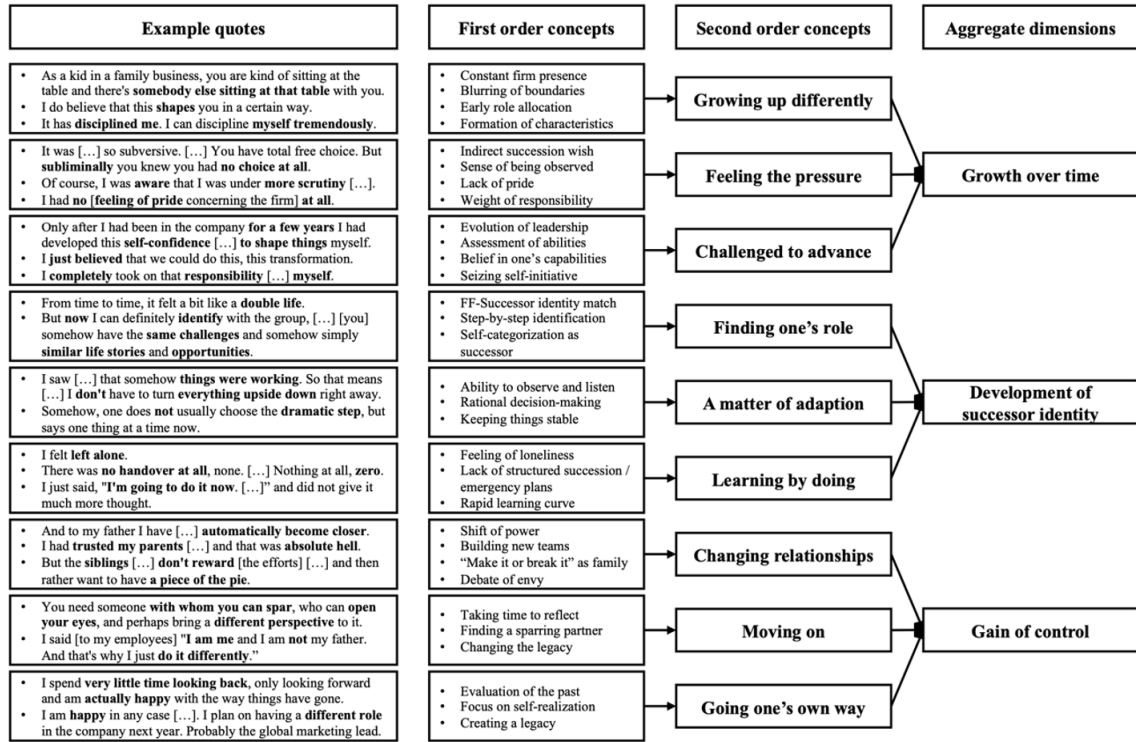


Figure 1: Data Coding Tree

pre-succession phase, during which the interviewee had not developed or even considered having a successor identity yet.

4.1.1. Growing up Differently

Despite the fact that lateral entrants were not planning on acting as successors in the family firm, growing up in entrepreneurial circumstances had always been a part of their lives. As interviewee H stated:

There were always conversations about business, regularly at family dinners, on Sundays, at family gatherings. That was always the point when my mother would say, "Don't start talking business again." Then my father would say, "We are entrepreneurs. Work doesn't stop at 4 p.m. on Friday." (4:38).

Other interviewees confirmed this when mentioning that as “a kid in a family business, you are kind of sitting at the table and there’s somebody else sitting at that table with you” (Interviewee F, 5:39) and that the family business has been present since the start of their lives (Interviewee G, 2:36), especially as owner families often had physical proximity to company grounds (Interviewee G, 5:18), which was further verified by interviewee E, who grew up under similar circumstances (6:20).

The influence of growing up in a family firm household on character building and identity development stood out to all interviewees, who agreed that factors like parenting, upbringing environment, discussion topics, and conversations

about the firm (Interviewee G, 10:32) were formative (Interviewee H, 10:54). However, the impact was evaluated differently by the specific individuals. For instance, interviewee B expressed his gratitude for growing up with his mother in distance to his father, who was controlling the family firm:

It was definitely a bit like the saying "Only mushrooms grow under a strong tree", [...] it was difficult to develop under my father, because he was extremely dominant, both privately and in business. He talked everyone into the ground. Own thinking, and commitment was valued to some extent, but at the same time he torpedoed it by just rolling over everyone. (22:39).

Interviewee F showed regret in “never [having had] the opportunity to really find out what I wanted for myself” (6:11) while being raised to be obedient, quiet, and invisible. Furthermore, candidate F mentioned the development of negative feelings towards the family business while growing up:

I was totally horrified by all these problems [...] and I thought, "Oh god, my parents are so worried, that must be absolutely horrible." [...] Above all, it had a very negative impact on me, because I was simply never important, [...] and I kind of blamed it on the company. (7:36).

Nevertheless, interviewees also recalled the evolution of specific characteristics due to their upbringing and environment, which were mainly perceived as positive. For instance,

interviewee H felt like the bustling of his father motivated him to think about achieving more than just being a classic employee in a corporation (11:22), while interviewee D allocated his distinct sense of responsibility to his family firm background (7:38). Similar to previous statements, interviewee I linked his confidence to give things a try to his father's example of work ethic, especially when observing that projects turned out to be successful (4:26). Furthermore, interviewee F mentioned her ability to "discipline myself tremendously and do everything, even if I don't enjoy it" (8:39), which she labeled as "great achievement by my parents". Interviewee C emphasized noticeable capabilities having to do with handling financial resources and respective risk behavior (6:43), which was confirmed by interviewee I, who recalled:

[I had] experiences where I thought, well, you have to be a bit more made for not being so afraid of money. In both directions – you can lose or you can earn something, you shouldn't have a problem with either. [...] What I always get reflected from the teams I work with is that they say "You are always so relaxed." I can always sleep well. Of course, I'm fully behind all the professional issues that I have to deal with. But they don't stress me out in the sense that I feel under pressure. (26:32).

The relation to risk behavior was verified by expert interviewee J, who observed an excellent understanding of risk and responsibility in children raised by family firm owners (7:52).

The observation that interview candidates pointed out both positive and negative manifestations of characteristics was attested by expert interviewee K:

I believe that there is an imprint that you take with you through socialization, which has an entrepreneurial character. And that can have a positive effect in the sense that those people are particularly good successors or have a particularly great desire to be entrepreneurially active. But it can also be the complete opposite, that someone doesn't want to become a successor for that very reason and says I don't want anything to do with what my parents did. (5:04).

Interviewee E agreed on this perspective of influence, stating that "it's definitely a hard form of socialization" (7:01), verifying the immense impact of growing up as a descendant of family firm owners on character development.

4.1.2. Feeling the Pressure

When asked about feeling the wish for succession by their parents in early adulthood, most candidates remarked that their predecessor used to emphasize their freedom of choice while also subliminally expressing their excitement if a potential succession was discussed. Interviewee B recalled an incident during which his father "wrote a 20-page letter

and told me that he had practically disinherited me" after he could not attend the annual company Christmas party, reflecting that "somewhere [my father] probably did have thoughts that he would like to hand over the company to one or more of his children." (6:09). Moreover, interviewee F stated that her parents "never really expressed [the wish]. It was underlying, more like 'we would like that, but you have total freedom of choice.' But you knew subliminally that you had no choice at all." (2:36). This situation of the indirect wish was further supported by a statement from interviewee G, in which she said that her parents "did express the wish, but they always said you don't have to do this, you can actually do whatever you want." (2:59). Interviewee C complemented the previous statements when explaining that her father, despite giving her the freedom of choice, showed a lack of understanding for her willingness to fight for her place in the world of employment and found it abstruse to choose working for someone else when the opportunity to take part in the family-owned business was present (3:05). This alleged existence of options for potential successors was also observed by expert interviewee K, who declared "that there are certain points of reference and early childhood imprints or socialization patterns that don't just leave things voluntarily" (2:12). These findings are particularly interesting as all candidates felt the indirect wish for succession and nevertheless decided to not go through with following in their parents' footsteps, instead starting their own path of career.

Depending on the individual's sensitivity to the parents' wish, this ongoing, underlying presence of the topic of succession led to some interviewees sensing pressure related to the family firm and feeling observed from their external environment. Interviewee H remembers the realization of being "aware that you are being watched more than a normal guest at a Christmas party" (6:09), further explaining that he knew he "had a role to play" (7:34). Additionally, interviewee C commented that she felt a bit of pressure, especially since the company bore the family name (5:56). However, not all interviewees developed a feeling of pressure, for instance, interviewee G was encouraged to choose her studies after her interests, not after the potential match of the education to the company, which led to her "not really feeling the pressure. Basically, it wasn't there." (3:14). Expert interviewee K raised the point of the existence of internal and external pressure that potential successors have to think about as "one factor is to say can I even deal with the pressure? Am I the one who will lead hundreds of thousands of employees in 2030, 2040 in these crazy times like this? Can I live up to my parents' expectations?" (8:11).

The feeling of pressure was also complemented by the candidates' linked relation to the family firm in early days. Most interviewees showed a positive relation of feelings towards their family business, which often expressed as feeling of pride or responsibility. For instance, interviewee H recalled that:

It was great to see [...] the projects that you have built. That's something tangible. You've already noticed that not everyone has that kind of thing, where the parents somehow employ 100 people and somehow build projects that help shape the city. (8:07).

Interviewee D emphasized two sides of the coin when he talked about being impressed about how well-known, high-ranking managers appreciated and acted personal with his father, however he also questioned how his father was able to deal with all the responsibility coming with these connections (3:36). Other candidates like interviewee G (11:54), E (8:10), and F (7:59) stated to having had no specific feelings of pride or responsibility towards the firm while growing up.

In a practical context, these findings became extremely important when the unforeseen event occurred. While the reasons for the candidates to join the firm as lateral successors in the cases of death and sickness were pretty simple as the core reason was owed to the timely emergency of the event, the decision point for candidates like interviewee F and G, whose event was linked to emotional pressure and despair of their predecessors, had their origin in these early childhood imprints. During her reflection of the reason for her lateral succession, interviewee F recalled:

I felt my father's emotional distress, let me tell you! Well, because he always didn't really want to go through with the sale [of the firm], but somehow never really wanted to express it or say "I'd prefer it if you took over the company", I would have wished [for that]. [...] [This behavior] wasn't actually typical for my father at all, he actually always planned and [...] I think I just said "I'll do it now" [because of my] father's emotional distress. (10:09).

Interviewee G had a similar experience when the family firm underwent a major software change. When her father did not see "anyone who could do this ad hoc" (15:31) and was looking for a trustworthy person (16:03), the candidate recognized that her father was very stressed and decided to support him as much as she could by joining the firm despite having other career plans. This was especially important as she could tell that this was "also a sign for the employees that someone from the family is coming to take on this task" (19:32), ultimately showing responsibility and a strong future for the company.

Generally, the above-mentioned findings show that the feeling of pressure and responsibility can be linked to the interviewees taking on the succession in case of the unexpected. The findings also demonstrate that the relation with the firm, namely feelings of pride about the company and its history, are independent of their decision to step in as all candidates filled the position in case of emergency, no matter if they had a positive, negative, or non-existent relation to the family firm, instead of selling the business or hiring external managers.

4.1.3. Challenged to Advance

When the interviewees jumped in as next generation after the unforeseen event, they naturally had to portray a representative figure of leadership and stability to the external environment, employees, and other stakeholders. As one can imagine, this is more of a process the candidates had to go through than an immediate status. Interviewee B remembers this procedure the following way:

In the beginning I used to address everyone formally and jumped around in my suit and tie at every event because I thought it was proper. [...] And only after I was with the company for a few years and developed this self-confidence, [I felt like] I'm not the one who inherited yesterday and that's why I'm in this position, but I've put a lot of time and diligence and good things in here for ten years now. That's when I first developed my self-confidence to design things myself. (39:10).

Interviewee H described his path of advancement as "evolutionary process" (36:37), which was supported by a statement of interviewee G, in which she talked about her "evolving leadership":

In the beginning, I remember, my heart was always pounding before such one-on-one meetings with employees and there was also pressure. [...] And now I do it very casually on the side and can also make a strong announcement to them. (29:18).

Expert interviewee K also observed the progress of self-confidence and leadership style from past cases. He reported to have witnessed "extremely incredible internal developments" from insecure individuals to established leaders, which developed by the lateral successors finding their style in a "trial and error" approach (31:57). This outcome was confirmed by expert interviewee J, who also witnessed an "enormous development [...] with big steps at a rapid pace" (45:13) within his clients. He particularly mentioned that:

[Successors] become decisive and more confident with a decision. And even so the announcements become clearer and clearer. That's when you notice that the leader has developed and you're making quick decisions, [...] and before we discussed for hours from left to right [...]. So, you can already feel that the people develop strongly there. (45:27).

While leadership naturally evolved amongst all lateral candidates, another important factor, which was identified during the interviews was the belief in one's own abilities and the presence of self-initiative. For instance, interviewee F just remembered an "incredible amount of work and responsibility" when she took out a major bank loan to execute a necessary transformation within her parents' company, adding "I

just believed that we could do this” (16:28). Interviewee D added that he “took on responsibilities completely independently” when no one else in the company did (6:53), showing confidence and willingness to do things on his own.

4.2. Development of Successor Identity

During this part of the interview, successors found the starting point of their personal successor identity evolution by rapidly adapting to their new role and approaching it head-on due to the company’s state of emergency.

4.2.1. Finding One’s Role

After officially starting as successors in the family firm, interviewees often had difficulties to find the conformity between their own identity and the identity of the family business. Additionally, challenges arose during their identification with the new “successor component” of their identity, which suddenly became part of their being. In order to analyze the potential change of self-categorization, I asked candidates about their patterns of self-perception throughout their lives, starting with their identification in early childhood and adulthood. In this life period, I interrogated interviewees about their self-categorization as future successors, and their contact to other children of family firms. The majority of candidates specified a lack of identifying as future successors and no interest in building contacts with other children or young adults in similar situations. Interviewee B did specifically mention that he did not identify as son of the owner of a family firm entrepreneur (12:10) during his upbringing, while interviewee G (12:25) and E (9:04) stated that they had absolutely no interaction with other potential successors until the point of the unforeseen event. Moreover, interviewee D recalled that he did not actively seek for a group with similar background (10:40), which was similar to interviewee F expressing “absolutely no interest” in earlier days (9:05). These findings represent that the interviewees did not see themselves as successors, which is interesting considering the previous results regarding the indirect wish for succession of parents and feeling of pressure and responsibility by most candidates. Even though these factors had an obvious influence on the candidates, they did not result in a categorization of themselves as successors, which led to choosing different career paths.

During the transition of finding their role as successor, the candidates had different approaches. For instance, interviewee B opted for a “balancing act” approach in terms of living and working location (36:56) when starting his job at the family business:

At weekends, I practically jumped through Berlin with young people like myself and [...] had a lot of fun. And during the week I played the serious managing director and from time to time it felt a bit like leading a double life, [...] which rather helped me in this new role. (35:56).

He further stated that this technique also enabled him to develop his personality as well as his entrepreneurial identity as successor of a company, which he ultimately managed to “bring together over the years” (38:50). He perceived this balance of physical distance as especially important since the family business is often seen as local hero in the respective region (38:22). Furthermore, interviewee C mentioned that she has had the feeling of having found her identity as successor around three years after joining the company (23:02):

In the first three years I experienced new things all the time, things I have never done. [...] And for a year now I’ve had the feeling that I’ve gone through the rough situations, [...] I think that gives me security, because I have found these patterns to solve similar problems. And now I simply have a lot more certainty when solving them, and I go about it with a different level of composure. (23:05).

This temporal assessment was confirmed by interviewee E, who also specified the duration of the timeframe to have been of 3 years in order to feel accomplished and secure in his successor identity (17:32). The interview statements further showed the presence of the predecessor as one of the deciding factors of self-categorization. In the case of lateral entry due to emotional distress of the predecessor, interviewee G stated that she did not perceive herself as representative person yet since her father was still actively taking part in the family firm today (24:32).

When investigating the current identification status, I examined the candidates’ sense of belonging to the group of successors in the context of participating in networking events, being politically engaged in discussions and unions, or offering their expertise in form of panels or conferences. The majority of candidates showed interest and active engagement after becoming a successor, for instance, interviewee B expressed a desire to “exchange ideas with other family business owners, but only since last year” (49:33). Interviewee G remarked that for her “it actually happened at the same time that I became the successor and was in contact with other successors”, further emphasizing that she can now “definitely identify with this group” due to the same entrepreneurial background, challenges, and opportunities (12:40). Two of the interviewees even played a high-ranking chairmanship role in family firm initiatives (Interviewee F, 30:49; Interviewee E, 9:59). This shows that the candidates did change their identity status from “non-identifying” to “definitely identifying” as part of the successor group. However, from a temporal perspective, interviewees’ point of identification varied as some interviewees only started to show activity in these associations after being in the company for a fairly long time while others engaged right away.

4.2.2. A Matter of Adaption

After joining the company as successors due to an unforeseen event, most candidates had to perform some kind of status quo analysis due to the prompt change of the situation.

In these parts of the interview, I focused on gaining insights in the interviewees' thought process while joining the company, ultimately trying to find out if they were aiming for the company adapting to them or vice versa.

The interrogation showed that all participants focused on making rational decisions when entering the family business. Interviewee B realized upon his entry that it was going well, which must have meant that "the structures seemed to work and that I didn't have to turn everything upside down right away" (42:35). He further explained that he opted for "bringing up suggestions and then I checked to see if I get majorities for my proposals." (43:20). If he did not receive positive feedback, he recalled thinking that "maybe it wasn't the best suggestion after all" (43:34). Thereby, he kept the company on course, while "correcting the direction" from time to time without implementing any "revolutionary actions" (43:49). Interviewee H had the same experience and stated that "one does not usually choose the dramatic step but says one thing at a time now." (35:54). Interviewee E agreed when recalling that he used an "evolutionary" approach, rather than forcing a "revolution" (13:20). Moreover, interviewee F added that the "personal thing [about family businesses], like the connection to the employees, the long-term connection to customers and suppliers, this credibility – that's good if it stays the same" (14:46), which is likely to happen in these cases of succession as well because "you grew up in the same family, so you don't do things completely differently now. Well, I was exactly like my parents there." (15:09).

These statements were also supported by the expert interviewees. For instance, expert interviewee J said that this concept is "[working quite well] if you realize you don't have to change the whole big picture, but first of all take a look at it on a small scale – how projects are to be done, what has to be done." (47:09). On top of that, expert interviewee K mentioned the dangers of trying to adapt a company to one's own identity and liking:

I would now say that the larger the organizational structure, the more difficult it is for the company to adapt to the person. And then I believe [...], a company should always be built in such a way that you don't need someone [...], [as] functional systems [...] should always be independent of people, [...] I think the company shouldn't become who you are, but I think the company should follow the logic of the market. In the end it's not about what the individual wants, it's about what the customer [...] wants. It's very market-oriented, otherwise I think it'll quickly become a hobby. If I only ever do things that I think are right, but I don't actually get any relevance for them on the market, then I think it's going to be difficult. (27:38).

These testimonies showed a definite tendency towards successors accepting characteristics of their family firm from beginning on, even if they could not identify with everything right from the start.

4.2.3. Learning by Doing

When lateral entrants enter the company due to an unforeseen event, there is no succession or emergency plan in place most of the time. Successors find themselves in front of – what seems to be – an incredibly high mountain they have no idea how to climb onto or where to start. The majority of interviewees recalled starting with a learning by doing approach, for instance, interviewee B went on to say:

Okay, my father is dead. Who are the people here who have something to say. They were then identified relatively quickly. Then I sat down at the table with 10 people and asked what the current issues were. And then I chaired this session as I previously chaired the student parliament. (21:26).

Interviewees with similar unforeseen events had common experiences, for instance, interviewee C phrased it as feeling "a bit dazed" (18:10), mentioning that she cannot really recall or understand what happened anymore. In the crisis of losing someone overnight, she felt like she "just functioned somehow for a very long time, especially when you realize other people need you now" (18:25). The numb feeling of "just doing it" was also referenced by interviewee I, who mentioned "I had no concept. I didn't have a business plan. It wasn't well prepared." (6:26) and interviewee F who "said [to herself] 'I'm just going to do it now.'" (10:43). Besides the external pressure of people depending on successors in all situations like these already being high, expert interviewee J remembered a past case during which the unforeseen successor, who managed the company successfully after severe illness of his father, told him "with tears in his eyes how difficult it was for him and how much he would have liked to hear his father's advice" (39:03), adding immense emotional pressure.

While participants who lost their parents to death or sickness and could not ask them for advice anymore felt uncertain and left alone naturally, interviewees whose predecessors were still alive and well, showed various outcomes when asked about their succession plan. For instance, interviewee F felt abandoned when her father "disappeared to southern Spain for eight weeks" after she took over the company from him, recalling that "there was no handover at all, none. Just nothing. Nothing at all. Zero." (11:50). The high incidence of this feeling in succession cases was verified by expert interviewee K when he explained "these entrepreneurs are often really, really alone" (30:06), further stating that family firm entrepreneurs are often missing a sparring partner to exchange ideas (30:09). Contrary, interviewee G had a positive succession experience stating that she feels "actually confident, because I know my father, if I have anything, he will take care of and support me and I can ask him anything. And I also have the employees and colleagues at hand, [...] and that's actually a good feeling." (26:42).

Both expert interviewees K and J mentioned that the lack of emergency or succession plans for unforeseen events is a fundamental problem in family firms. Both consultants independently stated that they offer a service called "death stress

test” (16:04). With this practical approach, family members were able to derive decisions and feel more confident for the future (16:43).

However, interviewee K expressed a perspective of change in the thinking of the next generation when stating “this next generation [...] is much more reflected than the older generation and through this willingness to reflect, I perceive that more and more [family business owners] are now dealing with these questions.” (17:39). He further mentioned that this change is due to successors’ realization that the traditional, old-fashioned patriarchal structures are not working in today’s environment (18:02).

4.3. Gain of Control

During this post-initial successor phase, the lateral entrant has fully emerged into his role of successor and shows a mature successor identity. In the process of successor identity evolution, interviewees showed their ability to form their own perspectives and learn from experiences. By building their own teams and taking time to reflect, the majority of candidates showed a high level of satisfaction about their current position in the family firm.

4.3.1. Changing Relationships

Due to the sudden nature of lateral entries, an automatic shift of power is inevitable. However, most interviewees stated that there were no issues between them and employees while joining the firm. Interviewee F declared that she did not face any challenges (16:15), which was further supported by interviewee B (32:02), interviewee D (23:17), and interviewee I (10:44), who had similar experiences. Both expert interviewees described this situation as common for lateral successors after unforeseen events as the entry of a family member is seen as sign of stability and security (Interviewee K, 36:40).

I do get the impression that when there’s such a tragic situation, [...] there is a completely different motivation. Then it’s not about, I want to secure a position of power for myself here, it’s not about I want to gain recognition from the parents. [Successors] don’t want to get in here just because of the money, but the crux of the matter is a completely different motive [...]. [In these cases, employees] give the [successors] a little more freedom and allow them more mistakes, because they didn’t choose this role. That means you deal with them much more gently than you would with others. (Interviewee J, 13:46).

However, some frictions between employees and the lateral entrant could be detected as soon as potential threats directly related to the individual’s position came up. For instance, interviewee H remembered scenarios that were due to the employees’ feeling of uncertainty. As he entered with a previous career in finance, the head of the funding department of the family firm saw him as competition and was concerned about keeping his job (29:17). Furthermore, ego was

a root cause of conflicts as project partners tended to address him directly about finance topics even though the chief financial officer (CFO) of the family business stood right next to him, which caused some tension (26:05). Interviewee C experienced the fear of uncertainty when she directly expressed her own insecurity about the future of the family firm and her stay, which was received extremely negatively by employees, who wished for clear commitment from their new leader (13:14). Furthermore, interviewee G experienced some challenges in terms of authority when she first started as employees addressed her informally due to her age (8:23), which she immediately set straight from the beginning on.

Looking at the human resource management (HRM) of the candidates, lateral entrants showed their preference to build new teams upon arrival. Interviewee F recalls “looking for her own people, who can grow with me” (27:02), which was also frequently observed by expert interviewee J in past cases, who not only noticed a generation change at the owner level, but also at employee level:

The next generation will very often completely break away from [past history] through new employees, new hires. You just don’t want to be the little boy or girl who ran across the facility and now leads the way. My impression is more that you bring in your own employees, who you hired yourself, who you selected yourself, who you bring into your own management level (49:13).

As for relationships between family members, the degree of change depends on the specific family member’s role and the experienced unforeseen event. Interviewees, who worked alongside their parents after joining the company, reported that the relationship actually improved. Interviewee D for instance, declared that he has grown much closer with his mother after his father died as they have started to work alongside each other (28:31). Interviewee G described a similar outcome as she grew closer to her father after joining the family firm and promptly became the superior of her own mother, which left the team in doubt about future work dynamics (27:57). However, the precariousness could be taken away by mother and daughter demonstrating a hands-on work mentality, which enabled a pleasant work atmosphere amongst the team (28:45).

Nevertheless, tension and challenges within the family are not unusual during emotional, high-pressure time periods. According to expert interviewee K’s know-how, “it takes a lot of your own strength to keep going” (35:31). In the past, he has observed that conflicts exacerbate in difficult situations and “some families break apart, some emerge stronger” during these tough times (35:43). However, he could not make a clear statement about the factors driving this outcome and indicated that it could have to do with the supporting parties or advisory services families involve for assistance during these times (35:55).

The debate of envy amongst siblings could be detected as one specific point of conflict during the interviews. In-

interviewee A assigned the failing relationship to her sister towards the course of her own succession in the family business. When she solely accompanied the sales process of the company, she was “rewarded with zero”, referring to the lack of gratefulness or appreciation by her sister (18:08). Quite the contrary, her sister criticized her for not negotiating an even higher price (19:27). Expert interviewee J claimed that this is a frequent matter as siblings tend to ignore the hard labor and energy needed to turn a company around, which is often in a critical state after an unexpected event (40:25). Interestingly, siblings “don’t even reward this and then rather want to have a piece of the cake, not really appreciating this achievement of the other” (40:50), ultimately leading to a strained relationship.

4.3.2. Moving on

During the course of the interviews, it was noticeable that candidates showed a point of changing the legacy and moving along by developing their own perspectives and ways of leading the company. For instance, interviewee B recalled trying to “partly fill in my father’s footsteps, [but] sometimes I said ‘No.’ right from the start” (39:51). He further stated:

I didn’t really let myself be drawn into [the feeling of having to do things like my father] and then sometimes said “I am me and I am not my father. And I don’t see that his path was the only true one. And that’s why I just do it differently and I’m sorry for those who don’t like it, who liked it better under my father, but this is not a wishing well for anyone here.” I didn’t apply for my father’s profile or anything like that. (42:07).

Interviewee F took matters in her own hands when she “pretty much changed everything” (14:02) and ultimately shifted the core business of the company to another industry. She also introduced a new calculation scheme and computer system, thereby turning “the whole thing upside down” (14:25). Similar to her, interviewee C also developed her own way of taking over the company after her father’s sudden death, explaining:

But then I just developed my own perspective on the company and tried to implement it. And I think it’s more mine now than it was then. At the beginning, it felt like you came into the executive office, and until Thursday my father was still sitting there. The following Wednesday, I sat there on the armchair and it’s like a still very warm chair. It was not like you had a chair next to it, which you could sit on. (15:33).

However, it was not only the progress within the company that helped unforeseen successors to move on, but it was also progress within themselves, which only came after having gained some distance of time to the event. When asked about taking time to absorb and reflect everything that happened, Interviewee F remembered to have only started

to take things in retrospectively when she wrote her doctoral thesis about the topic of succession (20:07) since she “hardly thought about anything during that time, everything I planned to do had to work [to save the company]” (20:14). Additionally, she named the initial phase of her succession as “a borderline exceptional situation” (20:24).

When asked about support or a sparring partner to help reflecting, most candidates indicated to having had no specific person to exchange thoughts and worries with. Interviewee I declared to not having “a fixed contact person with whom I discussed things” (16:30), while interviewee F stated to having felt “very left alone” but only realizing it at a later stage as she was busy solving issues in the first phase of succession (20:49). Nevertheless, she found a sparring partner in the managing director of an international company site, which she founded a couple of years after her entry (21:21). Furthermore, she described him to be a very important person in her life for the last 20 years and that she was “very grateful that he existed” (21:39) as they constantly exchanged ideas (21:41). Expert interviewee K confirmed the supporting effect of reflecting and having someone to communicate with by stating:

It is very important to work very hard with yourself, to go a bit into this ability to reflect, that you have sparring partners on your side in both good and bad times in order to be accompanied in this succession process [from] the external perspective. (42:01).

He further recommended to choose a professional, third party to give perspective (43:03) to help successors find a concept in this situation of “hyper-complexity” (42:44). This proved to be successful in his past cases, when a client of him told him that he did not want to discuss every firm and succession issue within his own family (30:35). Therefore, “someone with whom you can spar, who can open your eyes, and perhaps bring a different perspective to [issues]” (30:46) was of high importance to move on.

4.3.3. Going One’s own way

When asked about their satisfaction and fulfillment regarding their lateral entry in the family firm, the majority of successors indicated that they felt very content in today’s situation. Interviewee H, for instance, declared that he spends “very little time looking back, only looking forward and I am actually happy with the way things have gone.” (47:14). Moreover, interviewee G stated her happiness about the current situation and added that she was looking forward to getting more insights into other departments next year (36:00), which showed the opportunity for her to grow within the family organization. Interviewee B concurred with the mentioned points and stated that he “made the best of the situation” (56:25) and was “satisfied and [could] only complain at a high level” (57:35).

However, the experience of living through unforeseen events can be hard for all parties of the family firm involved.

When asked about negatively linking the unexpected happening to the interviewees' succession and position today, opinions differed amongst individuals. Speaking of a negative linkage, interviewee C declared right away that there is a connection between the death of her father and her position in the company that left her with negative feelings (24:26). In contrast, interviewee F was "able to completely separate [her career from the unexpected event]" (26:08), emphasizing that she does "not think anyone ever noticed [the emotional connection between the two]" (26:10).

Nevertheless, both interviewees C and F agreed on the importance of taking care of yourself in the process since "you personally neglect yourself very, very much" (Interviewee C, 18:40).

I had so many things [to do] and really suffered from it afterwards because I didn't take care of myself and my social contacts anymore. This was completely left behind. There was no more time for that. (Interviewee F, 19:35).

Due to their own experiences, lateral successors showed a high interest in preparing the succession for their offspring in detail, especially for emergency cases like their own:

Looking at our clients, those who had such bad experiences with the unplanned succession [do not want] this to happen again. I think they learn so much from it, realizing that they don't want to do that to their children – what they have experienced to be repeated again and again. So that's why we might have one or the other customer who then says "Let's do it better next time". (39:43).

This was the case with interviewee F, who had since handed over the company partially to her son and "didn't want him to feel like I was handing over the company, and he had to pay so much that he had no financial options at all." (24:03). Additionally, she made sure to "let my son know that he can basically do whatever he wants and that I'll be there when he needs me" (31:00). Moreover, interviewee E just experienced the sudden death of his brother, who led the company alongside him, and was in the process of preparing the unforeseen succession for his niece at the time of the interview (19:06). In this context, he emphasized the importance of getting to know the company well and introducing the successors within every department instead of giving them top management positions right from the start, if not absolutely necessary (20:02), which is highly dependent on the individual situations and unforeseen events.

5. Discussion

As the research question in this paper deals with the identity change of lateral family firm entrants due to unforeseen

events, the given recommendations focus on supporting successors in the process of this new identity component development. In order to do so, similarities detected in the findings were used to identify frequent behavior patterns, feelings, and suggested improvements. As a result, the theoretical implications focused on detecting similarities between current academic research and interview findings, while the practical implications emphasize how the lateral entrant can be best supported emotionally as well as professionally to ensure a holistic approach of the successor identity evolution.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Regarding unforeseen events, the scientific definition does correspond with the experiences of interviewees. As a matter of fact, the academic proposition that unforeseen events have negative and/or positive consequences (Rundmo, 2018) does prove itself to be true with the majority of interviewees showing overall satisfaction with their position today, while a small part of candidates did link their experience and current position in a negative way. When looking at the tools of adverse event management and prevention, a causal sequence and process model could theoretically be applied in order to execute a risk analysis of unforeseen events in family firms. However, this would require a large data set and structured clusters for individual adverse events. Additionally, the concepts of samhandling (Torgersen, 2018) and the four best practices by Söderholm (2008) can be applied as useful guidelines during the happening of an unexpected event. However, scientific research does not show explicit strategic action plans when it comes to the emotional and professional challenges due to unforeseen events in family firms. Even though statistical evidence of the high responsibility and pressure amongst family firm successors due to the economy and employees is present, inspirations for a hands-on unplanned succession concept can only be taken from regular succession implications or related events. This was also shown in the interviews, as unforeseen successors did not follow succession implications, but rather developed a strategy themselves.

In terms of the social identity theory, the evolution of the interviewees' successor identity could be well connected to the theory of Tajfel and Turner (1978). For instance, the lack of interest in successor groups during the initial successor phase shows that candidates did not necessarily identify as succeeding parties, ultimately not seeking to be accepted or in contact with this – from their perspective past then – outgroup. Only by developing their own succession identity with time, interviewees slowly categorized themselves more and more into the group of successors, ultimately joining that group after having found their role as successor. Furthermore, one could argue that successors did put effort, time, and energy into the family business to turn it into profitable entity with high employee satisfaction. As a result, successors were able to gain positive feelings from their ingroup and verified this in the interviews while stating their happiness and satisfaction about their path.

Additionally, the importance of matching the family firm's identity to the unforeseen successor's identity and vice versa was shown when most interviewees only started to identify wholeheartedly with the family business when they felt like they had discovered their own way of managing the firm and leading employees. As soon as this interplay was achieved, interviewees showed a matured successor identity, which went coincided with the family firm's identity.

Finally, the early identity development amongst family firm successors showed some similarities and differences between scholarly resources and interviews. While the academic proposition towards identity work being an emotional process could be confirmed by interview candidates, some claimed developed characteristics differed. For instance, interviewees underlined the ability to assess and take risks, while Gomez-Mejia et al. (2011) stated that family firm principals avoid taking risks due to narrow asset distribution. Furthermore, the theory of identity construction due to storytelling by Thompson et al. (2009) was not directly attested, however interviewees did declare that conversations and discussions in the home of family business owners had an impact on their character development and identification with the family firm while growing up.

In summary, current scientific research helped to clarify and explain findings from the qualitative research based on SIT and further academic remarks. However, the lack of resources for this niche topic of identity work during unforeseen succession required some cross-references and translational interpretations of related topics to gain scientific insights and implications.

5.2. Practical Implications

When examining the findings of the conducted interviews, commonalities of behavior and feelings are found across all observed categories of unforeseen events. Due to these consolidated results, a roadmap of the successor identity evolution could be created (Figure 2), which helped to highlight characteristic milestones found in the process of successor identity development, ultimately pointing out the needs for practical implications during the three aggregate dimensions.

As the research question focused on the change of family firm successors' identity in case of a lateral entry due to an unforeseen event, the practical implications emerging from these findings focus on measures to ensure the smooth transition from non-successor to successor identity. As this process is highly complex and individual depending on the unforeseen event, the following practical implications are designed to support entry candidates on an internal, emotional level, while also giving assistance on the external, business aspect.

As depicted in Figure 3, recommendations can be given in accordance with the constructed roadmap to provide potential lateral entrants with a clear and timely structured proposition in case of an unforeseen happening. As illustrated in the first part of findings, lateral entrants developed favorable characteristics as a result of their upbringing in a family firm environment. As potential entrants are still in the phase of

child- or young adulthood, the following recommendations are generally addressed at predecessors, and thereby parents or similar guardians, of the entrants. A further advancement of mentioned entrepreneurial qualities and values is of high importance as fostering the business sense of potential successors is not only helpful for any career they may choose after their own liking but can also be of tremendous assistance in case of an unforeseen succession. Additionally, it is important to promote a partaking in staying updated about the family firm to keep successors in the loop and teach rational decision-making from early on. Moreover, the focus on discussing challenges about the company at home was linked to negative feelings by the majority of interviewees, ultimately driving potential successors away from the willingness to join the firm in the future. However, it is also important to address issues at first hand to educate descendants about possible struggles in the industry and business. Therefore, the shift from problem-focus to problem-solving is recommended in this context as this trains potential entrants to apply knowledge and developed qualities in a practical way. During this time, predecessors can already get a sense if descendants are eligible to become successors, which is important for their personal and the company's own good. In case of a clear mismatch, arrangements like appointing external managers or discussing a potential sale of the company can be discussed at an early stage.

Furthermore, the lateral entrant should be supported from the start of his entry in the family firm from two perspectives. As unforeseen events are mostly related to highly sensitive topics, an emotional support during this time is of utmost importance but is often neglected. This can be done by a medical professional or any sparring partner the candidate feels like having a trusting relationship with. Additionally, successors usually need assistance to navigate through the company's idiosyncrasies and business model, including departments like manufacturing or financial operations. A business coach specialized on family firms can be of help to give structure to the succession strategy, while long-term employees with experience and knowledge about the firm can support with knowledge-transfer and providing the big picture as starting point to the lateral entrant. By taking care of both the internal, emotional component and the external, business side of the unforeseen succession, the lateral entrant is given the chance to find a balance between his personal and professional sense without getting lost in the process of the prompt and surprising change of plans.

After having gone through an unforeseen succession, interviewees showed a high willingness to prepare future handovers once they have gained control over the situation. In order to provide an emergency succession plan for future generations, I recommend the involvement of an external consultant specialized on succession. By executing stress tests that simulate the death, sickness, or downtime of different players or other scenarios like liquidity shortages, or the integration of external managers, the behavior tendencies of involved parties can already be assessed, and consequential scenarios and step-by-step strategy models can be

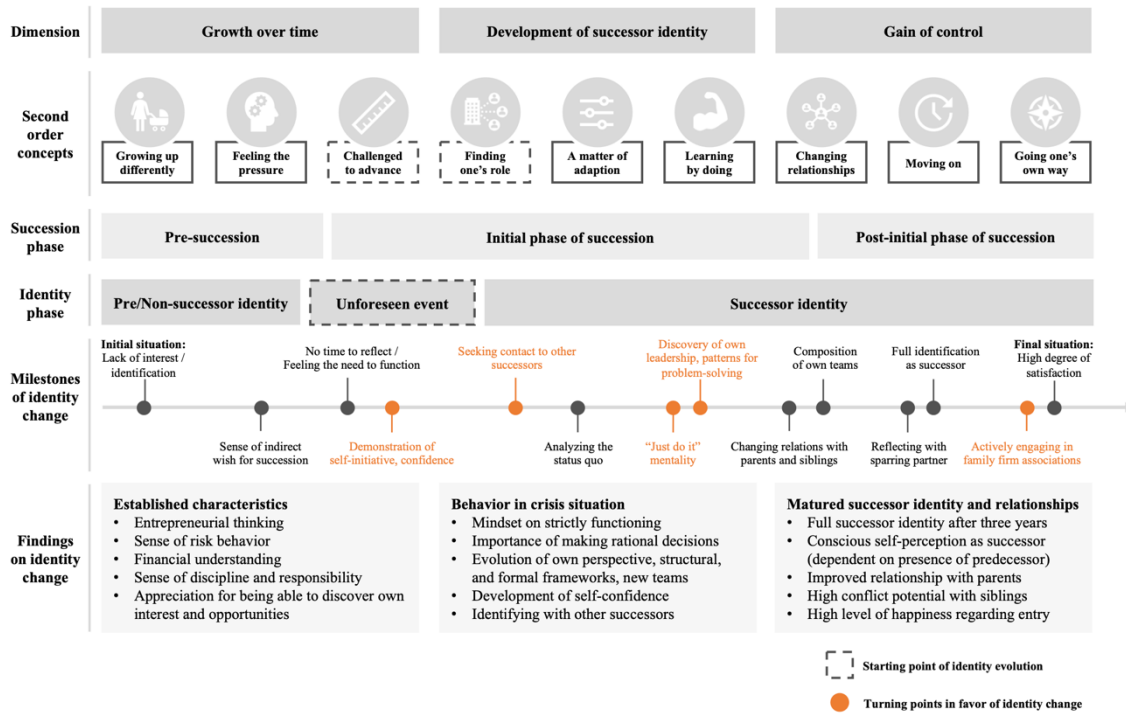


Figure 2: Roadmap of Successor Identity Evolution

constructed. Moreover, a guideline for first step actions for the successor will ensure an organized approach to immediate actions after the unforeseen event. For instance, these should include measures like analyzing the status quo, allocating roles, knowing where to find information, and communicating with employees and stakeholders to show stability, followed by focusing on a long-term plan. Additionally, composing a “core emergency management team” on demand consisting of long-term employees with broad experience and knowledge about the family firm’s inner structure, assets, and overall history will support lateral entrants immediately after the unexpected happening and give them certainty and confidence during the initial and post-successor phase. Aside from that, I would recommend hosting regular meetings with family members who are potential unforeseen successors in order to keep them updated on trends within the company.

6. Conclusion

This thesis aimed at investigating the influence of unforeseen succession on the identity of lateral entrants in family firms. As a result of interviewing nine German-based lateral entrants and two consultants specialized in family firms and succession, I gathered valuable insights into the evolution of successor identity, which showed to be more of an ongoing process instead of a disruptive identity change. The found aggregate dimensions could be translated into the chronological succession phases of pre-succession, initial succession phase, and post-initial succession phase, which all showed specific findings and milestones in terms of identity evolution. Established entrepreneurial characteristics and

similarities in rational behavior during the unforeseen event helped successors to develop their own, mature successor identity, which resulted in changed relationships within the family and amongst employees. Furthermore, milestones like demonstrating self-initiative and confidence during the unexpected happening, engaging with other successors, showing a “just do it” mentality, discovering own perspectives, leadership style, and problem-solving skills could be identified to present turning points in the development of successor identity.

As these findings demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the identity process during an unforeseen succession, theoretical implications on behavior patterns of lateral entrants could be given through the lens of the social identity theory, which supported the idea of being able to explain successors’ behavior during the challenging process of identifying with a foreign component of their being, which was given during the initial phase of succession. Furthermore, gained insights from the interview findings led to the opportunity of giving practical implications to future unforeseen successors in a well-structured approach. These implications did not only focus on the obvious, preventive measures but also included recommendations for the successor’s upbringing in order to position potential lateral entrants in the best way possible for the organization and their own sake. Finally, suggestions for the acute case of an unforeseen succession were provided, which included instructions for taking care of the successor’s personal and professional state of mind.

Similar to any empirical research, the findings of this study present limitations. Firstly, the sample size of eleven interviewees is small, especially considering that different un-



Figure 3: Action Implications for Unforeseen Events in Family Firms

foreseen events were indicated by the interview candidates. As the majority of interviewees experienced sickness or death of a parent as adverse event, the focal point of the study may have shifted to more in-depth information on this specific event despite verifying similarities with other candidates and expert interviewees. Secondly, the discussed topic was highly sensitive and personal to the interviewees, which could have resulted in a conformity bias (Padalia, 2014), ultimately trying to give an answer expected by the broader society. This might have especially been the case since most interviews were conducted in a digital setting and knowingly recorded. Furthermore, the perspective of interviewees was limited to experiences in German-based family firms and the degree of successors' self-reflection varied as interview candidates showed a distinction in terms of year of entry in the family firm. However, this thesis depicted the emotions, thoughts, and wishes of lateral entrants during the unforeseen succession process and followed a trustworthy and holistic approach to offer future unplanned successors an informational roadmap and concrete guideline to the evolution of their successor identity. To further elaborate on this topic, future research should focus on gathering more insights allocated to different unforeseen scenarios to find specific recommendations for the respective adverse events.

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Analysing the Sustainability of Procurement in Family Businesses - A Study of Measurable Investments and Practices Based on ESG Principles

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Abstract

Sustainability has gained considerable prominence in recent decades as the inevitability of change becomes increasingly apparent. Family businesses constitute a significant and influential part of the global economy. Therefore, they are pivotal in addressing the world's sustainability challenges. Despite extensive research on sustainability in corporations and public firms, there remains a dearth of comparable data concerning sustainability in privately owned family businesses. Through qualitative interviews and cross-case analyses, this thesis investigates the procurement practices within family businesses, deriving comparative insights guided by Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria. The findings evaluate family businesses based on the ESG framework, visualising the development and integration of sustainable practices into the procurement processes. The research highlights the indirect impact of sustainability on developing competencies that can confer a competitive advantage. Additionally, it sheds light on the potential financial benefits reported by family businesses that have implemented sustainability measures. Overall, the findings contribute to the existing academic research on sustainability in businesses and family business studies.

Keywords: ESG; family business; performance-based assessment; procurement; qualitative interviews; sustainability

1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Relevance

Sustainability is “(...) *meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*” (Brundtland & United Nations, 1987, as cited in Keeble, 1988). This quote from the United Nations Brundtland Commission describes one of the critical challenges the

world is facing today. Because of significant resource depletion caused by the extensive population growth and economic development, planet Earth is at the precipice of irreversible consequences. The two main drivers that are the underlying cause of the environmental problems are the world's population, which has quadrupled over the last 100 years and the global economic output, which has 20-folded, estimates say (Grossman, 2013). On the verge of the problem lies the Earth's depletion of natural resources. The majority of natural and renewable resources have been classified as over-used in the last decades (World Bank & FAO, 2009). Human activities such as industrialisation, deforestation, and mining have also played a significant part in the overuse of resources such as fossil fuels, timber, minerals, and water.

Sustainability is a megatrend for the industry that has become reinforced in recent years, leaving the corporate world with the need to implement new business practices to stay competitive (Sheth et al., 2011). In the past decade, sustainable business practices have significantly increased interest.

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Before the financial crises of 2007-08, there was a prevailing belief, as articulated by Milton Friedman, that the primary objective of businesses should be to maximise shareholder returns. However, the subsequent events revealed the inherent unsustainability of this approach. It became clear that specific organisations and individuals had neglected business ethics, resulting in crises encompassing the environment, ethics, and the global economy. These occurrences were a stark reminder of the need to prioritise ethical considerations within business practices (Boons et al., 2013). Especially the rise of public interest in sustainability topics accelerated the pressure on companies worldwide to develop a more socially responsible role (Gutberlet & Kern, 2007).

In 2006, the United Nations report first mentioned ESG as a term (Dai & Tang, 2022). Since then, there has been a notable increase in non-financial reporting. During this period, the emphasis has shifted towards maximising the impact on the organisation's stakeholders and the environment, not just the shareholders (Sandberg et al., 2022). ESG ratings are a set of objectively defined criteria that enable comparing companies based on their sustainable practices, as per Sandberg et al. (2022). These ratings have gained significant momentum in recent years, with ESG-themed investment portfolios estimated to be worth around \$40 trillion, which attests to their growing importance in the investment community. Since its inception in 2006, ESG has gained widespread recognition as the only measure of a firm's sustainability and social impact. This is evident in its adoption by businesses and its acceptance among governments worldwide (Dai & Tang, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought attention to ESG issues in supply chain operations, as the opacity of international supply chains revealed due to significant interruptions.

Consequently, there has been a growing demand for supply chain due diligence and accountability. Thus, the German parliament passed the Supply Chain Due Diligence Act in 2021, the latest directive in Germany concerning the supply chain issues occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic. It mandates that companies assume accountability for any social and environmental problems that may arise during their operations (Dai & Tang, 2022). In addition, on January 5th, 2023, the European Union put the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) into effect, representing a recent instance of the enactment of sustainable legislation. This directive is a testament to the EU's commitment to enhancing corporate sustainability reporting and disclosure standards.

Today's world is approaching and, in many cases, already surpassing the limits of the world's natural resources to the extent that immediate action is necessary (Grossman, 2013). The responsibility to act extends to the economy, with businesses playing a crucial role in addressing these challenges. Companies that conform to ESG criteria and allocate resources towards long-term sustainable solutions can secure a sustainable competitive edge (Grossman, 2013). As French President Emmanuel Macron said: *"Let us face it, there is no planet B"* (Wentworth, 2018, p. 1).

1.2. Objective

As aforementioned, the global population has grown significantly in recent decades, leading to a corresponding increase in demand for food and beverages (Shahjahan et al., 2022). In Europe, the food and drink industry is the largest manufacturing sector in terms of turnover and employment (FoodDrinkEurope, 2020). The industry is responsible for almost 26% of global greenhouse gas emissions and has a high usage of natural resources while facing social and governance issues throughout the supply chain. Moreover, the agricultural system prioritises maximum output, leading to soil quality degradation, water pollution and many other environmental problems (Sandberg et al., 2022). However, research on sustainability in the food and beverages industry has been limited thus far, mainly because of the industry's complexity of regulatory restrictions and supply chain requirements (Sandberg et al., 2022). Recent academic findings have expressed the industry's vulnerability to environmental hazards, like weather crises, as the impact of climate change has already led to a 3% reduction in global crop yield (Fróna et al., 2019). These risks are dangerous to the industry but, on the other hand, offer opportunities to promote social fairness and reduce environmental impact by integrating ESG measures into the supply chain. For instance, food waste is a significant problem in the food and beverages industry. Research has revealed that approximately 16% of all food waste occurs within its supply chain (Shand & Johnson, 2019).

Family businesses are essential to the global economy and have an extended and traditional role in national economies. Globally, they account for about 80% of companies and often contribute a large share of the GDP in many countries (Buchanan et al., 2023). With a concentration of almost 80%, the percentage of family businesses in Germany is significant (Bergfeld & Weber, 2011). In contemporary society, family businesses are frequently referred to as more stable in times of crisis, possessing greater sustainability and maintaining a long-term focus compared to non-family-owned enterprises (Bauer, 2013; Machek et al., 2019). Given the significant role that family businesses play in national economies, research on this subject has been extensive. Despite research on various aspects of family businesses, such as the impact of succession, management, and ownership, sustainability, measured with ESG criteria, remains critically understudied.

Sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) has been a highly productive area of research in recent decades, with a significant output on the topic (Carter & Easton, 2011; Carter & Rogers, 2008; Seuring & Müller, 2008). However, the link between ESG criteria and SSCM has received relatively little attention and is considered an understudied area, especially in family businesses (Dai & Tang, 2022). Furthermore, despite extensive research from academic literature on sustainability in family businesses, the findings do not present a consistent picture (Bauer, 2013; Olson et al., 2003). On the one hand, regarding sustainable business practices, research has found family businesses often exceed regulatory require-

ments (López-Pérez et al., 2018). In contrast, other studies indicate that family businesses do not outperform non-family firms regarding sustainability (Chen & Hsu, 2009).

As the public interest in sustainability has risen constantly, the urge to stand out in ESG reporting has become vital (Parida & Wincent, 2019). More than ever, sustainable business practices and communication are crucial factors in maintaining customer attractiveness and competitiveness in the economy today (Vătămănescu et al., 2021). As a result, a research gap in sustainable procurement was deemed evident, specifically in measuring sustainability in family businesses using ESG criteria. This paper seeks to establish a rating framework in which sustainable procurement practices are rated based on ESG criteria. The objective is to present a comparative perspective and facilitate the widespread adoption of sustainable practices (Seuring & Müller, 2008). The need to integrate sustainable business practices has been underscored (Ferreira et al., 2021; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2016). The degree to which sustainable procurement practices are established holds great significance, especially given the substantial representation of family businesses across various industries.

Germany, predominantly composed of family businesses, provides a conducive environment for conducting research and contributing to the academic landscape of sustainability in family businesses. ESG criteria could be integrated as a measurement tool for assessing and deriving best practices and general assumptions on the sustainability of procurement in the German food and beverages industry, thereby offering a promising avenue for advancing research in the field. Exploration of the sustainable practices of family businesses holds promise for generating valuable insights and establishing a starting point for assessing sustainability in the family business landscape. The proposed research methodology entails qualitative interviews with eight German food and beverage family businesses, employing ESG criteria for meaningful comparisons. The selected industry has been chosen for its economic significance and to facilitate a more focused and comparable analysis. As a result, two research questions were formulated to guide the subsequent paper:

(1) To what extent have German family businesses implemented sustainable procurement practices, measured with guidance from ESG principles?

(2) What characteristics do family businesses possess that influence the implementation of sustainable procurement measures, and how can these characteristics be integrated into a framework for sustainable procurement?

The thesis is organised as follows: Section 2 presents a comprehensive review of the relevant literature about the investigated topics. This literature review forms the basis for developing the research propositions. Section 3 describes the methodology employed in this study, with a particular emphasis on constructing the frameworks. In Section 4, the study's findings are analysed, interpreted, and synthesised.

Finally, Section 5 provides a detailed discussion of the study's findings, its contribution to academic literature, the limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Background and Proposition Development

Building upon the formulated research questions, the upcoming section offers a theoretical foundation for the topics under investigation. It will present a comprehensive overview of existing scholarly studies about sustainability in family businesses. Beginning with the definition of essential and central terms of this study, the focus will lie on academic research on family businesses in connection with sustainability in the procurement process. Finally, this paper will delve into SSCM, culminating in formulating two propositions to guide the qualitative data analysis and provide the reader with a clear research direction.

2.1. Definition of Terms

The section provides comprehensive insights into the key terms utilized in this paper related to family businesses, the concept of ESG, and the relationship between sustainability, procurement, and family businesses. This section aims to enhance the reader's understanding of the current academic research on the subjects under investigation through clear definitions and explanations.

2.1.1. Definition of the Term Family Business

A century ago, the word "business" was equal to "family business", as the vast majority of companies were family-owned (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003). According to Sharma (2013), families are two or more individuals related by blood or marriage and residing together while maintaining communication (Sharma, 2013). In this study, the term "family" refers to the individuals related by blood, adoption or marriage, following its conventional definition. According to Donaldson and Walsh (2015), a "business" is "(...) a form of cooperation involving the production, exchange and distribution of goods and services for the purpose of achieving collective value" (Donaldson & Walsh, 2015, p. 188).

Family businesses play a crucial role in the global economy. They are the world's oldest type of commercial organisation and constitute a substantial portion of businesses worldwide. In Germany, for instance, family businesses make up nearly 80% of all organisations, highlighting their significant presence and importance in the country's economy (Bergfeld & Weber, 2011). One distinguishing feature of family businesses is the inherent risk borne by the family itself. Research indicates that in 1996, family owners put over US\$86 trillion of family assets at risk for the survival of their businesses (Olson et al., 2003). There is a lack of consensus and precision in defining the term "family business", and a definitive and universally accepted description has not yet been established (Cano-Rubio et al., 2017). Thus, this paper makes use of the definition by Poza (2013) to describe family businesses. It "(...) considers family businesses to constitute

the whole gamut of enterprises in which an entrepreneur or next-generation CEO and one or more family members significantly influence the firm. They influence it via their managerial or board participation, their ownership control, the strategic preferences of shareholders, and the culture and values family shareholders impart to the enterprise" (Poza, 2013, p. 5). All definitions of family businesses revolve around the family's role in determining the firm's vision and control mechanisms and creating unique resources and capabilities. The family's involvement is often seen as a competitive advantage (Sharma, 2013). Extensive research has yielded significant findings, highlighting their advantages and disadvantages compared to non-family firms. These findings suggest that family businesses have unique strengths that contribute to their success (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996). One such characteristic are reduced agency costs due to the family's involvement in the executive stage (Habbershon & Williams, 1999). On the other hand, next to creating a competitive advantage, the same characteristics can also pose significant risks to family businesses themselves (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). Here, family involvement can be the potential for conflict between different groups of family shareholders. Research has shown that agency problems can be severe between controlling and non-controlling shareholders in family businesses (Ali et al., 2007; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2016). The distinctive capabilities and resources that family involvement provides to an economic entity were described by Habbershon and Williams (1999) as "familiness". These are best understood through the lens of the resource-based view. This perspective emphasises the strategic significance of a firm's resources and capabilities, which can be difficult for competitors to replicate or substitute. In family businesses, these resources and capabilities are often tied to the family's involvement and control, precisely their human, social and financial capital (Ferreira et al., 2021; Poza, 2013).

Financial Capital

Financial capital has negative as well as positive attributes for family businesses. Since most shareholders in family businesses are family members, this approach fosters a longer-term perspective on achieving financial stability rather than pressure to deliver immediate financial returns or engage in short-term thinking (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2016; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). This prioritisation of financial stability and long-term orientation stems from the goal of creating lasting value for future generations (Machek et al., 2019; Poza, 2013). A characteristic of family businesses is the desire to keep ownership and control without too much influence from external capital providers (Harith & Samujh, 2020). Focusing on long-term development and effective capital management can lead to limited financial resources and risk-averse investment decisions. Due to financial constraints, family businesses might face challenges in funding innovation initiatives, which are critical for staying competitive in today's fast-paced business environment (Clauß et al., 2022). Furthermore, their strong attachment to traditional values and emotional ties to the business can hinder their ability to inno-

vate and embrace change, resulting in negative implications for their long-term financial stability and socio-economic impact (Clauß et al., 2022; Machek et al., 2019). This may result in slower growth or missed investment opportunities for the family business (Machek et al., 2019; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003).

There is, however, also a contradictory view on the financial independence of family businesses. The ownership family may allow them to pursue their vision without being constrained by economic considerations. This includes the ability to make social investments that may not yield immediate financial returns. The overlap of ownership and managerial responsibilities in family businesses can significantly reduce administrative costs and facilitate faster decision-making. Quick decision-making is crucial in the economic world, as missing out on specific investment opportunities can mean a disadvantage in competition (Poza, 2013). Furthermore, emphasising building a business for future generations leads to increased self-analysis, the ability to adapt to changes without losing momentum, and a greater focus on research and development.

Human Capital

Human capital refers to the skills, knowledge, training and relationships of the employees and other individuals involved. This term emphasises the importance of people as a critical resource for the organisation's success (Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). Family businesses typically have a trust and value-based culture that stems from the close interpersonal relationships among family members. As a result, family businesses often have a more profound firm-specific understanding and stronger relationships with external stakeholders, providing them with a competitive advantage over non-family firms (Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Poza, 2013; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). These practices lead to a "win-win" approach, prioritising the interests of all stakeholders, including society and other businesses (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2016). Conversely, it can be argued that maintaining strong and long-term relationships may pose a risk and impede the agility of family businesses, as personal relationships with external stakeholders may influence their willingness to embrace change (Donaldson & Walsh, 2015).

Social Capital

Social capital focuses on the relationships between the organisation and individuals. It consists of structural, cognitive and relational components, all of which are embedded in a family (Bingham et al., 2011; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). Research shows the contrast between family-run and non-family firms, particularly regarding their heightened corporate social responsibilities (Bingham et al., 2011; Block & Wagner, 2014). It contends that family businesses frequently cultivate solid connections and alliances with their local communities and employees, increasing their influence on society and emphasising their social responsibility instead of prioritising profit maximization (Niehm et al., 2008). Family

businesses' distinctive features and competitive advantages have contributed to the perception of sustainable and long-lasting economic entities (Bingham et al., 2011; Machek et al., 2019).

2.1.2. Definition of ESG

In previous decades, management executives often prioritised business decisions that focused on maximizing shareholder value while disregarding environmental and social factors (Sandberg et al., 2022). As a result, the concept of ESG was initially introduced through a published report by the United Nations in 2006 (Dai & Tang, 2022). Since then, socially responsible investing has been a principle for decades. Still, the lack of specific performance measurement created a vast difference in approaches, thus creating more confusion and a lack of comparability (Boffo & Patalano, 2020). Bergman et al. (2020) have defined ESG as "(...) a means by which companies can be evaluated with respect to a broad range of socially desirable ends. ESG describes a set of factors used to measure the non-financial impacts of particular investments and companies" (Bergman et al., 2020, p. 1). Over the past two decades, ESG has been widely adopted in the investment industry, as socially responsible investing (ethical or sustainable) has grown significantly (Dorfleitner et al., 2015). ESG ratings are widely recognized as an effective way of evaluating corporate social performance and have gained considerable importance for investors and company management over the past few decades. The ESG framework is predominantly used to assess companies and their potential financial performance, aiming to minimize risk by considering sustainable business practices. This investment philosophy prioritises long-term growth while recognizing the economic significance of creating financial return (Li et al., 2021). In recent decades, the assets under management considering ESG factors have grown exponentially. In the US alone, this represents 20% of all professionally managed assets, equivalent to US\$11 trillion (Boffo & Patalano, 2020). Over the last 20 years, specialized rating institutions have developed ESG rating criteria, with ASSET4 being one of the most prominent providers of ESG ratings, owned by Thomson Reuters (Dorfleitner et al., 2015). The criteria have evolved and are not standardized, resulting in rating agencies using varying standards to evaluate companies. Nonetheless, this study is based on the standard criteria used by ESG rating agencies while acknowledging the existence of differences in their rating methodologies (see Table 1) (Boffo & Patalano, 2020; Escrig-Olmedo et al., 2019; Li et al., 2021).

ESG scores are categorized into two main types: one type emphasises ESG reporting and the level of transparency demonstrated by companies in this aspect, while the other assesses the extent to which companies generate social returns in addition to financial returns, thus considering the social impact of potential investments (Boffo & Patalano, 2020).

ESG measures are used in the investment industry to evaluate companies and businesses to improve their social, environmental and governance contributions and overall sustainability. Research suggests that considering ESG factors

can enhance risk management, resulting in organisations' more sustainable long-term performance (Boffo & Patalano, 2020). Despite this, academic literature has been divided in the past, being unclear about the effect of ESG ratings on the financial performance of businesses. Some suggest that higher ESG ratings are associated with better financial performance and can lead to a competitive advantage (Taliento et al., 2019). Deriving from that, ESG practices cannot only improve the sustainability of one's business but also lead to higher long-term growth, thus, better financial outcomes (Kim & Kim, 2014; Sandberg et al., 2022; van Beurden & Gössling, 2008). In the long term, investments made with ESG criteria have resulted in positive outcomes for shareholders (Barnett & Salomon, 2006). On the contrary, academic literature has found a negative correlation between social responsibility and financial returns. However, sustainable policies and business practices should still be adopted to maintain good relationships with all firm stakeholders (Taliento et al., 2019).

2.2. Overview of the Current State of Research

The ensuing discourse offers a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on sustainability in the context of family businesses. Family businesses possess specific characteristics that contribute to their positive relationship with sustainability (Berrone et al., 2010; Clauß et al., 2022; Ferreira et al., 2021; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2016). Furthermore, an overview of SSCM is provided.

2.2.1. Sustainability in Family Businesses

Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2016) have identified specific unique characteristics of family businesses that contribute to their positive relationship with sustainability.

As noted above, a notable characteristic of family businesses is their long-term orientation, emphasising their continuity for future generations. This long-term perspective fosters robust relationships with external stakeholders, which can be attributed to the historical resilience of family businesses (Berrone et al., 2010; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005). Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2016) family businesses are considered responsible corporate citizens. This reinforces their commitment to sustainability, as they maintain a vital connection with their external stakeholders and a vested interest in preserving the environment (Niehm et al., 2008). The interest in the environment is caused as family businesses focus on creating a sustainable future for the firm (Berrone et al., 2013). Furthermore, it has been discovered that family businesses rely on their human, social, and financial capital to improve their sustainable contribution (Ferreira et al., 2021).

According to Cui et al. (2018), family members serving as CEOs exhibit stronger corporate social responsibility performance than non-family CEOs. To mitigate rising agency costs, recommendations are to implement long-term incentives to align non-family CEOs with the values of the family business and foster sustainable investments. Additionally,

Table 1: ESG Framework (Source: Li et al. (2021))

Dimension	Factors	Definition
Environmental (E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •GHG emissions •Energy consumption and efficiency •Air pollutants 	Environmental matters that may have a positive or negative impact on the financial performance or solvency of an entity, sovereign, or individual.
Social (S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Workforce freedom of association •Child labor •Forced and compulsory labor •Workplace health and safety •Customer health and safety •Discrimination, diversity, and equal •Opportunity •Poverty and community impact •Supply chain management •Training and education •Customer privacy •Community impacts 	Social matters that may have a positive or negative impact on the financial performance or solvency of an entity, sovereign, or individual.
Governance (G)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Codes of conduct and business principles •Accountability •Transparency and disclosure •Executive pay •Board diversity and structure •Bribery and corruption •Stakeholder engagement •Shareholder rights 	Governance matters that may have a positive or negative impact on the financial performance or solvency of an entity, sovereign, or individual.

Anderson and Reeb (2004) highlight that family firms' monitoring capabilities allow them to manage agency costs that arise from non-family CEOs effectively. The strong sense of ownership and commitment enables family businesses to enforce their vision for sustainability throughout the organisation.

However, despite the positive associations between family businesses and sustainability found in academic research, there are potential drawbacks. One significant challenge is the potential conflict among family members within the company (De Vries, 1996). De Vries (1996) highlights that many owners can create distractions at the management level, leading to inadequate leadership and potentially harming stakeholders and sustainability-oriented business decisions (Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007). The greater the ownership dispersion among family members, the more challenging it becomes to maintain a long-term orientation for the business. Some family members may prioritise short-term financial gains over long-term survival, leading to potential conflicts that hinder the organisation's long-term vision and sustainable behaviour (Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007).

Furthermore, the socio-emotional wealth perspective, as highlighted by Berrone et al. (2010) and Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2016), can serve as a limiting factor for the sustainability performance of family businesses. Owners often perceive their family business as a source of social and emotional well-being for their families, leading to a hyper-conservative approach and reluctance to invest in business

renewal or growth because of the risk perspective (Patel & Chrisman, 2014). In support of this, Harith and Samujh (2020) found that owning families prioritise protecting their socio-emotional wealth by minimizing reliance on external capital providers. This reliance can impede investments and hinder the implementation of sustainable business practices because of pressure from external shareholders. It is worth noting that family businesses also have the potential to protect their socio-emotional wealth by demonstrating better sustainable performance compared to non-family counterparts, as argued by Berrone et al. (2010). This counters the aforementioned challenges associated with socio-emotional wealth that Harith and Samujh (2020) describe.

2.2.2. Sustainable Supply Chain Management

For decades, globalization and the increasing complexity of supply chains have sparked a growing body of research into environmental and social issues within the supply chain (Seuring & Müller, 2008). Exploring the possibilities and advancements in SSCM to identify areas for improvement and derive conceptual frameworks have only been a few of the numerous topics of research (Brandenburg et al., 2014; Carter & Easton, 2011; Carter & Rogers, 2008; Seuring & Müller, 2008). Over the past decades, managerial decision-making has been marked by a notable shift towards integrating social and environmental considerations, particularly within supply chain management. This trend underscores an increasing recognition of sustainable practices and respon-

sible business conduct in the contemporary company landscape (Brandenburg et al., 2014). Supply chain management, according to Seuring and Müller (2008), “(...) is the management of material, information and capital flows as well as cooperation among companies along the supply chain while taking goals from all three dimensions of sustainable development into account, which are derived from customer and stakeholder requirements” (Seuring & Müller, 2008, p. 1700). To provide various perspectives from academic literature on SSCM, commonalities and divergent opinions across crucial publications have been identified.

According to the analysis of 191 academic papers by Seuring and Müller (2008), a lack of clarity and focus on the social dimension of sustainability is evident. Only 20 papers adequately addressed social issues along the supply chain, while 140 articles emphasised environmental dimensions. Supporting those findings, Carter and Easton (2011) also demonstrated a predominant focus on ecological aspects of sustainability. On the contrary, they found a shift in recent years, evolving from focusing on environmental issues to a broader consideration, including social and economic factors. Supporting the implications, Brandenburg et al. (2014) state the existing models' main foci lie on a single sustainability aspect or a limited set of sustainability indicators, thus arguing for a lack of integration among them. Suggestions and implications are that while sustainability research has placed significant emphasis on the environmental aspect, there has been comparatively less attention regarding social dimensions in existing literature (Seuring & Müller, 2008).

Furthermore, as per Carter and Rogers (2008) and Beske et al. (2014), an essential factor for success in the future will be the collaboration between the companies across the supply chain. As per Beske et al. (2014), partner development plays a critical role in ensuring the overall performance and efficiency of the supply chain. They argue that the weakest link in the supply chain can be strengthened through practical guidance and the development of partners. Focal companies can collaborate with suppliers to establish sustainable processes and implement effective governance structures. This can be accomplished by proactively encouraging suppliers to engage in environmental and social activities and assisting them with guidance and collaborative development. This approach fosters strong supplier relationships and creates strategic value for focal companies (Sanchez-Flores et al., 2020). Supporting that, findings have shown that the collaboration and close assessment of one's supply chain positively influences adopting sustainable business practices (Macdonald, 2007; Matos & Hall, 2007). Without effective partnerships and comparative evaluation, adopting sustainable business practices can be severely impeded (Sancha et al., 2016; Soundararajan & Brown, 2016).

SSCM's impact on financial performance has been a highly debated topic in academic research. Although some opinions vary, authors generally view sustainable purchasing as having a positive economic impact (Carter et al., 2000; Govindan et al., 2020; Wolf, 2014). However, Feng et al. (2018) argue that SSCM only, in some cases, increases fi-

nancial performance, depending on the practices and investments taken. It is important to note that those measures must be considered long-term investments, and businesses cannot expect a direct payoff. While Carter and Rogers (2008) suggest the focus of focal companies should be on environmental purchasing, Wang and Sarkis (2013) and Koberg and Longoni (2019) extend those findings by proposing to pay attention to social and governance practices as well. Overall, sustainable supply chain practices are widely recognized as positively impacting financial performance in the long term by enhancing firms' resilience to crises and enabling them to operate effectively through challenging circumstances (Govindan et al., 2020).

While prior studies have highlighted the distinctive sustainability approach of family businesses, scholars have emphasised the importance of analysing individual firms instead of relying on aggregated data to gain a thorough understanding (Habbershon & Williams, 1999). Based on the preceding literature review, it is proposed that family businesses demonstrate a well-developed sustainability focus in their procurement practices due to their strong relationships with external stakeholders.

P1: Family businesses exhibit high sustainability levels attributed to their focus on long-term perspectives, commitment to communities and external stakeholders, and facilitating the adoption and implementation of sustainable practices.

Academic research indicates that the close relationships typically maintained by family businesses with external stakeholders can result in a reluctance to change suppliers regarding unsustainable production practices.

P2: Close relationships and the absence of external shareholder capital in family businesses do not hinder the implementation of sustainability practices in procurement and facilitate supplier switching if necessary. These relationships foster collaborative development processes and joint establishment of sustainability objectives, while family ownership strengthens the long-term emphasis on sustainability.

3. Methodology

The subsequent section describes the methodology employed in this study to address the research questions. The process of conducting academic research to aggregate data for this study can be seen in Figure 1.

3.1. Research Context

The research context of this study focuses on the food and beverages industry in Germany. Several factors support the research context of the German food and beverages industry.

To begin with, the industry's significant annual revenue of €185.3 billion underscores its economic importance. With

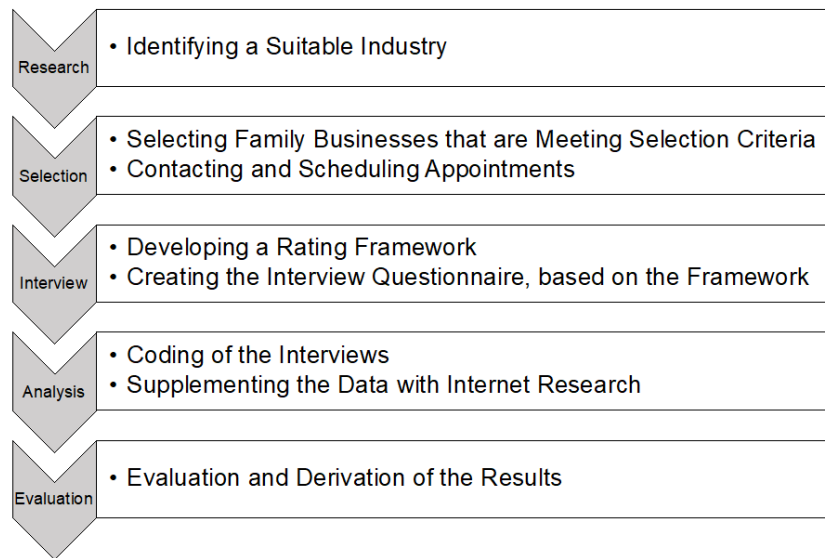


Figure 1: Research Approach (Source: Own Creation)

a substantial workforce of 614,000 employees, the industry holds a crucial position in the German labour market. The sector has gained an exceptional global reputation for its stringent sourcing standards and policies guaranteeing excellent quality. The notable presence of numerous family businesses within the industry makes it a representative and influential component of the broader German family business landscape (BMWK, n.d.).

Globalisation and recent crisis events, like the COVID-19 pandemic, have raised concerns regarding the sustainability of global supply chains. Given the food and beverages industry's heavy reliance on agricultural inputs, ensuring sustainability within the sector becomes paramount (Beske et al., 2014). The industry is dynamic and driven by changing customer demands (Vlajic et al., 2012). Consumers are increasingly concerned about the products they consume, paying attention to factors such as product origin and social practices, including labour standards (Beske et al., 2014). The complexities of mass production and the industry's dynamics necessitate agility and close collaboration within the supply chain, primarily due to the involvement of perishable food products (Beske et al., 2014; Matopoulos et al., 2007). The reliance of the food and beverages industry on agricultural sourcing further underscores the imperative for sustainability. Overall, the interconnectedness of supply chains within the food and beverages industry and the significant presence of family businesses make this industry a suitable research focus.

3.2. Research Design and Sample

This study seeks to comprehensively understand the existing state of sustainability in procurement in German family businesses. Orienting on the case study approach made by Yin (1994), this paper uses a cross-case-analysis system to derive findings and gain insights. This method is well-suited as the aim is to examine the state of heterogeneity across

the industry's family businesses regarding sustainability (Yin, 1994). For each case study, the selected research methodology is the exploratory qualitative research approach (Ward et al., 2018). This approach is well-suited for this study as it allows for in-depth exploration and interpretation of the collected data. The nature of the research questions and the complexity of the subject matter make quantitative measures less applicable, as open questions and individual answers given by the interviewees are essential. Alongside developing a rating framework to assess the sustainability of the procurement process, this study aims to draw insights from the data, offering practical implications and recommendations to address the challenges family businesses face.

An investigation was conducted on their official websites to identify prospective companies in the food and beverages industry that were potentially family-owned, supplemented by direct inquiries through telephone calls. The research specifically targeted indicators suggesting the businesses' familial ownership structure. To encompass a diverse range of family businesses, those with a workforce of up to 3,000 employees were selected for inclusion in this study. In this research, family businesses are defined as aforementioned. Thus, family ownership had to be present, regardless of whether they were family managed. This criterion is in line with the existing literature, which suggests that family businesses are more adept at monitoring and reducing higher agency costs compared to non-family firms. Hence, the prevailing assumption is that non-family executives have a limited impact on sustainability, either negatively or positively (Anderson & Reeb, 2004). One of the family businesses in this study was no longer majority-owned by the family but still led and managed by the second-generation members who remained involved. In total, eight interviews were conducted to facilitate the research process.

Table 2: ESG Rating Criteria (Source: Based on Escrig-Olmedo et al. (2019))

Environmental			Social			Governance	
Responsible Investments	Renewable Energy / Water Management and Usage	(Food) Waste Reduction	Supplier Labour Standards	Local Sourcing	Community Relations	Compliance with non-binding Regulations	Brand Communications
CO ₂ Emissions in Supply Chain	Biodiversity Preservation	Water and Land Pollution	Transparency of Supply Chain	Raw Material Sourcing		Audits	Business Ethics

3.3. Interview Questionnaire

This study had two main objectives: first, to develop an ESG-based rating framework for assessing the sustainability of family businesses in procurement; second, to create a framework that establishes a connection between measures and characteristics of family businesses that improve sustainability. To initiate the process, a set of rating criteria was established to provide a foundation for evaluating sustainability (see Table 2). The requirements in Table 2 were derived based on Escrig-Olmedo et al. (2019) and other academic literature (Beske et al., 2014; Dai & Tang, 2022; Zhu et al., 2008).

Each criterion is shortly explained in Appendix 2. The questionnaire was designed based on the rating criteria to enable a comparable and measurable assessment of the family businesses. It comprises 20 open-ended questions crafted to gather valid information. The questionnaire is structured into four sections: introduction, environmental, social, and governance. Each section includes questions that aim to contribute to assessing sustainability in procurement and gather detailed insights into the challenges and solutions encountered by family businesses. The introductory segment helps set the context for further exploration (see Appendix 1).

3.3.1. Environmental Section

The environmental section of the interview comprised five questions (see Table 3). These questions aimed to collect information on different aspects pertaining to the environmental dimension of sustainable procurement, with a specific focus on addressing the typical challenges faced by the food and beverages industry. The questions sought specific examples, metrics, and actions implemented by the family businesses concerning these areas.

3.3.2. Social Section

The social section of the interview consisted of six questions (see Table 4). The topic focused on the social aspects of sustainability in procurement. The questions covered areas regarding supplier selection criteria, engagement with suppliers and more.

3.3.3. Governance Section

The concluding section of the study comprised five questions that specifically addressed the governance dimension

of sustainability, with a particular emphasis on the interviewees' oversight of supply chains and relationships with suppliers (see Table 5). The interviewees' perspectives on sustainable practices, including their adherence to legal regulations, were explored. The interview ended with a comprehensive summary of the topics (see Appendix 1). Appendix 1 is divided into various sections, with the introduction and conclusion indicated in light red, while a distinctive colour represents each of the three pillars.

3.4. Interview Analysis

The interview ended with a comprehensive summary of the topics (see Appendix 1). Appendix 1 is divided into various sections, with the introduction and conclusion indicated in light red, while a distinctive colour represents each of the three pillars.

The data from the questionnaire were analysed in a two-step process. The initial step involved analysing each family business interviewed and examining the collected data. The interviews were transcribed and coded during this phase to extract valuable information. The primary objective was to obtain data and establish a fair evaluation process to facilitate the comparison of sustainability in procurement among family businesses. As previously mentioned, a set of 15 rating criteria was developed to assess the procurement process, categorised under three main pillars: Environmental (E), Social (S) and Governance (G). These criteria serve as a framework for evaluating the sustainability performance of the procurement process (see Table 2). Among them, six pertain to environmental factors, five focus on social factors and four on governance. The weight of each pillar was calculated by dividing the number of criteria within the pillar by the total number of criteria (15). Consequently, the environmental pillar accounts for 0.4 of the overall rating, the social pillar for 0.33, and the governance pillar for 0.27. This weighting scheme reflects the relative importance of each factor in the procurement process. The rating scale for each criterion ranges from -3 to 3, following the Likert scale, enabling a more objective assessment. Based on the compiled data, information was documented for all eight family businesses regarding each criterion. After gathering data for each criterion, comparing the best and worst outcomes was conducted to establish ratings. Finally, each criterion was assessed based on the collected measures to determine the corresponding

Table 3: Questionnaire Environmental Section (Source: Own Creation)

1. How does "Business X" prioritize and address CO ₂ emissions in the procurement process? Please provide any specific examples or metrics used to measure and mitigate these emissions?	3. Do You agree with the statement that 16% of products are lost in the supply chain due to overproduction and other factors, is this an issue at "Business X"? Why or why not?	5. Are issues in agriculture, such as wastewater pollution, pesticide use, deforestation, monocultures, ecosystem destruction and more a significant problem for "Business X"? Why or why not? What actions are taken with suppliers to address these issues?
2. Are sustainable investments in procurement taken? Why or why not? What specific sustainable investments did "Business X" make, and when?	4. What measures does "Business X" have in place to contribute to waste reduction? Have any measures and processes been implemented with suppliers to reduce waste and minimize wastewater production?	

Table 4: Questionnaire Social Section (Source: Own Creation)

1. How does the supplier selection take place? How is trade-off between lower prices and more sustainable/local suppliers handled?	3. Does "Business X" conduct audits, has codes of conduct and closely engage with its suppliers regarding sustainability practices? How would You describe the relationship with Your suppliers?	5. When choosing suppliers, how important are labour standards to Your organization? Does "Business X" have specific guidelines, compliance requirements and other criteria for suppliers?
2. To what extent do You consider environmental and social aspects, when purchasing raw materials, packaging materials and other items?	4. How important is the development and collaboration with Your suppliers? What experiences and challenges has "Business X" encountered in this regard? Are there any lessons learned or advantages that You perceived because of being a family business?	6. How has the COVID-19 crisis impacted Your operations, such as supply chain disruptions? Have you identified areas for improvement within Your supply chain and made any sustainable changes to enhance resilience in the long-term?

Table 5: Questionnaire Governance Section (Source: Own Creation)

1. Do you perceive sustainability as an opportunity for "Business X" to establish a long-term competitive advantage or do the associated costs outweigh the benefits in terms of financial performance?	3. Could You summarize the key points that distinguish your company's sustainable performance in procurement?	5. How transparent is your supply chain, and to what extent do You control Your suppliers? How would You describe the relationships with Your suppliers?
2. How has the implementation of the Supply Chain Act in 2021 impacted "Business X," and how prepared is the company to comply with its requirements? Have the new legal regulations posed any challenges to the organization?	4. What would You say sets "Business X" apart in terms of sustainability in procurement, even when it is not legally required? If applicable, why and since when have You been implementing these practices?	

scores. These ratings are later transformed to a scale of 0 to 6 for further calculations, with 0 being the worst and six the highest possible rating (see Table 6).

All the data is coded and examined for findings related to each rating criterion. The final evaluation is presented in the

form of a spider chart that displays the scores of each family business in each criterion. Additionally, a diagram was created to provide a comparable representation of the ratings (see Figure 2). Here the ratings are evaluated as follows (see Table 7): The example calculation in Table 7 is based

Table 6: Rating Scale (Source: Own Creation)

Likert Scale rating in Analysis	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
Rating for official score determination	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Table 7: Comparable ESG Rating Score (Source: Own Creation)

Pillar	E	S	G
Total Number of Rating Criteria	6	5	4
Weight of Pillar	0.4	0.33	0.27
Total Score	36	30	24
Base Score	6	6	6
ESG Rating for Pillar	2.4	1.98	1.62
ESG Rating "FB X"	6		

on the highest possible score that each family business could receive:

$$\text{Total Number of Rating Criteria} \times 6 = \text{Total Score}$$

Afterwards, the rating is divided by the total number of rating criteria to calculate the base score:

$$\text{Total Score} / \text{Total Number of Rating Criteria} = \text{Base Score}$$

In the final step of the calculation, the base score is multiplied by the weight of its pillar:

$$\text{Base Score} \times \text{Weight of Pillar} = \text{ESG Rating for Pillar}$$

In the end, the ESG ratings of each pillar are aggregated, resulting in a maximum possible rating of 6, as seen in the ESG Rating “Family Business X” (FBX) (see Figure 2).

The second and final step entailed conducting a comprehensive cross-case-analysis of the family businesses. It aimed to identify potential challenges and examine measures implemented to enhance sustainability in procurement while recognising the specific challenges faced by family businesses in this context. The primary objective was to uncover meaningful patterns and derive actionable recommendations to help family businesses improve their sustainability/ESG rating in procurement. Furthermore, the aim was to provide valuable suggestions to other family businesses on overcoming challenges and enhancing sustainability. As a result, a framework was developed to visually represent these recommendations and offer a comprehensive overview of the findings.

Various analytical tools were employed throughout the analysis to identify patterns and manage the substantial volume of data. The subsequent section will present and explain the findings obtained from the data analysis.

4. Findings

The following section presents the findings and will be divided into two parts. The first part aims to answer the initial research question, deriving a comparable ESG rating based

on the gathered interview data. In the second part, cross-case analysis will be conducted to provide further insights into current research, assess specific claims and evaluate the propositions. To ensure the anonymity of the interviews and the data collected, each family business has been assigned a numerical identifier representing them in the study, ranging from FB1 to FB8.

4.1. ESG Rating Analysis

Figure 2 presents the aggregated overall scores for each family business, providing a comparable rating across the eight interviewed companies. Due to the extensive nature of analysing each rating, this paper will highlight the key findings for each criterion and the underlying assumptions. The evaluations in this study are derived from the data collected through interviews and website research. An objective rating system was developed by comparing the performance of all family businesses and assigning points accordingly. As seen in Appendix 3, a spider chart displays the combined results of all family businesses, while Appendix 4 provides an overview of all criterion scores for each company. Appendices 5 to 12 also show individual spider charts of each family business, offering a comprehensive view of their respective ratings. Figure 2 presents the overall scores for each pillar, providing an overview of the family businesses’ performance.

FB5 achieved the highest rating with 4.9 out of 6 points, demonstrating its strong position relative to the other businesses. The interviewee highlighted that FB5’s motivation for founding the company was the limited availability of organic products. Sustainability and promoting healthy nutrition have always been fundamental to FB5’s business philosophy, as evidenced by the statement: “Sustainability has always been ingrained in the DNA of our family business”. FB5 demonstrated exceptional performance across all pillars, outperforming other family businesses. In the environmental pillar, FB1 achieved an equal rating. FB1 earned the second-highest rating with 4.3 points, reflecting a 12% lower score than FB5. This was primarily due to weaker performance in the social and governance pillar. On the contrary, FB2 received the lowest score, with 3.1 points, indicating a significant performance gap of 37% compared to FB5.

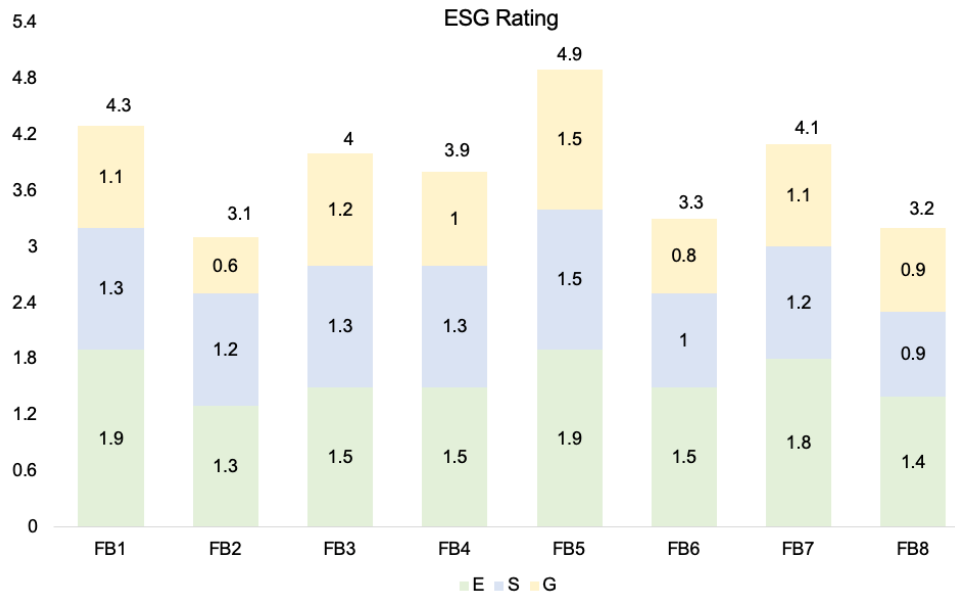


Figure 2: ESG Rating (Source: Own Creation)

The criterion with the highest aggregated rating is Responsible Investments, with 36 points, indicating that all family businesses have made commendable efforts to enhance sustainability in their procurement processes. On the other hand, the criterion of Transparency of the Supply Chain received the lowest aggregated score with 25 points, confirming the observations of scholars who highlighted the weaker social dimension as a general issue (Seuring & Müller, 2008). The following sections will provide a detailed analysis of each pillar.

4.1.1.1. Environmental Pillar Analysis

As previously mentioned, this pillar focuses on evaluating the environmental practices implemented by family businesses to promote sustainability and preserve natural resources. It also examines the measures taken to reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions within the procurement value chain. The individual ratings for each family business can be found in the Appendices.

One notable standout in the responsible investments criterion is FB7. This family business has developed expertise in measuring Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions, setting them apart (see Appendix 11).

Furthermore, FB6 has made significant strides in reducing CO₂ emissions in their procurement process by opting for train transportation of their sourced goods, stating "(...) that definitely has positive effects, that's quite a big lever". This change has resulted in substantial benefits, with a remarkable reduction of 16,000 tons of CO₂ emissions since the implementation (see Appendix 10). Although FB2 and FB3 have the lowest ratings, it is essential to note that they are not detrimental. Both companies have implemented measures to prioritise regional sourcing, with FB2 focusing on a radius of 150km and FB3 primarily sourcing from Germany or north-

ern Europe. However, unlike the other family businesses, they have not implemented specific measures to reduce the environmental impact of transportation.

Regarding the use of renewable energy, FB7 has demonstrated commendable efforts by obtaining certification in one of the world's leading sustainable building standards. This certification underscores their commitment to sustainable business practices and efficient energy usage (see Appendix 11). Additionally, FB4 has made significant strides in developing core competencies in water-saving agriculture compared to other family businesses. According to the interview conducted with FB4, the interviewee mentioned, "(...) in certain regions, we actively implement water-efficient agricultural methods to reduce water usage" (see Appendix 8).

Preserving biodiversity is a crucial criterion within the food and beverage industry, given the impact of agricultural practices on land and ecosystems. The expansion of agricultural land has led to deforestation and the proliferation of monocultures, resulting in a decline in biodiversity over the past decades. FB5 has received the highest rating for their extensive efforts in this area. They have implemented reforestation measures and only source from ecological agriculture, which adheres to strict regulations enforced by eco-control bodies (see Appendix 9). Moreover, they have made commendable efforts to address the issue of palm monocultures, as asserted by the statement, "(...) sustainable palm oil cultivation is possible without deforestation".

In the context of waste reduction, all family businesses have demonstrated expertise in implementing circular economy practices, utilizing recycled packaging materials, and repurposing food and production waste as animal feed. FB1 stands out by recycling its bottles and caps and actively working on innovations to make its labels recyclable (see Appendix 5). The interviewee from FB1 emphasised the signifi-

cance of the circular economy to their business, highlighting that "(...) even their purchased single-use bottles are made of 100% rPatt material".

FB1 and FB5 have implemented commendable measures to reduce water and land pollution. At the same time, the other family businesses have shown limited progress, making this criterion the least developed within the environmental pillar. FB1's efforts demonstrate their strong commitment to and close connection with the local environment. They collaborate closely with farmers to promote and incentivize adopting ecological farming practices and jointly develop measures to reduce pesticide usage. The interviewee from FB1 characterized this relationship as a "(...) cooperative partnership, rather than a traditional supplier relationship (...)", underscoring the company's exceptional commitment to allocating resources and compensating their partner's potential reduced agricultural yields. Indeed, the absence of a traditional supplier relationship makes FB1's commitment to environmental sustainability particularly remarkable.

Summarising the environmental pillar, evidence showed the need to prioritise and strengthen efforts towards addressing water and land pollution. This is essential to safeguard the fertility and cleanliness of agricultural land and ensure clean water availability for future generations well-being.

4.1.2. Social Pillar Analysis

The social pillar received the fewest total points compared to the number of criteria being evaluated. However, except for FB2, all family businesses had a code of conduct in place, which included requirements for social standards for their suppliers' employees. Notably, FB3, FB4, and FB5 made extraordinary efforts by implementing a supplier evaluation system and assessing factors such as the origin countries and political situations (see Appendix 7, 8, 9). By conducting annual evaluations of suppliers, family businesses can effectively monitor and address social deficiencies and risks across different countries. If a supplier's rating falls below predetermined thresholds, it prompts the consideration of transitioning to alternative suppliers. This proactive approach allows businesses to maintain control and ensure their sourcing practices align with sustainability goals and values. "From an international perspective, GlobalG.A.P is available, (...) where the audit results can be accessed in the GlobalG.A.P database (...)", stated the interviewee of FB4. While not all family businesses have a fully developed code of conduct in place, progress has been made, as stated by the interviewee from FB1, who mentioned that they "(...) are just in the development of creating a new code of conduct as much has changed in recent years".

The issue of supply chain transparency remains a challenge for certain family businesses, as they rely on wholesalers to source goods without having complete visibility into the origins of these goods. Despite EU regulations requiring the traceability of goods, a comprehensive overview is often lacking. Companies may not know the production companies where the sourced goods were produced, except for FB5,

FB7, and FB8. While laws and compliance regulations primarily focus on the quality and cleanliness of goods, there is less emphasis on social laws that demand responsibility for the supply chain from a social perspective. Consequently, transparency gaps persist, particularly regarding understanding the social impact and labour conditions.

In terms of raw material sourcing, FB2 demonstrated commendable efforts, stating that "(...) the majority of sourced goods come from within the region" (see Appendix 6). On the other hand, FB5 has made commendable efforts in material sourcing by specializing in using paper packaging across its entire product portfolio. As a result, they have reduced 7,000 kilograms of plastic film waste, demonstrating their commitment to minimizing their environmental impact.

FB2 primarily sources locally within a 50-kilometre radius of their production facility, whereas other businesses, such as FB1 and FB3, focus on local and regional sourcing. While FB5 may not be able to source all its products locally, they demonstrate a strong commitment to sourcing from local small businesses in the region of origin. They aim to support and strengthen local farmers through collaborative partnerships. The interviewee from FB5 emphasised, "(...) it is important for us to support suppliers and empower small farmers through cooperation."

All family businesses prioritise strong community relations and actively engage in supporting local projects through sponsorships and positive interactions with external stakeholders. They take pride in their role as employers and strive to impact their communities positively. FB2, for instance, strongly focuses on integrating physically and mentally disabled individuals "(...) not because we want to avoid disability contributions, but because we firmly believe that everybody deserves a chance". Additionally, FB3 highlights their commitment to local sourcing, stated: "When it comes to repairs in our production facilities, we always try to engage local businesses".

4.1.3. Governance Pillar Analysis

In the governance pillar, the compliance criterion with non-binding standards evaluated the voluntary efforts made by family businesses that are not legally required. FB5 stood out with their extraordinary efforts, implementing a program that pays a fee to certain suppliers, allowing them to make sustainable investments. Additionally, the interviewee of FB5 stated that "(...) annually, approximately € 160,000 is donated from the earnings of the products purchased with this program. (...) since October, we have had a program that donates 1 cent of every product sold to a foundation, which makes an additional € 800,000 a year". Instead of paying out the sum as profits for the ownership family, it is invested in environmental and social projects such as "(...) organic farming, women's empowerment, and climate protection". FB1, FB4, and FB7 also demonstrated significant efforts in this criterion, having implemented projects and working groups to develop their suppliers and implement other projects.

Audits are crucial in ensuring compliance with guidelines, laws, and the code of conduct. Although there were instances

where certain family businesses demonstrated inadequate efforts, FB5, FB3, FB4 and FB7 stood out for their strong supplier auditing practices. FB3, FB4 and FB7 go the extra mile by involving a third party to audit their suppliers yearly or as needed. Additionally, FB5 conducts risk assessments to determine the necessity of on-site audits. All family businesses emphasised their close and collaborative relationships with suppliers, built over years of partnership. However, they fall behind despite FB2, FB6, and FB8 requiring social and environmental compliance from their suppliers.

The last criterion examined the moral principles and values that guide decision-making in family businesses. Whereas all family businesses focused on sustaining the business for future generations, FB5 expressed the most extraordinary business ethic. According to the interviewee, their founding principle roots in the desire "(...) to make the world a better place, piece by piece".

After summarising the ratings, it can be concluded that the concept of sustainability is deeply rooted in the philosophy of most of the companies interviewed. However, there has been a greater emphasis on environmental aspects in recent years, while the social perspective of sustainability has lagged. Nevertheless, in recent years a notable shift happened, as the family businesses are revising their code of conduct and placing greater attention on social norms and human rights. As the interviewee of FB5 emphasised: "*The ethical question in family businesses has been strongly followed when it comes to the social aspect, and I can imagine that it has always been better, compared to large corporates*". Progress has been made, and new laws like the German government's supply chain act pressure businesses to enhance transparency in their supply chains. However, challenges persist, especially in regions where issues are prevalent. There is still a long way to go, but considering the various developments and investments, the family businesses are on a positive trajectory. The average score of 3.9 indicates a good average, heading in the right direction, although specific areas still require further development. As the interviewee of FB1 noted, "*(...) sustainability is not a short-term trend. It will continue to rise significantly and then remain of very, very high importance in the long term*".

4.2. Cross-Case-Study Analysis

In this section, a cross-case analysis examines common characteristics that influence sustainability in family businesses. The interview findings are compared to academic literature and translated into a framework. The cross-case analysis of all eight interviews revealed specific advantageous characteristics and challenges that family businesses face that do not align with existing scholarly literature. The qualitative analysis identified six essential areas related to sustainability in the procurement process of family businesses (see Table 8). The identified statements are presented and compared to academic literature, ending in the development of the "Sustainability Process Model" (see Figure 3).

4.2.1. Sustainability: Cost or Benefit

While implementing sustainable business practices brings undeniable environmental and social benefits, it entails investment costs and requires substantial resource allocation. Among most interviewed family businesses, there was a consensus that the benefits surpass the expenditures (FB1, FB3, FB5, FB6, and FB7). Furthermore, FB4 acknowledged the potential for more significant benefits by comprehensively analysing their procurement process, revealing existing inefficiencies and identifying opportunities for sustainable investments. The interviewee from FB1 pointed out: "*With many investments, there is medium- to long-term cost advantages, and it starts with efficiency gains*". Moreover, FB5 is an excellent example, as they have focused on sustainable business practices for decades. The Interviewee of FB5 stated, "*(...) showing other companies that sustainable procurement practices can have a pay-off demonstrates that such practices can be rewarding for other companies*". FB7 emphasised the non-financial benefits of sustainable practices, highlighting their importance for the ownership family.

Nonetheless, all participants acknowledged that the short-term costs are significant. FB2 and FB8 perceived the expenses of sustainability to outweigh the benefits. FB8 explained this by emphasising: "*(...) the regulations imposed by the government result in high bureaucratic costs because even the purchase of 100 pencils has to be reported*". In recent years, the political landscape has undergone significant changes, introducing numerous laws and regulations. These changes have resulted in heightened bureaucratic costs, particularly for family businesses and other medium-sized companies.

Overall, most interviewed family businesses confirmed the academic findings of Carter et al. (2000) and Feng et al. (2018) that sustainable business practices indeed have a positive financial payoff. However, this is contingent upon making suitable investments and considering the long-term perspective, as sustainable practices contribute to more crisis-resistant business operations.

4.2.2. (Dis-) advantages of Relationship with Suppliers

The interviewees recognized the significance of their relationships with suppliers as a critical distinguishing factor contributing to their operational success. They highlighted the substantial competitive advantages derived from their close and personal connections with their suppliers. For instance, the interviewee of FB4 stated: "*Our primary focus is on building enduring and sustainable relationships with our suppliers, which facilitates seamless collaboration*". FB5 and FB6 further endorsed this perspective by emphasising that such partnerships enhance resilience through close collaboration, fair pricing, and personal connections. They underscored that these strong ties with suppliers enable them to navigate crises because of their loyalty and personal connection to their family businesses. FB7 highlighted that personal relationships enhance transparency and simplify gathering environmental, social, and governance data. Additionally, FB4 and FB5 emphasised the importance of high-quality relationships in driving change, developing sustainable prac-

Table 8: Impact of Sustainability on Family Businesses (Source: Own Creation)

Topic	Sustainability: Cost or Benefit	(Dis-) advantages of Relationship with Suppliers in regard to Sustainability in Family Businesses	Financial Situation of Family Business in regard to Sustainable Investments	Impact of Sustainability and Family Businesses on Agility and Resilience	Impact of Family Ownership on Sustainability	Other (Challenges)
FB1	Long-term cost advantages	Strong positive benefits derived from close supplier and community relationships	High investments are needed, but no financial constraints due to less external capital	Family ownership enhances organizational agility, while sustainability practices contribute to increased resilience during crisis situations	Family ownership entails a high sense of responsibility driven by an intrinsic interest in the well-being of the community and future generations, exemplifying a commitment to caring for external stakeholders	Risks of Sustainability are High costs
FB2	Higher costs outweighing advantages	Decades-long partnerships providing a cooperative advantage and not impeding change if necessary	The robust capital structure and positive relationships with banks allow for investments without being hindered by financial limitations	Family ownership enhances organizational agility sustainability enhances resilience	The strong and enduring relationships between the firm and its external/internal stakeholders result in low fluctuation and foster mutual trust and cooperation	High costs and bureaucratic burdens arise as a result of the increasing number of laws and regulations that have been implemented and are expected to be
FB3	Brand image as a benefit and long-term cost advantages	Close personal relationships, while potentially subjective, are mitigated through established practices, offering advantages in supplier relationships and collaborative sustainable development	No financial constraints	Flat hierarchies facilitate expedited agility, prioritizing factors beyond mere financial payoffs and sustainability leads to crisis preparedness	Family businesses possess deep knowledge of the firm due to their longstanding history, allowing for close relationships with suppliers and facilitating sustainable practices while considering the welfare of external stakeholders	Long-term perspective as an advantage

(Continued)

Table 8 – continued

Topic	Sustainability: Cost or Benefit	(Dis-) advantages of Relationship with Suppliers in regard to Sustainability in Family Businesses	Financial Situation of Family Business in regard to Sustainable Investments	Impact of Sustainability and Family Businesses on Agility and Resilience	Impact of Family Ownership on Sustainability	Other (Challenges)
FB4	Chance to look and improve operations leading to potential improvements and benefits	Long-term partnerships and collaborations foster mutual growth and are highly advantageous, highlighting the importance of close relationships and sustainable collaboration	Capital is not a concern due to a healthy capital structure and cooperations with banks, eliminating any issues related to financial constraints	Flat hierarchies enable higher agility and sustainability increases enhanced crisis resilience	Family businesses have the ability to understand and empathize with the challenges faced by its suppliers, particularly smaller businesses and can provide financial support while maintaining a long-term perspective	High costs and bureaucratic burdens arise as a result of the increasing number of laws and regulations that have been implemented and are expected to be
FB5	Benefit from firm's long-standing commitment to sustainability since inception	Strong personal relationships facilitate the development of sustainable practices in the supply chain and enhance resilience during crises	Financial independence provides a significant advantage for making decisions that prioritize non-monetary goals	Sustainability and close supplier relations enhance resilience in crisis situations	With no obligation to external shareholders, family businesses have the autonomy to make decisions and investments that may not prioritize immediate financial gains but contribute to long-term sustainability	Fast decision-making processes and the pursuit of non-monetary interests, even when financial gains are not evident, are inherent advantages of family businesses
FB6	Enhanced financial performance through sustainability in the long run	Good relationships have proven to be a source of resilience during challenging times	No significant differences are observed in capital structures between family businesses and non-family businesses	Sustainability and close supplier relations enhance resilience in crisis situations	Long-term perspective is given in family businesses and that enhances sustainability	High costs and bureaucratic burdens arise as a result of the increasing number of laws and regulations that have been implemented and are expected to be

(Continued)

Table 8 – continued

Topic	Sustainability: Cost or Benefit	(Dis-) advantages of Relationship with Suppliers in regard to Sustainability in Family Businesses	Financial Situation of Family Business in regard to Sustainable Investments	Impact of Sustainability and Family Businesses on Agility and Resilience	Impact of Family Ownership on Sustainability	Other (Challenges)
FB7	High costs, but significant non-financial benefits and chances for pay-off in the long-term perspective	Personal contact offers significant advantages in areas such as transparency, honesty, and collaborative consultation	The company maintains a healthy capital structure and faces no issues in working alongside banks	Sustainability and close supplier relations enhance resilience in crisis situations	The long-term perspective ingrained in family businesses promotes sustainability and fosters independence in decision-making processes	
FB8	Predominance of high costs over benefits	Close relationships are equally valuable in both non-family and family businesses	No significant differences are observed in capital structures between family businesses and non-family businesses		Due to the family ownership, a decreased employee turnover is at hand, giving an advantage to family businesses	High costs and bureaucratic burdens arise as a result of the increasing number of laws and regulations that have been implemented and are expected to be

tices, and fostering collective competencies. They also highlighted that due to stringent regulations and compliance rules in Germany, cooperation cannot be sustained if products fail to meet the required quality standards. However, FB3 acknowledged the potential issue of subjectivity by establishing personal connections. To ensure objectivity in supplier evaluation, they have implemented specific processes that involve multiple individuals in the assessment. As stated by the interviewee of FB3: *"We have two people looking at the supplier's evaluation to ensure objectivity"*. These measures aim to minimize subjective biases and enhance the accuracy of supplier evaluations. Furthermore, FB8 expressed a different viewpoint, stating that there were no discernible differences between family and non-family firms regarding their relationships with external stakeholders.

Berrone et al. (2010) and Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2016) researched the high-quality relationships that family businesses tend to develop with internal and external stakeholders. They found that these mutually benefit both the suppliers and the firm, aligning with this study's findings. Furthermore, the results of this study support the research by Carter and Rogers (2008) and Beske et al. (2014), highlighting the importance of collaboration and supply chain support in adopting sustainability practices and building competencies. The family businesses recognized the benefits of collaborative partnerships and the development of sustainable practices within the procurement process. Contradicting the findings of Donaldson and Walsh (2015), who suggest that such relationships may hinder agility and the firm's willingness to change, most family businesses emphasised the positive impact of close relationships on their sustainability efforts. Overall, the findings indicate that personal relationships are advantageous regarding sustainability and economic aspects. Consistent with Beske et al. (2014), family businesses considered the support of their supply chain to be beneficial, as it fosters loyalty and resilience, particularly in crises.

4.2.3. Financial Impact of Sustainability

None of the family businesses confirmed that financial constraints were imposed by their family ownership. FB2 highlighted the significance of maintaining a healthy capital structure, stated, *"(...) one particular effort we made is that we have achieved a robust equity structure (...)"*, while FB4 added, *"(...) we have a solid capital structure, which enables us to support suppliers financially or provide backing for their loans at banks"*. The interviewee from FB5 further reinforced these statements: *"As a result of our financial independence, we have a great deal of freedom in decision-making and can implement sustainability strategies that we deem appropriate"*. In summary, the findings suggest that family businesses, with their financial control and absence of external shareholders, are not restricted by financial constraints when making sustainability investments in the procurement process. Many companies expressed that family ownership enhanced their access to capital and allowed them to prioritise their vision and values over purely financial considerations. The inter-

viewee of FB5 stated the absence of external shareholders as advantageous in making investments that did not pay off financially but instead focused on social and environmental value creation.

On the other hand, the interviewee from FB8 stated, that *"(...) it is not important if the business is a family business or not, but what is important is the product and market the business operates in"*. A sentiment supported by the interviewee from FB6.

The findings of this study contradict the existing literature, particularly the arguments put forth by Clauß et al. (2022) and other scholars regarding the limited financial resources and risk aversion of family businesses. None of the family businesses, except for FB8, reported having financial constraints. Academic literature suggests that focusing on safeguarding the company leads to reduced innovation and potential missed investment opportunities (Machek et al., 2019). The study findings unveil that none of the family businesses interviewed encountered financial limitations or inadequate capital for essential investments. Furthermore, FB2, FB4, FB5, and FB7 specifically emphasised the strength of their capital structure, enabling substantial investments without relying on external funding. These findings disrupt the prevailing understanding and underscore the necessity for additional research in this domain, expanding upon the current literature.

In addition, the perspectives of Harith and Samujh (2020) and Patel and Chrisman (2014) regarding socio-emotional wealth highlight conservative investment behaviour and aversion to risk. In contradiction to this view, the family businesses interviewed in this study diverged from such a perspective. They underscored that family ownership amplified their commitments to sustainable investments. Although they did not explicitly mention an inclination towards higher risk-taking, they expressed heightened liberty to invest in projects that might not yield financial returns. This finding reinforces that the socio-emotional wealth perspective underscores the non-financial aspects cherished by family businesses, culminating in enhanced sustainability performance. (Berrone et al., 2010).

4.2.4. Agility and Resilience in Family Businesses

Agility and resilience are critical concepts in today's business environment, as organisations need to make prompt decisions in challenging situations. Demonstrating resilience is particularly important within the supply chain to ensure uninterrupted production. An important finding from the interviews is that family businesses possess greater agility than large corporations. This perception is attributed to their family ownership structure, flat hierarchies, and the owning family's active participation in the business's daily operations. (FB1, FB2, FB3, FB4, FB5, FB7). The Interviewee of FB4 stated: *"We have a cooperative with which we collaborate closely, and being a family business gives us the advantage of being more agile"*.

Moreover, it became apparent that sustainability acts as a catalyst for enhancing the resilience of family businesses, par-

ticularly amidst recent disruptions to supply chains caused by various crises. The establishment of close and enduring partnerships with suppliers, along with the adoption of sustainable business practices, was found to be instrumental in bolstering this resilience. As the interviewee from FB2 articulated: *"We have implemented a CO₂ recovery system, thereby eliminating the need to procure carbon dioxide for our production processes"*. Corroborating this perspective, the interviewee from FB5 affirmed the operationalisation of the procurement, even during times of crisis, because *"(...) the suppliers are loyal to us as we invest in the relationship"*. Furthermore, attaining self-sufficiency in electricity can further strengthen resilience and diminish reliance on external sources, as evidenced by the practices of FB2 and FB7.

Academic literature, as well as the findings of this study, demonstrate that sustainability practices contribute to enhancing resilience (Govindan et al., 2020). Family ownership and management also fostered agility through flat hierarchies and low agency costs, facilitating fast decision-making processes (FB1, FB2, FB3, FB4).

4.2.5. Impact of Family Ownership on Sustainability

The influence of family ownership on sustainability can be a double-edged sword, as it depends on the vision of the owning family and the management of the business. Given the introduction of new laws in recent years and the resulting demands for commitment to sustainable practices of the public, there is no distinction between family and non-family firms, as these laws apply to all.

Nonetheless, when the owning family embraces the traditional mindset of dedication, family ownership can be perceived as advantageous. The interviews unveiled that all respondents viewed family ownership as a strength for sustainability, as family businesses commonly demonstrate a profound commitment to their communities and the enduring sustainability of their enterprises. Family businesses often adopt a long-term outlook, prioritising generational objectives over short-term or medium-term gains. As emphasised by FB1: *"Family businesses tend to have a strong sense of responsibility due to their close connection to their communities"*. Extending on that interviewee of FB2 mentioned: *"(...) family businesses think sustainable because they do not focus on quarterly reports or executive terms, but instead on generations"*, a sentiment echoed by FB6 and FB7. FB4 emphasised that most of their suppliers are small- or medium-sized family businesses, allowing for a deeper understanding of their challenges and the opportunity to develop sustainable measures collaboratively. Furthermore, FB5 illustrated the independence of family ownership enables the possibility of making investments that may not yield financial returns. The interviewee stated: *"The moral aspect becomes crucial, particularly in the realm of social sustainability. I believe that family businesses have historically outperformed large corporations in this regard"*.

Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2016) have observed that family businesses exhibit a long-term orientation and prioritise sustainability over short-term gains, which aligns

with the findings of this study. The interviewees expressed their commitment to ensuring the business's longevity for future generations and their interest in environmental and social sustainability (Machek et al., 2019). Finally, this study further supports the findings of Habbershon and Williams (1999) regarding the strong commitment of family businesses to their communities and external stakeholders.

4.2.6. Challenges of Sustainability for Family Businesses

During the interviews, several challenges were expressed by the interviewees, particularly regarding the high costs associated with the increasing need for sustainable investments (FB1, FB2, FB4, FB6, FB8). Additionally, FB2, FB4, FB6, and FB8 highlighted the escalating bureaucracy costs resulting from new laws and compliance regulations imposed by the government. As illustrated by the interviewee of FB2: *"When I have to go through the same process for a pen, which is just a merchandising item, as for all other products in the procurement process, it becomes nothing but bureaucracy"*. Building on that, the interviewee of FB4 stated: *"In our case, the heterogeneity of family businesses comes into play, as we don't have a unified inventory management system, (...), thought should be given to the structure of different types of businesses, rather than only large corporates. This escalates the resources spent on bureaucratic processes"*. In this context, the interviewee emphasises that the issue lies not in the essence of sustainability itself but in the tendency of governmental policies to predominantly cater to corporations with a standardized structure, disregarding the distinct characteristics of family businesses. This challenge has the potential to lead to inefficient utilization of resources in the future, particularly in the upcoming decade, and may pose a substantial competitive disadvantage for family businesses. Appropriate measures must be implemented to address these challenges, either by the government or family businesses. These measures should bridge the gap between regulatory requirements and family businesses' specific needs and capabilities, fostering a more favourable and supportive environment for sustainable practices.

4.3. Propositions and Framework

The findings derived from the interviews conducted with family businesses provide evidence to support Proposition 1. It showed apparent that all the family businesses demonstrated a certain level of sustainability and showcased strengths in one or more pillars. Notably, all the interviewed family businesses emphasised the significance of maintaining high-quality relationships with suppliers and other external stakeholders, attributing this as an advantageous factor in implementing sustainable business practices. Furthermore, most family businesses underscored their long-term focus and unwavering commitment to their communities. This confirms the proposition that having a long-term vision facilitates sustainable investments, as it allows for a focus on non-immediate financial pay-offs.

The study's findings support Proposition 2, as all interviewed family businesses affirmed the advantages of close

relationships with suppliers in adhering to and advancing sustainable business practices. While one family business expressed concerns about potential subjectivity in supplier selection, they had implemented business processes to mitigate this issue (FB3). It is noteworthy that all family businesses emphasised the strict compliance regulations in Germany, which compelled them to change suppliers if any quality or social issues arose. Their decision-making process was free from any form of personal favoritism. They actively sought solutions and collaboration with suppliers to maintain the business relationship, but if improvements were not feasible, they were forced to switch suppliers. Additionally, seven of eight family businesses acknowledged that family ownership heightened their focus on sustainability. It gives them the autonomy to pursue their visions without pressure from external shareholders. The strong connection of the owning family with external stakeholders, driven by motives beyond financial gain, further facilitated the implementation of sustainable business practices.

To summarise, the findings of this study indicate that specific characteristics inherent to family businesses positively influence sustainability in the procurement process. These characteristics include the ownership structure, a long-term vision, agility, and a genuine interest in supporting communities and regions. Furthermore, the absence of external shareholders and the ability to access local banks' capital based on a favourable brand image provide additional support for sustainability initiatives. Based on these findings, a framework has been developed to emphasise the significance of family business characteristics in enhancing sustainability in procurement (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 showcases the key findings, emphasising the potential of family businesses, to drive sustainability in procurement. The study uncovers that family businesses derive advantages from their ownership structure and streamlined decision-making processes, which are facilitated by their flat hierarchies. These advantageous characteristics of family businesses are further elaborated in Figure 3. These attributes, coupled with the preferred measures listed, can improve sustainability in procurement and the overall supply chain, consequently leading to a higher ESG rating. Furthermore, the study highlights the long-term advantages of enhanced sustainability, indirectly contributing to the competitive edge of family businesses. The following concise definitions offer a comprehensive overview of the indirect impact that enhanced sustainability can exert on family businesses, illustrating the potential for these measures to yield significant competitive-, as well as cost advantages.

- Resource usage pertains to reducing resources utilized in production through implementing circular economy practices. This ultimately generates long-term cost advantages and has a positive environmental impact.
- Sustainability bolsters resilience by ensuring an agile procurement and supply chain process. Strong supplier relationships enhance loyalty, enabling consistent delivery to family businesses even during shortages.

- Effectively utilizing an improved brand image can serve as a powerful tool for employer branding and customer attraction. Furthermore, it has the potential to enhance long-term brand image, customer retention rates, and foster customer loyalty.
- Investments can enhance supply chain independence by utilizing by-products and developing in-house capabilities to produce essential items like energy and gas. This reduces reliance on external sources and mitigates the impact of cost increases and crises.
- Centralizing data management facilitates streamlined communication with entities such as the government and aids in compliance with regulations, as all pertinent data is readily accessible, leading to decreased resource intensity. This decreases the resource intensity of sustainability reporting.

Integrating sustainable procurement practices can improve risk management by identifying and mitigating potential environmental, social, and governance risks. This highlights the overall advantage of sustainability in the procurement process.

5. Discussion

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in academic literature focusing on sustainability, indicating a growing interest in these topics. However, the connection between sustainability and family businesses has been largely overlooked. This study aims to bridge that research gap by measuring privately held family businesses' sustainability ratings on the procurement process. The following section summarises the study's findings, outlines the implications, and finally presents the limitations of this study and future research avenues.

5.1. Summary of the Findings

5.1.1. Research Question 1

Based on the cross-case analysis, several noteworthy findings emerged, shedding light on sustainability in procurement within family businesses. The formulation of the first research question aimed to conduct a comparative analysis of sustainability, based on ESG principles, in the procurement process of family businesses.

The ESG rating assessment revealed that all family businesses allocated resources to sustainable initiatives. This demonstrates their growing commitment for sustainable practices in the procurement process, highlighting the business sector's role in this regard. Furthermore, the results indicated that family businesses firmly focused on sustainable investments and process implementations in the environmental pillar. However, there was a lag in the social pillar, particularly in areas related to transparency of the supply chain. A noteworthy observation is that family businesses that implemented sustainability measures years ago have

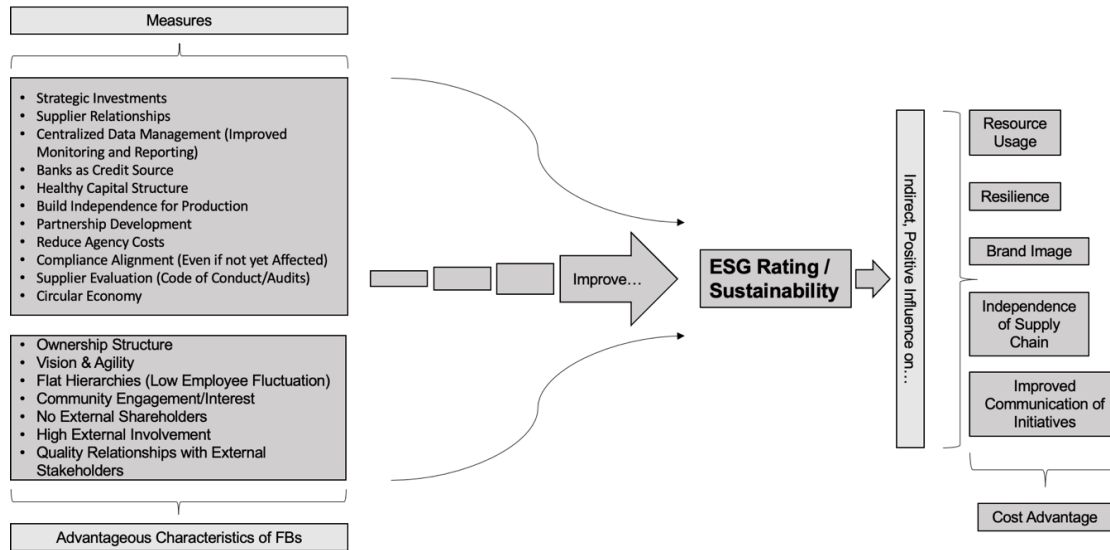


Figure 3: Sustainability Process Model (Source: Own Creation)

Table 9: Influence of Sustainability on Family Businesses (Source: Own Creation)

Sustainability: Cost or Benefit	(Dis-) advantages of Relationship with Suppliers in regard to Sustainability in Family Businesses	Financial Situation of Family Business in regard to Sustainable Investments	Impact of Sustainability and Family Businesses on Agility and Resilience	Impact of Family Ownership on Sustainability	Other (Challenges)

reported financial benefits, indicating the potential return on these investments (see Figure 2). This highlights the significance of adopting a long-term perspective when considering and implementing sustainability initiatives.

In summary, the rating assessment showed that most family businesses had made reasonable efforts in implementing sustainability practices based on ESG principles, particularly in the environmental pillar.

5.1.2. Research Question 2

Turning to the second research question, challenges and advantageous characteristics that influenced sustainability in family businesses were identified and described. By comparing these findings with existing academic literature, a comprehensive understanding of the topic was achieved. These characteristics and traits are presented in Table 9.

Six of the eight family businesses interviewed positively viewed sustainability, acknowledging its long-term advantages. Nonetheless, FB2 and FB8 raised concerns about the potential cost implications of government regulations introduced in recent years. The immediate apprehension revolved around the bureaucratic burdens associated with extensive reporting obligations. While larger corporations might find it more manageable to meet these requirements, medium-sized businesses, including family enterprises, could encounter difficulties ensuring compliance.

Throughout the study, it became clear that family businesses regarded their external stakeholder relationships as

the most advantageous characteristic for enhancing sustainability in procurement. By maintaining strong and positive relationships with these stakeholders, family businesses could gain support, share knowledge and expertise, and collectively work towards achieving sustainability goals in the procurement process. It is important to note that while these relationships were personal, the businesses emphasised that they did not face any constraints in holding suppliers accountable for meeting quality standards and other requirements. In cases where deficiencies were identified, the existing laws and regulations did not allow for compromises. However, it was evident that the family businesses sought to provide support and opportunities for their suppliers to improve and address any shortcomings before considering alternative options.

Regarding the financial situation of family businesses on sustainability, none reported challenges in accessing capital for sustainable investments. On the contrary, their favourable reputation and personal relationships with external stakeholders enabled them to access money more quickly, particularly from local banks (FB2).

The agility of family businesses was attributed to their flat hierarchies and the active involvement of the owning family in the industry. Family businesses could make agile decisions without being constrained by extensive corporate policies, ensuring the smooth functioning of their procurement process (FB2). Sustainability initiatives also contribute to the resilience of family businesses by promoting

self-sufficiency and reducing dependence on external suppliers. They enhance their operational continuity and adaptability through sustainable practices such as recycling by-products from their production processes or developing in-house competencies. This allows them to withstand crises better and maintain uninterrupted operations. By fostering independence and reducing reliance on external factors, family businesses strengthen their resilience and increase their ability to navigate challenging circumstances.

Lastly, it was evident that family ownership positively influenced sustainability in the procurement process. All family businesses showed a genuine long-term commitment and interest in ensuring the company's continuity for future generations. In contrast to large corporations with shorter executive terms driven by shareholder pressure and high agency costs, family businesses were not constrained by such factors. This allowed them to prioritise long-term sustainability and make significant investments in the procurement process. Additionally, family ownership directly impacted employee retention, fostering strong commitment. This, in turn, indirectly influenced the establishment of close and favourable connections and relationships with external stakeholders, ultimately enhancing sustainability efforts.

Deriving from those findings, the framework presented above highlights specific characteristics of family businesses that serve as general competitive advantages compared to non-family firms (see Figure 3). If these characteristics are combined with specific measures to enhance sustainability in the procurement process, they contribute to improved financial returns, brand image and more. As depicted in Figure 3, this framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how family businesses can leverage their inherent strengths to drive sustainability and reap the associated benefits.

5.2. Implications

5.2.1. Implications for Academic Research

The findings of this study make a valuable contribution to academic research in several ways. Firstly, they align with existing literature on the long-term benefits of sustainability measures in family businesses, corroborating the findings of Carter et al. (2000) and Feng et al. (2018). The study emphasises that the positive impacts of sustainability outweigh the associated costs, highlighting the importance of sustainable investments in driving long-term success.

Secondly, the study sheds light on the significance of considering the social dimension within SSCM. As highlighted by Carter and Easton (2011) and Brandenburg et al. (2014) the focus of sustainability has predominantly been on a single sustainability dimension, with more attention given to the environmental aspect within SSCM in recent years. The findings align with previous observations and highlight the need for more attention to specific measures, such as transparency within the supply chain.

Thirdly, the study contributes to understanding the advantages of family businesses concerning sustainability and agility (Seuring & Müller, 2008). Cooperation and the immediate support of focal companies within the supply chain

are essential for improving sustainable procurement practices (Macdonald, 2007). The research confirms that close relationships with suppliers are perceived as catalysts for agility and resilience, contradicting the notion that they impede change or decrease agility. Adding to that, the findings by Govindan et al. (2020), which suggest that sustainability initiatives contribute to enhancing resilience, are supported by this study. All family businesses in the study confirmed this relationship, indicating that investments in sustainable business practices improve process efficiency and promote greater independence from suppliers. These insights bring nuance to the current body of literature and underscore the significance of professional partnership management and transparency in supply chain relationships, thus highlighting the distinctive advantage held by family businesses.

Regarding financial limitations, the research by Clauß et al. (2022) and other scholars suggest that financial resources often constrain family businesses and tend to be risk-averse in decision-making. The cautious approach observed in family businesses, as mentioned by Berrone et al. (2010), stems from their strong desire to safeguard the long-term sustainability and success of the family business. However, this study challenges these findings as none of the interviewed family businesses reported financial constraints or a lack of capital for investments. Some family businesses highlighted their robust capital structure and healthy financial position, enabling them to make substantial investments in sustainability without relying on external capital (FB2, FB4, FB5, and FB7). These findings contradict previous research and provide an extension by demonstrating that family businesses' low debt financing and healthy capital structure empower them to make significant financial investments regarding sustainability in procurement.

5.2.2. Implications for Practitioners

While all family businesses have made some level of effort in implementing environmental sustainability measures in procurement, there is a noticeable gap in addressing the social dimension. The findings imply that future focus should prioritise enhancing social sustainability practices, as government regulations increasingly demand reporting in this area. While larger firms with a substantial workforce have been obligated to report thus far, smaller firms will also be impacted in the coming years. Family businesses already invested in sustainability and developed relevant competencies will be better positioned to navigate this transition smoothly.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that family businesses possess specific competitive advantages compared to non-family firms (see Figure 3). To effectively make use of these identified advantages, prohibit challenges, and utilize the framework, several actions can improve the ease of adoption:

- Employing a full-time sustainability specialist facilitates staying informed about new regulations and laws, enabling the organisation to remain proactive and compliant.

- Implementing a centralized data management system is crucial for effectively adhering to new regulations and laws introduced by governments. This ensures the efficient allocation of resources and facilitates better access to comprehensive company-wide data.
- Conducting a thorough supply chain analysis and establishing collaborative relationships with suppliers helps identify areas for improvement and inefficiencies, thereby promoting innovation.
- Maintaining a long-term vision and ensuring alignment between management and family ownership regarding goals and objectives helps mitigate agency costs and enhances sustainable decision-making.
- Acknowledging the indirect benefits of sustainable measures can provide a strategic advantage (see Figure 3).
- Building and nurturing strong collaborative relationships with external and internal stakeholders, fostering employee loyalty and positive relationships, facilitates continuous development and progress.

Aligning the identified competencies with the inherent advantages of family businesses facilitates the implementation of sustainability measures (refer to Figure 3). Adapting processes to reduce resource intensity in reporting and ensuring thorough due diligence contribute to long-term benefits and indirect advantages (see Figure 3).

In summary, while sustainability in procurement may entail initial costs and resource-intensive processes, family businesses can leverage their inherent advantages and apply the practical implications to implement the measures outlined in Figure 3. This strategic approach can lead to a sustainable competitive advantage in various domains over the long term and minimise family businesses' challenges.

5.3. Limitations

While this study has made valuable contributions to academic research, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study.

Firstly, the study focused specifically on family businesses in the food and beverages industry, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to firms in other sectors. The variations in products, sourcing regions, and other factors within the food and beverages industry can also introduce differences among family businesses that were not fully accounted for. Additionally, the study concentrated on German family businesses, and the findings may not directly translate to other regions or cultural contexts. The cultural, legal, and regulatory factors influencing sustainability practices vary across countries. Thus, the findings should be interpreted within the specific context.

Secondly, the sample size of family businesses included in the analysis was relatively small, which could affect the representativeness of the findings. That could restrict the extent

to which the results can be applied to a broader population (Queirós et al., 2017). However, the rating scale developed in this study can be broadly used and modified for further research and industry evaluation.

Lastly, a limitation of the study is the potential presence of biases in the responses provided by the interviewed individuals. Since only one person per family business was interviewed, ensuring complete objectivity in the results is difficult. On the other hand, it is essential to acknowledge that all findings in this study were derived from detailed explanations and specific examples provided by the interviewees. These examples served as evidence to support the observations and statements made by the participants. While the data analysis conducted in this research provides valuable insights and keeps the identified factors, it is essential to consider the potential influence of other variables that have not been accounted for.

5.4. Avenues for Future Research

This study focused on examining the sustainability of family businesses in the procurement department and developing a comparative framework for assessing their sustainability practices. This framework has the potential to be applied to other industries and allows for comparisons between family businesses and non-family firms in terms of sustainability in procurement. Future research should consider expanding the sample size to include family businesses from diverse geographic locations, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of sustainability practices in procurement. Moreover, employing qualitative research methods could provide deeper insights into family businesses' motivations and decision-making processes concerning sustainability. This would benefit policymakers, researchers, and practitioners aiming to promote sustainable business practices.

Another area of research that warrants investigation is the financial situation of family businesses. The qualitative findings of this study have uncovered intriguing results that challenge existing literature on the financial constraints experienced by family businesses. Further research in this area could yield valuable insights into the economic dynamics of family businesses and potentially offer additional evidence to support these findings.

Sustainability has garnered increasing attention from scholars and researchers in recent years, and its connection to family businesses has been explored in previous studies. However, this study aimed to bridge a gap by developing an ESG rating framework specifically for privately held family businesses to compare their sustainability efforts in procurement. This framework can be adapted for future research in various business departments, industries, or non-family firms. The framework provides a structured approach to evaluate sustainability in private companies, allowing for consistent and standardized assessments across different industries. It can help researchers and evaluators identify strengths and weaknesses in sustainability performance and

track progress over time. Moreover, it can assist in benchmarking and setting targets for sustainable practices.

Finally, developing the rating scale and criteria provides a valuable contribution to future research, as it can be adapted and applied to various scenarios, industries, and sustainability topics beyond procurement. The scalability and adaptability enhance the usefulness of the rating scale in assessing sustainability efforts in different contexts.

6. Conclusion

This study offers insights into the sustainability practices in their procurement processes by conducting qualitative cross-case analyses of eight family businesses. The findings reveal that most family businesses have implemented sustainable procurement measures, surpassing current legal obligations. However, there is room for improvement in addressing the social dimension of sustainability in light of new regulations. Furthermore, the study highlights the advantageous characteristics of family businesses in implementing sustainable practices, as outlined in Figure 3.

In light of the current state of environmental pollution caused by companies, the global community, and the planet, it is imperative to prioritise comprehensive sustainability development. Although commendable efforts and investments have been made, continuous progress is essential to uphold and enhance sustainability, as the interviewee from FB5 highlighted: "We have now reached the status quo and want to maintain it, so we must continually strive to sustain and improve it ourselves". Every business should strive for ongoing growth, investment, process implementation, and innovation to advance sustainability, as the demand will consistently rise to secure a livable future for future generations. Significant challenges lie ahead, particularly considering the potential impact of upcoming regulations in Germany and the European Union. These regulations will affect large corporations, family businesses, and medium-sized enterprises, emphasising the need for proactive measures and adherence to regulatory requirements at all levels.

In summary, this study finds that family businesses have achieved satisfactory sustainability, as evidenced by their positive ratings in reducing environmental impacts and adhering to governance practices. However, family businesses must acknowledge and fulfil their responsibilities, considering their substantial presence in the economic landscape. Moving forward, they should continue their dedication to sustainability and embrace their role as responsible corporate citizens.

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Leveraging Credit Ratings Through Impression Management: An Exploratory Study of German Small and Medium-Sized Family Firms

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Abstract

In an era marked by multi-crisis environments, the significance of corporate finance and credit ratings amplifies, especially for German small- and medium-sized family firms, often constrained in accessing capital markets. This thesis investigates how family firms employ impression management strategies within qualitative credit ratings to enhance their creditworthiness. Through exploratory qualitative research involving 17 interviews with German family firms and banks, primarily financing the Mittelstand, three key dimensions of impression management emerge: family-specific, business-specific, and relationship-specific tactics. Family-specific factors, including values and generational succession, significantly influence qualitative credit rating scores. Moreover, the interplay between firms and banks, orchestrated by the owning family, shapes effective impression management strategies. This research underscores the role of family involvement in shaping qualitative credit ratings, emphasizing the interrelations among family, business, and banking dynamics. The discussion highlights the relevance and adaptability of these impression management dimensions, contributing to a deeper understanding of qualitative credit rating processes within the context of family firms.

Keywords: credit rating; family firm; impression management; leveraging credit ratings; qualitative rating factors

1. Introduction

Family firms (FFs) which are predominately associated with the German Mittelstand form the backbone of the German economy and account for over half of the German gross domestic product (GDP) (Pahnke & Welter, 2019). In times of advancing globalisation, increasing governmental regulation and digitalisation, FFs are increasingly becoming the focus of research, being the engine of the German economy. FFs, which are generally characterised by a long-term vision (Covin & Lumpkin, 2011), strong values (Salvato et al., 2019), and close ties with society (Yates et al., 2023), must face these challenges and position themselves accordingly. The characteristic of the coupling of two different systems, namely the family and the firm (Habbershon & Williams, 1999), likewise presents FFs with a double challenge (Neuviens, 2011). Despite the coupling, the need to position the business successfully and shape the family relationships to achieve maximum success for the firm is evident. Peter May, who specialises in advising German FFs, sums up the over-

all importance of the family for the firm by stating: “Family businesses have one very big advantage and one very big disadvantage, and both are the family. A family at peace is the best thing there can be for a business, a family at odds is the worst thing.” (May, 2001).

The challenges of economic change are most evident in the German Mittelstand, where FFs are predominantly located. The challenges range from supply chain difficulties to sustainability and a shortage of skilled workers. In addition, however, most German medium-sized firms face a significant challenge. Since the financial crisis of 2008, the business environment has changed significantly concerning debt financing requirements and regulations. This change is mainly caused by the Basel III regulation adopted by the European Union (EU) to protect the banking system. Basel III is a joint effort by the EU member states to impose stricter rules on banks to limit their freedom in credit ratings (Marek et al., 2022). This banking system regulation presents FFs with the difficulty of competing for loans and investors in ex-

ternal financing. As FFs are usually traditionally grown companies, they are similarly characterised by tradition and continuity concerning suppliers, customers, and business partners (Becker & Ulrich, 2015; Rose, 2018). Despite modern financing instruments, the most critical partner for FFs in terms of financing remains the bank and, with it, financing via bank loans. Driven by the house bank principle anchored in Germany, many FFs find themselves dependent on the banking system and must position themselves in this system in the best possible way (Becker & Ulrich, 2015). Within bank financing, the focus is on the frequently examined principle of credit ratings. When requesting financing, companies are confronted with a credit rating, which is the decisive factor in deciding whether to grant financing and its conditions. Previous research has, therefore, often addressed the topic of credit ratings, focusing on the quantifiable aspects related to capital structures. Regarding FFs, studies examining financing forms and capital structure characteristics are widely studied (Koropp et al., 2014; Michiels & Molly, 2017; Wiener-Fererhofer, 2017). Accordingly, much is already known about the mechanisms of credit ratings, the requirements for borrowers and the necessary financial aspects (Matthies, 2013). To a lesser extent, previous research has dealt with the qualitative, non-measurable aspects of a credit rating. The need for more comprehensive and refocused research is becoming apparent in light of the economic challenges described. Thus, we know little about how the changing external circumstances affect the requirements of credit ratings in terms of qualitative factors and to what extent FFs position themselves in the competition for loans and investors. Since the application for bank loans involves demonstrating and presenting the coupled systems of the family and the firm to the lender, this paper sheds light on the process of qualitative credit ratings when applying for bank loans. This process is explicitly illuminated through an impression management lens elaborating on its adequacy. Since impression management deals with the created image of individuals or organisations vis-à-vis third parties, the impression management theory forms the framework of this study (Bolino et al., 2016). Furthermore, previous research has shown that perception and image can influence various parameters in many contexts.

On this basis, this thesis examined whether and to what extent impression management applied by individuals or organisations is adequate in the context of qualitative credit ratings. Hence, this thesis tries to answer the research questions: “*What are relevant qualitative credit rating factors for family firms?*” and “*How do family firms use impression management to leverage their qualitative credit rating, and which family firm-specific characteristics drive this strategy?*”. The research objectives are to (1) understand which factors are relevant in a qualitative credit rating, (2) examine potential asymmetries in the perception of FFs and banks on these factors and, (3) identify strategies and techniques used by FFs to manage their image in bank negotiations. My research, therefore, contributes to broadening the understanding of two essential aspects. Firstly, the classification and identi-

fication of requirements of qualitative credit rating factors and, secondly, the investigation of the effect of an impression and the forms of representation through impression management. To gain new insights into these areas and to answer my research questions, Chapter 2 gives a bundled overview of the theoretical background of impression management, credit ratings and FFs. This serves to highlight relevant theoretical aspects regarding credit ratings and to incorporate concepts of impression management. In Chapter 3, I will explain my choice of research method and the methodological approach. As my thesis is based on interviews with German banks and FFs, chapter 4 comprehensively presents my findings, which I discuss in Chapter 5 and summarise in the conclusion.

2. Theoretical Background and Relevant Literature

2.1. Impression Management

2.1.1. Introduction to Impression Management

Impression management (IM) is a concept that refers to the process by which individuals and organisations attempt to control or influence the perception that others have of them (Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Bolino et al., 2008, 2016; Nagy et al., 2012; Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014). The origins of IM can be traced back to the sociological work of Erving Goffman in the late 1950s, who defined it as a process by which individuals present themselves in a way that aligns with their desired image or identity (Goffman, 1959).

Since then, the concept of IM has been widely studied in various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and business. Bolino et al. (2008) synthesised in a multi-level review the existing research on IM. The authors found that it is a complex, multi-level phenomenon that can occur at the individual, group, and organisational levels (Bolino et al., 2008). The use of IM on an individual level focuses on the type of IM tactics that can support or hinder individuals from achieving and maintaining their image from the perspective of others (Bolino et al., 2014). Historically, researchers seek to understand which behaviours of employees affect the assessment by, e.g., supervisors or other authorities. Moreover, the research tried to identify when employees use IM tactics to improve their image. Due to the vital role for individuals in creating, protecting, and maintaining the right image to succeed at work, the individual level offered many fields of study (Bolino et al., 2008, 2016). On an individual level and given the nature of IM, research has often focused on IM tactics used in job interviews, career success and performance appraisals (Bolino et al., 2014, 2016). Notably, while reviewing IM on an individual level, one needs to mention the two causes IM can have. As noted by many researchers, IM generally refers to maintaining and controlling the perception others have of them. Following IM is often used interchangeably with the term self-presentation (Bolino et al., 2008; Nagy et al., 2012).

Leary and Kowalski (1986) argued that due to the correlation of IM and the self-presentation of individuals, a separation concerning the audience of IM needs to be made as it

does not only account for control of how “others” see and perceive an individual but, similarly, the individual itself. It has been argued to define this form as “self-presentation to the self” (Leary & Kowalski, 1986, p.34). Even if this aspect coincides with the broader definition of IM, and most research dealt with IM concerning others’ perceptions; the terms will be used interchangeably. The research on this topic in the context of organisational levels occurred much later in the 1980s; however, it has become an essential organisational phenomenon due to its importance for both individuals and organisations (Bolino et al., 2008, 2016).

Appendix A shows the by Bolino et al. (2008) synthesised 31 frequently used IM tactics, which can be used to observe the behaviours of individuals and organisations. Even if the individual level presents most research, IM and related tactics have also been adopted on an organisational level. A broad field of application has been identified by shifting the focus towards contexts such as feedback seeking, leadership and management, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Bolino et al., 2008). Despite less intense research on organisational levels, studies suggest that also on an organisational level, IM tactics can be used to create an organisational image. To further differentiate and classify IM in the context of organisations, Bolino et al. (2008) define organisational impression management (OIM) as any action intentionally designed and carried out to influence an audience’s perception of the organisation. In contrast to IM carried out by individuals, OIM aims to create, protect, and maintain the image of an organisation through a spokesperson and organisational representatives (Bolino et al., 2008; Elsbach et al., 1998). Another significance of OIM compared to IM on an individual level lies, according to Leary and Kowalski (1986), in the approach of “others-as-audience”, differing from pure self-presentation in the process of showing oneself as a particular type of being, representing “self-as-audience”. Therefore, OIM focuses on self-presentation to “others” (Leary & Kowalski, 1986). Due to the context and research objective of this thesis, both IM and OIM, as well as their influence on “others”, is of primary concern as this type of behaviour may be most pertinent in the studied work context of credit ratings given the coupled system of the family (individual) and firm (organisation).

2.1.2. Dimensions of Impression Management

IM being a well-researched field in business, several dimensions of IM and OIM have been identified. Mohamed et al. (1999) stated that IM and OIM tactics may be differentiated. It must be mentioned that research does not entirely classify IM tactics as either individual or organisational-related. Bolino et al. (2008) acknowledged the differentiation by Mohamed et al. (1999), however, sees the problem in the scattered research on OIM specifically. Because OIM is, as mentioned, conducted by spokespersons and organisational representatives (individuals as such), IM tactics might be assigned on both levels simultaneously. In their multi-level review, Bolino et al. (2008) identified a link between individual-level antecedents and organisational out-

comes, bringing IM and OIM research closer together. In spite, one can distinguish between direct and indirect tactics to allow classification. Direct tactics involve proactively presenting own traits, accomplishments, and abilities, whereas indirect tactics are defined as understood as managing information about whom and what an individual or organisation is associated with (Mohamed et al., 1999). Furthermore, the context in which IM is used highly influences the applied type. Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) pointed out that IM further needs to be subdivided into assertive and defensive tactics. Assertive tactics are used in situations to boost an image actively, and defensive tactics are used to respond to issues affiliated with an individual or organisation. Some of the 31 synthesised IM tactics by Bolino et al. (2008) were classified to be purely OIM tactics. They were therefore allocated in **Table 1** 2 × 2 metrics, which comprise direct-assertive, indirect-assertive, direct-defensive, and indirect-defensive tactics (Mohamed et al., 1999; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984).

The differentiation and classification however remain ambiguous. Additionally, research has found that the tactics and related processes can be of conscious and unconscious nature. Individuals or organisations can strategically and purposely try to cultivate a distinct image of themselves or as an organisation. Oppositely, unconscious IM being habitual describes individuals or organisations having reflexive tendencies (Bolino et al., 2016; Leary & Kowalski, 1986). Nevertheless, the myriad tactics, processes, and differentiations between individual and organisational levels can be reduced by reviewing the components of IM.

Impression motivation and impression construction are the most fundamental aspects which influence and affect all tactics on an individual or organisational level. Most research focuses on conscious IM, for which goal relevance, goal value and the discrepancy between desired and current image constitute the impression motivation. The component of impression construction comes in place once the impression motivation is fulfilled, involving choosing which IM tactic to use and, more precisely, how to use the tactic (Bolino et al., 2016; Leary & Kowalski, 1986). The resulting measurement of IM tactics proves difficult due to many variables, such as who is involved, under which conditions the behaviour happens and to whom the tactic is targeted (Bolino et al., 2016).

2.1.3. Previous Studies on Impression Management

Previous studies on IM have focused on various subjects, including tactics used by individuals and organisations, factors influencing the tactics’ effectiveness, and the resulting consequences and impact IM can have on individuals and organisations (Bolino et al., 2008, 2014, 2016). Similar to the different levels of IM, the existent literature analysed the effects of IM, primarily focusing on personal influence and referred concepts in different intra-organisational phenomena (Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014). On three levels: individual, within organisations, and between organisations and stakeholders, studies identified goal relevance, benefits, and diverse audience and actor-related variables (Bolino et al.,

Table 1: Metrics Organisational IM Tactics (adapted from Mohamed et al. (1999))

Dimensions	Direct	Indirect
Assertive	Ingratiation	Boasting
	Intimidation	Blaring
	Org. Promotion	Burnishing
	Exemplification	Blasting
	Supplication	
Defensive	Accounts	Burying
	Disclaimers	Blurring
	Org.Handicapping	Boosting
	Apologies	Belittling
	Restitution	
	Prosocial Behaviour	

2008). The focus, however, has remained to research IM in the context of performance appraisals, job interviews, career success, feedback-seeking, leadership, and whistleblowing (Gundlach et al., 2003; Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014; Roberts, 2005).

The studies and research fields mentioned so far have looked at IM from an inward perspective. This way, correlations between IM behaviour and its results could be identified. However, much less attention has been paid to the benefits of IM for organisations regarding external evaluation. Most studies have been conducted at the organisational level on the effects of IM on the legitimacy of an organisation after certain events or poor performance (Nagy et al., 2012), increasing acceptance of decisions (Davidson III et al., 2004), and recruiting minority job applicants (Avery & McKay, 2006). Scholars, however, have called to consider the “bigger picture” of IM (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1099). A more focused approach of IM outside the predominantly contexts, such as feedback-seeking and job appraisals, is of interest to deepen the understanding of business phenomena IM can find its use (Bolino et al., 2008).

Parhankangas and Ehrlich (2014), in their quantitative study on the impact of IM for entrepreneurs in raising capital, set the stage for examining IM in an external context. They investigated to what extent and which IM tactics entrepreneurs use to seduce business angels and secure investments in the early funding stages (Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014). The research found that entrepreneurs use various tactics to present themselves in the best light, such as their experience, the uniqueness of their ideas, and testimonials from past partners. Additionally, the study found that entrepreneurs with high self-confidence, enthusiasm, and passion for their projects were more likely to successfully attract investment from business angels (Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014). They contributed to the existing literature by analysing the role of assertive IM tactics as positive language, promotion of innovativeness, opinion conformity, exemplification, supplication, intimidation and blasting of competition (Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014). The intention

resolves non-verifiable claims an entrepreneur makes before reliable information is available. Their results suggest that IM if used appropriately, can increase the chances for entrepreneurs to raise business angel funding. Their study has shown that besides defined IM tactics, different approaches by organisations can be used to create an image and impress others, widening the perspectives IM can be looked at.

This thesis will follow a similar approach as Parhankangas and Ehrlich (2014) in identifying if IM is used in the business context of business funding. However, it will not be specified which tactics can be expected to be found in advance. Instead, an exploratory approach is used as no previous research exists, which would reduce the number of IM tactics. Nonetheless, this thesis adds to the knowledge of Parhankangas and Ehrlich by changing the business context to corporate credit ratings, with actors being FFs and targets represented by banks.

2.2. Corporate Credit Rating

2.2.1. Overview Credit Rating

Ratings are used for various entities, such as countries, corporations, and financial products. A fundamental difference in credit ratings can be made by having internal and external ratings. External ratings are conducted by specialised rating agencies, whereas internal ratings, known as “shadow ratings”, are conducted by banks (Becker & Ulrich, 2015; Matthies, 2013). Corporate credit ratings (hereinafter: credit rating) are meant to condense the quality of a debtor and quantify the expected probability of default (POD). It allows banks to measure credit risk, align a bank's credit portfolio and is the basis for loan approvals, monitoring, and pricing (Claessens et al., 2018; Grunert et al., 2005; Matthies, 2013). A corporate credit rating is crucial in influencing lending practices and the economy. Credit institutions are responsible for reviewing and evaluating credit applications to assess the debtor's POD. Both quantitative and qualitative factors play a role in this process (Boot et al., 2006). Numerous studies in the literature deal with credit rating methods and their strengths and weaknesses.

A study by Altman (2005) examined the predictive power of credit ratings for corporate insolvency risk. The results show that credit ratings are a good indicator of insolvency risk, but there are some limitations to the accuracy of the prediction (Altman, 2005). The author concludes that predictions are less reliable, especially in smaller companies or in times of economic instability. Another study by Berger and Udell (2006) examined the relationship between credit ratings and the credit terms companies receive from banks. Their results show that companies with higher credit ratings receive better credit terms, including lower interest rates. The authors conclude that creditworthiness is essential in determining whether and on what terms a bank will lend to a company, highlighting the importance of corporate credit ratings (Berger & Udell, 2006). Further, Ongena et al. (2013) examined the impact of credit ratings on lending during the 2008 financial crisis. The results show that banks tended to reject loan applications from companies with low credit ratings during the financial crisis. This led to a decline in overall lending, especially to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Ongena et al., 2013).

Another vital aspect in assessing a company's creditworthiness are regulatory requirements, especially under Basel III. Basel III is an international set of rules regulating banks and their capital and liquidity requirements (Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, 2013). Basel III aims to improve banks' risk management and increase the stability of the banking sector and financial markets. The rules are based on three pillars: enhanced minimum capital requirements, risk position monitoring, and bank disclosure and transparency. The introduction of Basel III has helped to harmonise banking regulation worldwide and make the banking sector more resilient to crises. However, some critics argue that Basel III is too strict and could hamper growth and lending practices (Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, 2013). The effects of Basel III on credit ratings resulted in stricter and uniform quantitative factors. However, qualitative factors remain un-uniformed and are chosen by banks individually. As credit ratings are a major concern for stakeholders (e.g., banks), identifying credit rating factors has gained significance in prior literature. Nevertheless, the differences between companies' quantitative and qualitative assessments are presented in the following. Bank internal ratings are similarly composed as ratings by external agencies. Rating agencies such as S&P and Moody's present the largest on the market (Camanho et al., 2022) and are most referred to in terms of quantitative and qualitative factors. **Appendix B** comprises key aspects, similarities and differences between common rating factors used by the leading rating agencies and commercial banks. The quantitative assessment is mainly accomplished by financial statements being essential determinants (Matthies, 2013). Analyses of financial ratios from a company's balance sheet and income statement represent easily accessible and quantifiable company information.

Reasonable ratios used in credit ratings are the debt-to-equity ratio, equity ratio, liquidity, and the company's prof-

itability (Matthies, 2013). These ratios assess the credit risk and can be used to determine a company's creditworthiness. During Basel III, the requirements for credit risk assessment have become more stringent and moved the evaluation centre to quantitative aspects (Gama & Galdes, 2012; Marek et al., 2022). Banks must now have better equity capitalisation to protect themselves against the risk of a loan default (Marek et al., 2022). Nevertheless, Basel III requires banks to consider quantitative and qualitative factors when assessing credit risk and conducting credit ratings. Qualitative ratings, in contrast, refer to non-financial factors such as the company's industry, management's quality, succession, company's competitiveness and the industry's prospects (Crouhy et al., 2001; Krahen & Weber, 1999; Matthies, 2013). However, assessing qualitative factors is more complex than assessing quantitative factors, as they are often subjective and may be less quantifiable. Therefore, banks evaluate companies using a combination of quantitative and qualitative factors (Grunert et al., 2005). This combination allows for a more comprehensive assessment of a company's credit risk and creditworthiness. However, the role of non-financial factors remains ambiguous (Grunert et al., 2005). Furthermore, transforming the above-mentioned factors into ratings is essential in determining credit risk.

2.2.2. Credit Ratings of Family Firms

The stated quantitative and qualitative factors are usually converted into ratings with the help of a rating model. These models are based on statistical methods and can be weighted and combined to produce an overall rating score that varies between banks (Claessens et al., 2018; Krahen & Weber, 1999). Both quantitative and qualitative factors are usually considered to provide a comprehensive credit risk assessment. An example of a rating model is the rating methodology of Standard & Poor's, which is explicitly used for corporate loans. Different factors (see **Appendix B**) are classified and weighted into categories. Categories include, for example, the company's financial strength, competitive position, management, and corporate strategy (S&P, 2023). The weighting of the individual categories varies depending on the used model and bank. Ratings are usually expressed as letters or numbers, with higher ratings indicating better creditworthiness. For example, Standard & Poor's considers AAA-rated companies very creditworthy, while C-rated companies are speculative and have a high POD (S&P, 2023). Another suggested rating model is the use of the so-called z-score. First presented by Altman and Saunders (1997), historical default rates are regressed to determine an optimal function between defaulted and "survived" debtors. These estimates are used to predict the future POD of firms called the z-score (Altman & Saunders, 1997). The calculated z-score can thus be translated into a rating to determine a final score. Besides, more accurate models emerged, which include myriad forms of variables. Despite its age, the proposed model by Altman and Saunders (1997) and the resulting z-score are still used to calculate a borrower's credit risk (Altman et al., 2017; Gama & Galdes, 2012). Notably, there are no uni-

form rating schemes and models used by banks. Different approaches to measuring credit risk and formulating credit ratings can be applied. Many studies have analysed the changes in credit ratings and the effects of new regulations. Primarily the literature focuses on rating agencies and, to a much lesser extent, on internal ratings by banks.

Nonetheless, similar approaches in conducting ratings might be assumed through shown similarities in the factors rating agencies and banks use to develop a credit rating (Marek et al., 2022). Yet we know little about the weighting and more detailed qualitative factors used in credit ratings. As frequently stated in the literature, management quality, competitiveness, and industry prospects are some broader qualitative categories banks consider in their ratings. Moreover, qualitative ratings might be impacted by industry sectors and ownership structure. Wiener-Fererhofer (2017) analysed whether family and non-family firms' credit score differences exist. The author examined whether FFs are rated differently than non-family firms (NFFs) in credit ratings. The author argues that credit rating differences could be due to characteristics of FFs such as less transparency, higher leverage, and more conservative financial policies (Wiener-Fererhofer, 2017). However, the author points out that rating FFs in the credit assessment process is more complex than rating NFFs. To conduct ratings of family-owned firms, banks or other entities must often consider family relationships and governance structures (Wiener-Fererhofer, 2017). Therefore, the author suggested that rating agencies and banks must adapt their rating methodologies to better reflect the unique characteristics of FFs. Overall, the author emphasised that better differentiation of family and NFFs in the credit rating process will help FFs be rated more fairly and access more favourable financing opportunities (Wiener-Fererhofer, 2017). Nevertheless, the lack of uniform regulations regarding qualitative factors increases the difficulty in assessing the role of these factors. Moreover, the firms' influence on qualitative credit ratings has not yet been studied.

2.3. Family Firms

2.3.1. Distinctiveness of Family Firms

In the last decade, FFs comprised many fields of research that gained increasing attention. This increasing interest in FFs may result from being the predominant organisational structure worldwide. Further, the crucial economic role of FFs, within the German economy has constantly been evident (Foundation for Family Businesses, 2023; Klein, 2000; Wallau et al., 2007). The broad variety of subjects examined in the context of FFs created the problem of which constituents are relevant and defining aspects of FFs (Barnes & Hershon, 1994; Klein, 2000). According to Klein (2000), a FF *“is a company that is influenced by one or more families in a substantial way. A family is defined as a group of people who are descendants of one couple and their in-laws, as well as the couple itself. Influence, in a substantial way, is considered if the family either owns the complete stock or, (...) through corporate governance or influence is through management. For*

a business to be a family business, some shares must be held within the family.” (Klein, 2000, p.158).

According to Barnes and Hershon (1994), the family business includes family-owned, family-managed, and family-controlled businesses. However, family control and ownership are the decisive aspects of identifying and distinguishing FFs from NFFs.

Figure 1 illustrates the typology of the German SME sector and highlights the difference between FFs and other business forms. For a firm to be classified as a FF, most shares or capital needs to be held by the founder or descendants of the founding family (Bauweraerts & Colot, 2012; Duréndez Gómez-Guillamón et al., 2016; Klein, 2000; Wiener-Fererhofer, 2017).

To at least be defined as a family-orientated firm, Duréndez Gómez-Guillamón et al. (2016) stated that the family needs to hold a minimum of half the capital. Besides the criterion of ownership, referring to the shareholder situation, FFs are typically characterised to be in family control, with family members covering relevant positions in top management and aiming to maintain this control beyond current generations (Anderson & Reeb, 2003; Bauweraerts & Colot, 2012; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2016; Sharma & Sharma, 2011; Wiener-Fererhofer, 2017). The long-term orientation of FFs constitutes one of the main characteristics as FFs have the *“intention to shape and pursue the vision of the business (...)”* (Chua et al., 1999, p.25). The cross-generational aspect of FFs has been similarly mentioned by Kellermanns et al. (2012), stating that FFs are characterised by the intention of achieving and shaping visions for succeeding family members. A more contrasting aspect of defining and distinguishing FFs from NFFs is, according to Habbershon et al. (2003), the competitive edge of familiness defined *“as the unique bundle of resources a particular firm has because of the systems interactions between the family, its individual members, and the business”* (Habbershon & Williams, 1999, p.11).

Furthermore the capital structure of FFs similarly shows specifics and is increasingly the subject of scholars. Capital structure decisions are influenced by strategic values and goals of corporate management as well as a complex interplay of exogenous and endogenous factors (Barton & Gordon, 1988; Becker & Ulrich, 2015; Myers, 1984). The capital structure of companies relies on three fundamental sources of funds: internal funds, debt, and new equity. In spite, little is known about how companies decide which funds to choose as a preferred base source of capital. The effective management and choice of financial sources are vital for the financial welfare and the firm's survival and determine the capital structure (Koropp et al., 2014). Stated qualitative aspects of ownership and control characterising FFs can serve as indicators to formulate a preferred order of funds. Cross-generational welfare and the context of maintaining control by family members directly influence external funding policies (Michiels & Molly, 2017).

Safe and continuous operations are at the centre of FFs, justified by the intention of maintaining the company over

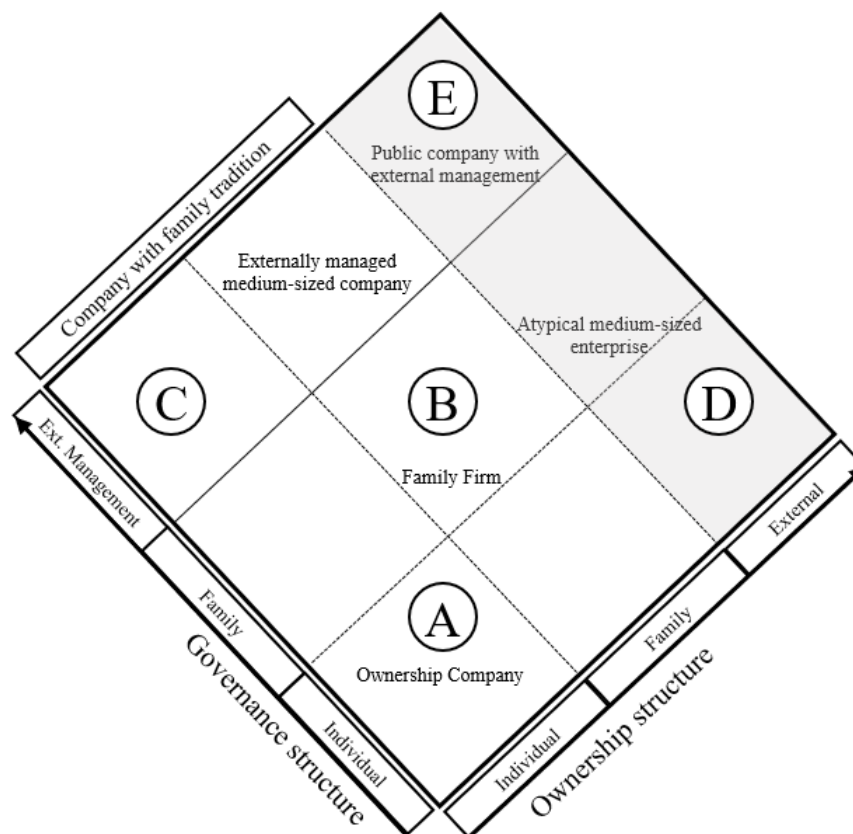


Figure 1: Typology of the SME Sector (Adapted from Becker and Ulrich (2015, p.7))

the long term (Chua et al., 1999). Moreover, maintaining control within the family leads to primarily financing operations and growth by retaining and reinvesting profits (Rottke & Thiele, 2018). Therefore, issuing new equity by external funding would limit or impact the family's control within the firm. According to Jansen et al. (2022), FFs follow a more hesitant approach to funds, potentially limiting their ability to act. Referring to the three primary forms of funds and the perceived hesitance of FFs, internal funds would be the most favourable funding source. If, however, the shareholders of a FF rely on the company's current income to earn their living, internal funds can be non-sufficient. On the condition that a FF seeks external funding despite the conservative funding policy, Myers (1984) stated to issue debt rather than equity securities. Myers (1984) proposed the rule to "Issue safe securities before risky ones." (Myers, 1984, p.11), which correlates with the aspect of FFs favouring safe and continuous operations over a long-term and emphasising the endogenous non-economic factors as risk-taking and family goals (Becker & Ulrich, 2015; Berrone et al., 2012; Jansen et al., 2022). Besides, the equity market appears to be less developed for most FFs, which leads inexperienced FFs in the field of equity funding to costly and inefficient equity-raising processes (Blumberg & Letterie, 2008).

2.3.2. Relevance of Credit Ratings for Family Firms

The scholar Gordon Donaldson proposed one of the first theories related to how a company should choose its funding sources in 1961. His research was closely linked to identifying the optimal amount of debt a company should have and determining firms' debt capacity related to firm value (Donaldson, 1961). The pecking-order theory by Myers (1984) links to the three primary forms of funds and elucidates on a particular order. Myers observed that internal funding should be the first choice before issuing external securities in debt or equity. Myers's (1984) rule to issue debt as the safest form of securities builds on the pecking-order theory, leaving equity as a last resort. Even if the pecking-order theory could be rejected while trying to explain all corporate finance-related issues and empirical research is discordant about the presence of the theory, FFs' strong reliance on internal funding and debt is evident and in line with the pecking-order theory (Jansen et al., 2022; Myers, 1984). Furthermore Jansen et al. (2022) investigated over a thousand financing decisions of 277 privately held Belgian FFs to develop a theoretical and empirical family pecking order while arguing that FF-specific financing types as family capital is needed to make a more fine-grained distinction. Their results proved the presence of a pecking order showing a modified hierarchy of the financing sources for internal funding, followed by debt, family capital and external equity (Jansen et al., 2022).

Assuming the findings on Belgian firms are similar present in Germany, debt funding in the form of loans is the primary external funding instrument for FFs. Financing through bank loans can generally be divided into long-term and short-term loans. If such financing is used for investments and operational business activities, FFs mainly resort to house banks (Gama & Geraldès, 2012). The house bank principle describes a relationship between companies and regional banks historically anchored in Germany. SMEs increasingly maintain long-lasting business relationships with one or a few banks (Becker & Ulrich, 2015). A study conducted by the German Reconstruction Loan Corporation (Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau, KfW) in 2019 shows that around 93% of German SMEs follow the house bank principle and show an apparent loyalty to their house bank (KfW, 2019). The house bank principle of German SMEs, which include FFs, shows that external financing continues to be primarily provided by banks and that there is hardly any demand for alternative forms of financing among German SMEs. Gama and Geraldès (2012) see the advantage of an exclusive relationship with banks, such as a house bank, in fewer information asymmetries, and that banks are more committed to financing companies. The house bank principle and loans as the primary source of external financing for German SMEs represent a link and relevance to Myers' pecking-order theory (Becker & Ulrich, 2015; Myers, 1984).

The strong anchoring of traditional loans in German FFs describes a business phenomenon in which IM can have an influence or presence. So far, there are no studies or research on the concrete application of IM concerning its use in credit ratings. The theory of IM has called for understanding IM tactics in other business contexts than previously studied. A bank's lending process, including evaluating qualitative factors, is relevant for FFs in Germany, and additionally, the qualitative credit rating shows possible IM applicability for FFs. As IM represents the process of creating an image or perception towards others Bolino et al. (2016), the business context of credit ratings of FFs represents this research field. Furthermore, the assessment of qualitative factors is, as stated, highly subjective, creating the possibility for FFs to influence the perception of banks in credit ratings to potentially leverage the conducted qualitative credit rating and resulting credit score.

3. Research Methodology

In this chapter, I will go into more detail and describe which qualitative methods I used for the data collection on the one hand and for data analysis to answer the research questions. To have transparency and rigor in my qualitative research, the path of data collection, evaluation, and theory building must be comprehensible (Gioia et al., 2013). Therefore, this chapter is intended to describe the methods I used for the research and make my methodological steps comprehensible.

3.1. Research Design

To answer my research questions and identify if the phenomenon of IM finds evidence in the context of credit ratings among FFs, and since little research has been done on how IM is used in credit ratings, this research is conducted on an inductive qualitative research approach aligned to Gioia et al. (2013). Moreover, Marshall and Rossman (1995) argued that qualitative studies are feasible for studying poorly understood phenomena. My choice of qualitative research is consistent with IM literature calling for more studies in different business contexts while seeing IM in a bigger picture (Bolino et al., 2008). In addition, unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not require fixed and predefined research subjects, which suits my exploratory research (Thomas, 2006). The qualitative research design has been chosen as it is instrumental in theory development as it can describe a phenomenon occurring in specific contexts. Besides developing new theories, Nowell and Albrecht (2019) argued that qualitative research using an inductive approach allows for the emergence of our understanding based on organisations and people who experienced it. As this thesis builds on the existing theory of IM in other contexts while intending to build a new theory in a different business context, the scientific approach of qualitative and inductive research applies. As mentioned, previous research has focused on the applicability of IM in other business contexts and primarily intra-organisationally, following which I used inductive research to add to the existing knowledge while exploring a new context. As the primary purpose of inductive research is to enable "research findings to emerge from frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238) without restraints from methodologies, the inductive approach is coherent with my thesis objectives. It allows IM to be examined for relevance in a new context and to find answers for my research questions.

Besides, I acknowledged Pratt et al. (2022) criticism that qualitative research had been dominantly conducted using templates such as Gioia et al. (2013) or Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), potentially worrying about the effect on the quality of research. To be coherent with calls from qualitative research to be more rigorous, I decided to use, besides the research design by Gioia et al. (2013), the active categorisation framework by Grodal et al. (2020) to precisely describe how my collection, coding, and data analysis lead to theory building. Therefore, I ensured by using an additional methodology to maintain quality and rigor throughout my research. I have used semi-structured interviews to explore the core of the thesis, represented by observing the behaviours of organisations and individuals within credit ratings. For my thesis, semi-structured interviews are the most suitable method of gathering data as it allows me to focus on the opinions and experiences of interviewees while aiming to gain rich and in-depth data (Bryman, 2016). Furthermore, Silverman (2009) stated that interviews in exploratory studies need to be less structured than in confirmatory studies and are frequently used to generate generalisable data.

Nevertheless, the use of semi-structured interviews made

sure that important issues were covered and to keep orientation while conducting the interviews. Furthermore, disregarding a strict structure allowed individual opinions and statements to be developed in a non-restrictive way.

3.2. Data Collection and Sources

As my thesis is based on exploratory research, interviews are the primary source of information to identify behaviours and opinion formation within credit ratings in respect to qualitative factors. I focused not only on the behaviour of FFs in credit negotiations and its impact on credit ratings but also on identifying if asymmetries between FFs and banks exist regarding qualitative factors in credit ratings. My thesis is based on 17 interviews, primarily with FFs, conducted in February and March 2023. Depending on availability, interviews were conducted with either the CEO or CFO of the company. In one case, a group interview was conducted with the CEO/Owner of the company, the head of finance, and the head of acquisition. I approached the respondents via different channels. The respondents of FFs were out of my network or had a broader connection to my network. The banks I considered for my interviews are directly or indirectly connected to the firms I interviewed. I focused on interviewing the executive level of firms, which are typically involved in funding decisions and take part in credit negotiations with banks. The firms I interviewed were selected based on the characteristics of a FF in **Chapter 2.1.1**. However, I did not distinguish which generation the company is in but ensured that the criteria of FFs, which are decisive, are fulfilled. **Table 2** summarises all interviews held with FFs and banks.

Furthermore, no specific industry was selected. This is to further pursue the thesis's exploratory approach to, investigate opinions and behaviours independent of the industry sector, and gain generalisable data. In addition to the characteristics of FFs, the companies were selected to vary in their size further providing generalisable data. I relied on the number of employees as well as the revenue of each firm based on the latest available information. **Chapter 2.3.1** emphasises that mid-sized firms primarily rely on debt as a funding source. This enabled to choose firms with the highest probability of using loans from banks and therefore involved in bank negotiations. Since the thesis attempts to relate the subjective assessment of FFs to qualitative credit rating factors and their behaviour during negotiations, the focus relied on the firms assuming a higher degree of heterogeneity among the companies. As house banks can be identified as the primary financing instrument, banks focusing on financing the SME market were chosen. In total, six bank respondents from five different banks were interviewed. Care was taken to interview those bank advisors who deal with business customers. To ensure transparency in the quality of the statements, senior bank levels interview partners were chosen due to their involvement in credit ratings. Moreover, the total asset is a typical measurement to differentiate banks, so I interviewed larger and smaller banks. To expand the

quality of the research, a Swiss bank was additionally interviewed. This allowed me to investigate whether there are differences in how FFs are rated in German-speaking countries. However, the number of banks interviewed is lower than the number of interviews conducted with firms, as an early homogeneity in the qualitative factors and perceived behaviours were identified. As there is no comparable research in this field, I used semi-structured interviews to allow open questions to retrieve as much information and insights as possible. All interviewees were granted discretion to "give voice to the informants" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 17), which creates the opportunity to "discover new concepts" (Gioia et al., 2013, p.17). Due to the geographical separation of all interviewees, I conducted the interviews online using platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The interviews took between 45 and 60 minutes and were recorded with the consent of the participants. As I interviewed only companies located in Germany and spoke to German bank advisors, the interviews were held in German. For analysis purposes, the interviews were transcribed ex-post.

3.3. Interview Guidelines

As the research field is particular and may need preparation by the respondents, all interview respondents received the questionnaire in advance to (1) identify if asymmetries regarding qualitative factors in credit ratings between the bank and FFs exist and (2) to research how actors, in this case, company representatives, behave and how the target (bank) react, two different interview questionnaires were constructed ex-ante (see Appendix C1 and C2). Both questionnaires were separated into two blocks to allow for a fluent interview. However, the order of questions was not strictly followed. In respect to the character of my study and in the sense of "giving voice to the informants" (Gioia et al., 2013, p.17), it seemed more feasible to let the interviewees answer the questions unconstrainedly. The first block focused on questions related to qualitative credit rating factors, their measurement and influencing aspects. The respondents of FFs were asked their opinion on this topic, as banks choose the used qualitative factors. The questionnaire started with more general questions about qualitative credit ratings before trying to generate answers related to the characteristics of FFs and how these might affect or be reflected within ratings. Most questions included these characteristics to differentiate from NFFs. As a semi-structured interview, however, differences between family and NFFs were asked directly, if applicable to the interviewee and their professional background.

Even if the questions were developed ex-ante, the focus of the interviews changed within the interview process depending on the interviewee, which is in line with Gioia et al. (2013). Furthermore, the first block and questions were designed so that, in addition to asking about qualitative factors, they also facilitate the introduction and transition to the actual credit negotiations. While the second block comprised the focal point for this thesis, and the open question approach received attention, in-depth and detailed questions related to

Table 2: Overview of interview respondents

Family Firm	Position	Industry Sector	Revenue in 2022 ^a (in M. EUR)	Number of Employees ^a
Company 1	CEO/Co-Owner Chairman/Owner	Hospitality	~ 130	~ 1800
Company 2	CEO/Owner	Manufacturing	~ 5	~ 30
Company 3	CEO/Owner	Industrial	~ 150	~ 160
Company 4	Chairman of the Supervisory Board	Production/ Distribution	~ 3.200	~ 14.000
Company 5 ^b	CEO/Owner; Head of Finance; Head of Acquisition	Automotive	~ 240	~ 600
Company 6	Former CEO	Publisher	~ 598	~ 2.153
Company 7	CEO/Owner	Furniture	~ 17	~ 100
Company 8	CFO	Construction	~ 400	~ 550
Company 9	CEO/Owner CFO	Facility/Security	~ 135	~ 3.000
Bank	Position	Type of Bank	Total Assets in 2022 ^c (in B. EUR)	
Bank 1	Senior Advisor	Credit Union	~ 6	
Bank 2	Head of Corporate Accounts	Credit Union	~ 10	
Bank 3	Former Member of the Board Financial Engineering Specialist	Universal Bank	~ 470	
Bank 4 ^d	Head of Corporate Banking	Universal Bank	~ 50	
Bank 5	Director Corporate Clients	Cooperative Bank	~ 670	

^aInformation received from respondents

^bGroup discussion with more than one respondent

^cInformation was retrieved from the web page

^dSwiss Bank

behaviours were constructed. Notably, the entire questionnaire did not include the term IM; instead, to grant openness, the questions were reformulated to maintain the IM focus. This minimised the risk of priming and interviewees needing to know about the concept. The same approach was used for the questionnaire with banks (see Appendix C2). As mentioned, the questionnaire was adapted while maintaining the core to identify which qualitative factors are relevant and which behaviours are observed in credit negotiations. As banks are the target of potential IM tactics, the questions were designed to identify how the behaviour of FFs is perceived. Identical to the questionnaire with firms, the second block contained detailed questions about which behaviours are dominant and how these might impact the qualitative credit rating. The focus is mainly to ask questions about how banks ensure that the behaviour and form of a presentation hold credibility and actuality. This divulged perceptions to what degree FFs use IM and how this approach can lead to leveraging the overall credit score.

3.4. Data Analysis

To answer this thesis research question and analyse the collected qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, I used the qualitative research methodology of Gioia et al. (2013). The methodology follows an interpretive approach, first to capture the meaning of the interview responses and experiences adequately and second adequately theorising about that experience (Gioia et al., 2013). This interpretive approach is in line with my exploratory research to identify (1) symmetries or asymmetries of qualitative credit rating factors and (2) identify and describe IM tactics used to leverage credit ratings. The Gioia method is intended to build grounded theory. However, it describes specific approaches to developing new concepts in rigorous inductive research. More precisely, this approach consists of four main steps: (1) use conducted interviews as database, (2) coding and analysing transcripts to create first-order themes, (3) refining these themes into second-order themes which purify into a few dimensions, (4) visualising and structuring of the data (Gioia et al., 2013). All 17 transcripts were uploaded into

the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. With an inductive approach, I openly coded the interview transcripts to follow the first-order analysis, whereby in the first-order analysis, I tried to “adhere faithfully to informant terms” (Gioia et al., 2013, p.20). The initial coding of the interview respondents resulted in 481 codes. To find symmetries and tendencies, I exported all codes from the software MAXQDA to Microsoft Excel. It allowed me to visualise which codes I have used most often and to better understand which aspects to focus on in generating categories. Gioia et al. (2013) stated that these codes must be analysed to create first-order themes. After generating these first-order themes, Gioia et al. (2013) state that a second level of granularity is needed. In this specific step, qualitative researchers highlight the importance of considering oneself as the “knowledgeable agent” to answer the rather flippantly formulated question of “What’s going on here?” (Gioia et al., 2013, p.20). Following the development of second-order themes, the methodology calls for a third and last refinement of categories to generate aggregated dimensions. To improve rigor in the entire methodological analysis, I additionally used the active categorisation framework by Grodal et al. (2020). This framework considers eight moves which can be used in three main stages: “generating initial categories, refining tentative categories, and stabilising categories” (Grodal et al., 2020, p. 11).

Generating initial categories refers to engaging with the collected and coded data. I used to “focus on puzzles” (Grodal et al., 2020, p. 14) to identify the most surprising or salient informant terms. As not all information is equally essential for categorising, I distilled them for my thesis’s most relevant responses. As category formation is crucial in my analysis, salience allowed me to focus on unique and novel aspects. In research this is often called “unusual cases”, which according to Grodal et al. (2020), highlight the importance in the theorising process. Furthermore, I used these puzzles to seize new insights from prior theories and IM contexts to find discrepancies in the light of my researched credit rating context.

Refining tentative categories is a stage by Grodal et al. (2020) to analyse further and refine the initial categories. In a broader sense, this is by either category reduction or enrichment. While analysing my coded categories, I either dropped, merged, split, contrasted, or sequenced categories to generate more distilled categories. These steps helped to generate overarching categories. While dropping and merging categories reduced my categories, I split categories when I recognised that a category contained more than one nuance which needed separate lone-standing categories. As categories were created in parallel and not independently, relating and contrasting allows for identifying relationships and moving them closer or becoming more distant. Sequencing emphasises that categories in a methodological step are non-static objects (Grodal et al., 2020). Therefore, sequencing allows to move and organise the categories temporarily. The use of different moves not only distils the identified categories, however, is also, according to Grodal et al. (2020), important in theory building to identify which categories func-

tion as mechanisms and which as concepts.

Stabilising categories is a methodological step by Grodal et al. (2020) to further enhance rigor in qualitative research. Creating a “theoretical scaffold” (Grodal et al., 2020, p.29) examines the data to determine whether it supports the theoretical conclusions. I reviewed my created categories to elaborate if all relevant informant terms are reflected in my categories. To ensure rigor, I weighted my categories as being relevant, qualified, neutral or contrasting to verify the data leading to emerged categories to discard those categories that no longer fit. While following these steps, I constantly tried to build categories which contained FFs specifics. This ensured that relevant information regarding FFs was incorporated into my analysis. Since the core of this analysis deals with two essential components, which represent the qualitative factors of a credit rating on the one hand and the behaviour of FF representatives on the other, the categories were chosen in such a way that the qualitative factors most frequently used by banks were integrated. This enabled to examine and illustrate the connection between the two aspects and to develop a final coding tree.

4. Emergent Findings

In the systematic evaluation of the data retrieved from the 17 interviews I identified overlaps in the views of the representatives of FFs and banks on the rating factors important in a qualitative credit rating. Two essential aspects could be identified by comparing the statements. Essential aspects which have been mentioned for a qualitative credit rating are the stability of the company and the people acting on its behalf. These streams build the basic aspects banks assess to identify the potential risk while granting a loan to a firm. In addition to elaborating on these building blocks, I identified IM tactics that can be used by FFs to influence these aspects of a qualitative credit rating and potentially positively leverage bank’s assessments. It should be noted that these tactics are primarily divided into family-specific, business-specific, and relationship-specific IM approaches. For this reason, the coding tree shown in **Figure 2** relates the aspects of the stability of the business and the acting persons to the IM tactics. Furthermore, I found differences in the specific characteristics of FFs and other business forms, which influence the approach of IM applied in credit ratings.

4.1. Family-Specific Impression Management

First, I found, typical for FFs characteristics that are associated with IM tactics for leveraging qualitative credit ratings. The family-specific factors were identified based on the recurring importance of the family in the statements of the interview respondents. Following, in this specific case the pertinence of the family leads to IM tactics incorporating this aspect. Besides, the appearance of the family and their image as well as internal family dynamics represent approaches for IM, which FFs can use in credit ratings to potentially leverage the credit rating.

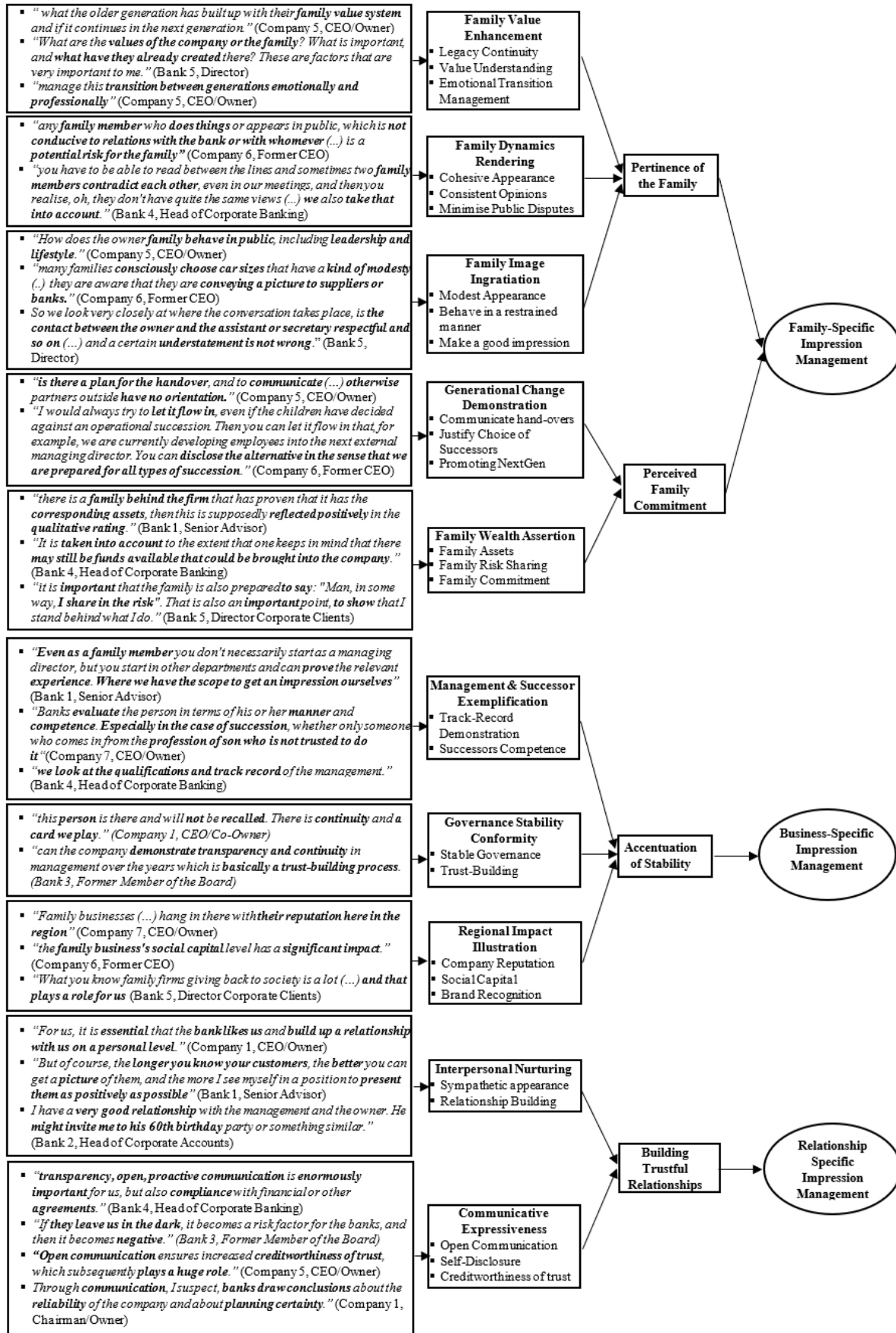


Figure 2: Coding tree of the interview analysis (Own Illustration)

4.1.1. Pertinence of the Family

I found that the peculiarities of FFs, are reflected in qualitative credit ratings by banks and especially regarding the acting persons within the firm. As a FF is characterised to be predominantly in family ownership or control, the interview respondents of the firms are aware that they are closely affiliated with the firm itself. This affiliation is evident and of importance in the business context of credit ratings and how FFs should portray themselves to banks. One respondent of a FF highlighted this significance: *“So generally it is not separated. The family is always part of the company, even if it is not operationally active. It always plays a role in the relationship with the bank.”* (Company 6, Former CEO). Therefore, the family itself is mentioned to be of importance and furthermore highlight the relevance of the families in credit negotiations. Moreover, I observe the emphasis and focus on the family in conversations with banks as one respondent stated: *“We essentially have two owner families and of course we have a much, much greater focus on the owners”* (Company 8, CFO). He highlights, that in negotiations with banks, the focus is especially on the owner’s family and accompanies the firm’s presentation. The pertinence of the family in credit negotiations represents an overarching aspect which needs to be considered and examined while identifying potential IM tactics used by FFs in the business context of credit ratings.

Family Value Enhancement

I identified a clear tendency towards the importance of the family within and behind the company. The perceived importance of the family is based on the results of comparing relevant aspects in credit ratings for banks and FFs. It became apparent that a company, especially a FF, is characterised by its identity related to its cross-generational family values. This has been argued by the owner and CEO of Company 5, stating:

“And of course they look closely at whether what the parents have built up with their family value system will continue or whether it will change in the next generation. In this respect, I think that in the case of family firms or small and medium-sized enterprises, the focus is also on us personally as a family and how our decisions are made.”

This states that the values of the company and, thus, also of the family play an important role and whether these values are consistent over generations. This perception holds similarities in terms of banks. The director of corporate clients of one of the leading German banks elaborated on the aspect of family values and legacy continuity and the importance for him by stating:

“What are the values of the company or the family? Where do they stand behind? What is important to them, and what have they already created there? These are factors that are very important to me.” (Bank 5, Director Corporate Clients)

Other interview partners also emphasised the closeness between the family and the company (Company 1, Company 3). So has it been exemplarily emphasised in the following: *“To demonstrate what we stand for as a family of entrepreneurs, in terms of our vision and values”* (Company 1, CEO/Co-Owner). As FFs can also be externally managed, it is also worth mentioning that the connection to family values is given similar attention by banks in the case of externally managed FFs. A former CEO of a renowned German publisher implicitly points to an even more important role of the connection to family values by saying:

“The length of the relationship with the company is of great relevance, regardless of whether the persons involved are family managers or third-party managers. (...). I have to convince people that I stand for the values, the culture and the future vision of the company and the family. I [as external manager] must be a bit more convincing than the person who perhaps has the right surname.” (Company 6, Former CEO)

Besides, I found that navigating the transition of the company’s family values not only plays an internal role but is also reviewed in the qualitative evaluation of banks. Furthermore, the findings highlighted that family values are associated with a type of legacy continuity that is also an important criterion for externally managed FFs and that family values are used as an enhancement within the qualitative credit rating. Although FFs can vary greatly in size, the aspect of legacy continuity and the passing on of family values to the next generation is evident in different sizes of businesses. This is illustrated by the statement of the CEO of Company 2, who emphasised the importance of values also in small firms: *“I think especially for us as a smaller family business that [passing on family values] is also very important because our customers with whom we do business know us and maybe like us because of that”* (Company 2, CEO). The navigation of the company’s transition regarding family values over generations and highlighting the relevance of this aspect for FFs and banks is supported by a respondent expressing: *“but also what does the senior give the junior along? So maybe this is not so explicit in the rating, but simply to see whether they stay true to themselves or whether the new generation goes somewhere completely different.”* (Bank 1, Senior Advisor). This statement illustrates that the representation of family values and continuity across generations can also play a role outside the actual rating. So even if not directly questioned in the evaluation and corresponding credit rating, it grants insights to banks into whether the family legacy continues in generational changes. This might be often the case in FFs particularly, caused by their governance structure. To present stability in the family’s values to the bank, one interviewee again refers to the need to make this emotional and professional transition (Company 6, CEO/Owner). Furthermore, the values of the firm and family have an internal and external impact and radiate outwards, according to the CFO

of Company 9: *“That is a sign to outsiders of how I treat the staff. What is the culture like internally and externally? So can the character of the company send a positive signal to the outsiders?”*. The results, therefore, highlighted not only the values that are aligned to the FFs’ corporate culture, which the family embodies and, according to the respondent, are very well perceived by banks and might impact qualitative credit ratings. Following the IM tactic family value enhancement was retrieved and developed.

Family Dynamics Rendering

Next, the external perception of the family represents another aspect in evaluating FFs in credit ratings. A cohesive appearance of the family can be achieved by passing on the values within the family and, thus, also within the business. This became particularly clear concerning loan negotiations, as the banks take the dynamics between the acting persons to indicate whether the managers present unified opinions when evaluating the companies. The importance of this aspect was illustrated by the statement of a banker: *“you have to be able to read between the lines, and sometimes two family members contradict each other, even in our meetings, and then you realise, oh, they don’t have quite the same views (...) we also take that into account.”* (Bank 4, Head of Corporate Banking). Besides, another interview respondent supports the argument of *“reading between the lines”*, by referring to his experience in bank meetings and mentioning possible aspects which draw assumptions about the dynamics within a family and between generations.

“If I only experience them as assessors, as the next generation, and the senior person is always telling and doing, then I don’t know whether the junior person is already being let into the role or is already in the role himself. Also, what parts of the conversation does he perhaps have, how valuable are they in terms of content, or does he just repeat what has already been said?” (Bank 2, Head of Corporate Accounts)

Therefore, a cohesive appearance and control of family dynamics is a criterion particularly evident in FFs. Cohesiveness is important to demonstrate to the banks a family unity in decisions on various aspects. This was confirmed in several interviews and exemplified in the following statement: *“Especially the banks, which come back repeatedly and observe exactly what happens at meetings. So, whether we agree or not. And there’s no denying that a family should always agree on important issues like financing, or at least behave that way”* (Company 5, CEO / Owner). The phrase *“behave that way”* demonstrated that FFs tend to be aware of their appearance and the impression they give in bank meetings, as well as in other situations and potentially render the family dynamics in a form which is in line with their audience. Another respondent gave cohesiveness an even more intense meaning by saying: *“Assuming there were two generations, and they*

didn’t have the same orientation, then I personally would never go into a bank meeting at all” (Company 6, Former CEO). Within my findings, I elaborated on the importance of the family’s cohesive appearance towards outsiders. None of the interviews revealed an entirely different view on this subject. Even though the statement of *“at least presenting oneself in this way”* and the other statement of *“never going to a bank meeting”* in case of disagreements differ in their views on how to render the family dynamics, a basic view of the relevance is apparent. The banker’s statement, which refers to the observation and evaluation of dynamics, confirmed the negative impact of incohesive family dynamics. In addition to this aspect, the owner of Company 3 made the general point that intra-family discord is never beneficial for the effectiveness of the company and the perception of any stakeholders:

“Because there are often disagreements, for example, investment decisions are delayed because the aunt and uncle do not agree. Of course, this can have a negative impact and be perceived by stakeholders, which banks are too.” (Company 3, Owner and CEO)

The disagreements arising in FFs, using the example of uncles and aunts, can support the finding that minimising the dynamics within the family has a positive impact for FFs in negotiations with banks. This approach makes it possible to minimise the potential risks arising from the family’s appearance. This applies not only to interactions with banks but also to other situations. For example, the explanation *“any family member who does things or appears in public, which is not conducive to relations with the bank or with whomever (...) is a potential risk for the family”* (Company 6, Former CEO) clarifies that appearance and behaviour can also play a decisive role outside the bank meeting. This strengthened the finding that the connection between family and their firm is an elementary aspect that FFs should consider when engaging with banks. Furthermore, it represents the overall pertinence of the family. Family dynamics often play a role in FFs and can influence the firm’s and the bank’s relationship. According to the respondent, the influence on the relationship is based on the rather reserved way family business owners deal with internal disagreements. He elaborates on this as follows: *“Then there’s rivalry in the family, the company doesn’t want to disclose. Then there are shareholder rivalries that don’t want to be disclosed either. In other words, there is tension between what the bank wants to know and what the owner wants to disclose”* (Bank 3, Former Chairman of the Board). Derived, I created the family-specific IM tactic *family dynamics rendering* presenting the second tactic associated with FFs in credit ratings which can potentially leverage credit scores.

Family Image Ingratiation

The chapter 4.1.1.1 and 4.1.1.2 are closely linked to the image of the family, which both banks and FFs have affirmed. Family values, continuity of legacy, but also the cross-generational preservation of corporate culture can build the

image that FFs convey to the external audience. Thus, in addition to the actual behaviour, I found that the family's appearance in public or bank negotiations is an aspect of the assessment in credit negotiations. As with family dynamics, this has a limited connection with the actual qualitative credit rating but is mirrored in the perception of the bank advisors, who perform subjective evaluations in qualitative credit ratings. The image of the family presented to external parties, and its effect is exemplified in the interview response: *"many families consciously choose car sizes that have a kind of modesty (...) they are aware that they are conveying a picture to suppliers or banks"* (Company 6, Former CEO).

Using the example of car choice and stating *"consciously"* and *"modesty"* undermined the awareness of families being in the focal point and their representative role for the firm itself. This aligns with the beforementioned closeness between the owner family and the firm. Further, an associated response highlighting leadership and lifestyle to be perceived by others emphasised the interplay between FF representatives' private and professional lives (Company 5, CEO / Owner). In addition to the public appearance that shapes the family's image, the leadership style also influences the perception of banks. This opinion is reflected in a response from a banker that expressed: *"So we look very closely at where the conversation takes place, is the contact between the owner and the assistant or secretary respectful and so on (...) and a certain understatement is not wrong"* (Bank 5, Director Corporate Clients). The detailed observations of the bank managers in the conversations with the family presented above showed that various aspects are recognisable that enable the bankers to judge the family better. Further, stating that *"understatement"* is perceived as positive by banks regarding the appearance relates to the described modesty families should present in public. The findings in the interview statements showed a differentiation between general possession behaviours, such as the choice of the car, and behaviour-dependent image criteria. These differences show the importance of family image in credit negotiations and substantiate that these are primary factors induced by family activities. The specificity of these aspects for FFs is subject to the association and anchoring between the family and the firm. This connection is influenced, among other things, by the strong perception of FFs in the region, as expressed by the CFO of Company 9: *"When you are in the public eye, also socially, (...) especially if you are a regionally positioned company, it is all seen."*

However, there is also a contrary view, which emphasised that owner families should not generally trim their appearance to be grounded in order to portray a certain image. As an interview partner expressed:

"So appearance always has an effect, whether you want it to or not, and I try to judge neutrally (...) and if the professionalism and performance of the entrepreneur is guaranteed, I don't care if he comes very smartly in a suit and whether he rides up on a

bicycle or in an expensive car, I honestly don't care at all" (Bank 3, Financial Engineering Specialist)

4.1.2. Perceived Family Commitment

In addition to the pertinence of the family and the identified areas in which the family gains importance in qualitative ratings, it was possible to elaborate the family's commitment to the firm through the analysis of the interview responses. This is related to the previously described family association with the firm but represents a category on its own. The family's commitment to the company could be divided into two main areas. These can be differentiated into financial and personal commitment and describe further typical family characteristics to be considered in the context of qualitative credit ratings.

Generational Change Demonstration

In the interviews with representatives of FFs and banks, succession in the firm was a recurring theme. The importance of succession in FFs, irrespective of the recurring mentioning in the interviews, is reflected in the fact that it is a designated question in qualitative credit ratings. All interviewees emphasised the relevance of the next generation (NextGen). This was explicitly described as essential by the interviewees on the banking side and reported that it is asked about as a *"soft"* factor in qualitative credit ratings (Bank 1, Senior Advisor). Therefore, the importance of generational change in FFs and related factors are examined in more detail. It should be noted that the aspect of succession has a certain significance in every type of organisation but is explicitly a predominant topic in FFs, even outside of the context of ratings, so the results found can be classified as family-specific. Succession arrangements serve to stabilise the business and ensure its long-term orientation. The aspect of stability is found, for instance, in the following comment:

"Another very important thing is the issue of succession planning. I would say, ultimately, [it is] a topic for family businesses and less for large group structures where it is not so relevant. Because I would say that when the managing director retires, a new manager is advertised, and then ultimately, this succession regulation is not as relevant as in the family sector. And that is also a very important aspect for us, if the entrepreneur has regulated his succession, as on the one hand in the sense of if something happens, the company is still able to act, and on the other hand, it is just so that if he retires due to age, that the company can then also continue to exist" (Bank 1, Senior Advisor)

Even if this statement is based on a placative formulation, the importance of succession planning, and the succeeding generation becomes significant. In the context of the succession, I repeatedly observed in the interviews that it is not only a matter of establishing a succession arrangement, but

also a matter of communicating it to the bank and signalling out the successor with regard to the integration into the company and the clear change of management. The first aspect of communicating the generational changes in FFs is closely linked to the conversations with banks. The communication of generational change allows to give orientation to business partners argued by the CEO/ Owner of Company 5: *“is there a plan for the handover, and to communicate (...) otherwise partners outside have no orientation”*. Further, proactive communication improves the comprehension of the current and planned governance situation in FFs. Even if the credit rating is a *“financial, mathematical tool to determine the one-year probability of default”* (Bank 1, Senior Advisor), and whether an appropriate succession is established within the family is answered without *“a continuous text but rather yes, or no”* (Bank 1, Senior Advisor), granting insights is still favourable. The representation of the NextGen, irrespective of whether it is a family-internal succession, is addressed in the exchange with banks. As one interview partner noted:

“I would always try to let it flow in, even if the children have decided against an operational succession. Then you can let it flow in that, for example, we are currently developing employees into the next external managing director. You can disclose the alternative in the sense that we are prepared for all types of succession” (Company 6, Former CEO)

By saying to be *“prepared for all types of succession”*, I could see the importance of demonstrating generational change in my results. Promoting the NextGen enables placing the successors and assuming management responsibility (Company 8, CFO). Besides the communication, the integration of the successors into the business in an early stage was highlighted in an interview response which directly related to bank meetings. The head of acquisition for Company 5 reported that: *“Banks have also really made it clear that it is important to them to clarify the new generation and the succession at an early stage and then also to actively involve them in the bank meetings”*, aligning both communication and integration of NextGens to demonstrate how the FF is planning its generational change. Although the finding of the interview with the banker shows a polar question regarding succession planning, the statement: *“But in particular, these are, of course soft factors where we have a certain degree of leeway in the sense that we can make up our own minds about them”* (Bank 1, Senior Advisor), points out to possible levers FFs can use regarding the demonstration of the NextGen.

Next, the interviews with both parties mentioned the importance of clear leadership handovers in FFs. This was already indicated in the statement quoted above about communicating the handover. However, a formulated handover between generations was explained further in the interview statements. For example, one of the bank's interviewees explained the necessity of this clear handover as follows: *“and then it is also important that you can make a hard cut, in my*

opinion, and that the senior does not still think he can bring in all his ideas; well, of course, he can bring in ideas, but clearly, someone has to wear the hat” (Bank 3, Specialist Financial Engineering). Moreover, the implied generational change and the precise formulation of who has control after a generational change are also reflected in another statement. *“Because if you start to intercede too much or talk in between, you have lost the trust in the new generation”*, states the CFO of Company 9 and equates the clear handover with a justification of the chosen successor and the representation of trust in the NextGen. He additionally emphasised the trust in the successors by stating: *“I will put the Marshall's baton in your knapsack, but you will have to unpack it yourself”*, an adaptation of *“the baton in the knapsack”* quote anchored in the Napoleonic era meaning to aspire to fulfil the highest rank. The anecdote illustrated, however, that the NextGen must be trusted to take over the management of the family business independently and that a baton handover is taking place. The baton's handover and the successor's integration are closely linked. The internal coordination of who should take on the role of successor and the handover that then takes place were addressed in the interview statements. The timely integration and *“letting go”* of the older generation were clarified by a suitable example of an interviewee who spoke about his experience with an entrepreneur's son, whereby internal disadvantages due to unresolved handover regulations with effects on the family also became apparent.

“I once had a businessman's son with us who spoke of himself as Prince Charles, and that shows the analogy. In principle, he has already given up on himself, and then, of course, it becomes highly risky for a company.” (Company 5, CEO/Owner)

An extreme case in which the importance of the family's commitment to succession for the bank, came up in an example when a loan was granted on the premises that the son joined the firm of his parents. This further exemplified the importance of arranging succession at an early stage. In addition, the interviewee pointed out possible tensions in connection with an unplanned succession arrangement by adding: *“and that was not funny for the son and for the parents”* (Company 6, Former CEO). So by appropriate *generational change demonstration*, being a retrieved IM tactic, FFs can improve the perceptions of banks in terms of stability.

Family Wealth Assertion

Next to family commitment, the qualitative credit rating increasingly considered the family's financial commitment to its firm. This result differentiates FFs once again from other types of companies. For example, an interviewee from a bank confirmed the actual question asked in the qualitative rating about the family's financial situation.

“Some questions only apply to family businesses. The question that is probably of particular interest is: how is the wealth situation of the shareholders

assessed? And that is, for example, the particular issue for family businesses.” (Bank 1, Senior Advisor)

In addition to the valuation of family wealth, however, the family's financial support of the business generally plays a role. Very specifically for FFs, an interview respondent from a bank perspective said the following: *“Some say about family entrepreneurs that they are prepared to invest everything possible to keep their life's work alive, so to speak”* (Bank 3, Specialist Financial Engineering). This result and the bankers' opinion also reflect the families' commitment to their businesses. However, while the previously mentioned factors of the qualitative rating are based on observations of the family in the bank interviews and on the positioning of the company itself, another result becomes tangible through the inclusion of family wealth. Even though the family's private wealth stands separate from the value and assets of the business, a rating emerges in the interview results concerning the FFs' willingness to take risks. For example, one banker described that it is important to keep in mind that there are potential family assets that can be brought into the business (Bank 4, Head of Corporate Banking). Another statement in a similar vein indicated that it can positively affect the qualitative credit rating if there is a family with corresponding assets behind the firm (Bank 1, Senior Advisor). In contrast, a banker stated that it is particularly important for the family to be actively prepared to accept risk sharing. He illustrated this as follows: *“it is important that the family is also prepared to say: “Man, in some way, I share in the risk”. That is also an important point to show that I stand behind what I do”* (Bank 5, Director Corporate Clients). The distribution of risk found in the statement, which is part of the evaluation of FFs in terms of family involvement, could also be found in a description of a negotiation by one entrepreneur: *“And then, in the very next sentence, they want to know if you are prepared to take a risk like a bank.”* (Company 7, CEO/Owner). Regarding the willingness of family entrepreneurs to take risks and the expressed preparedness of family entrepreneurs to also be liable with their private assets is seen in a contrary manner by a banker. He made explicit, for example, that he must pay attention to a balance between risk and management in the credit assessment's weighting family wealth. He adds to this with the remark: *“I would not see that the family entrepreneur is becoming more courageous and, for example, putting his own wealth at risk”* (Bank 3, Former Member of the Board). Nevertheless, the aspect of family wealth is mainly found in the bankers' statements.

To a lesser extent, these results were found in the statements of FFs, which nevertheless indicated the meaningfulness and significance of this “soft” factor in the qualitative credit rating. Thus, in the results, I identified the assertion of family wealth based on the statements of the interview partners as a reasonable approach for IM used by FFs in qualitative credit ratings.

4.2. Business-Specific Impression Management

During the evaluation of the interviews, the accentuation of stability through approaches as the exemplification of the management quality, governance stability and the business regional impact were found in addition to the family-related factors that potentially find IM applicability to leverage qualitative credit ratings. The subdivision into business-specific IM approaches in credit ratings is since these are attributed to the firm itself. Even though FFs differ from other business forms primarily in their control and ownership characteristics, they are universally rated like other businesses apart from the family-specific factors. Highlighted in the response: *“But I wouldn't separate the requirements or approaches that much, except for the characteristics of family businesses”* (Bank 2, Head of Corporate Accounts). Therefore, the following core statements were elaborated on in the interviews, representing further approaches regarding IM in credit ratings. Even though the responses explicitly refer to FFs, they reflect more generalisable and universally valid findings.

4.2.1. Accentuation of Stability

The credit rating reflects the POD of companies and serves to assess the likelihood that companies will not be able to meet their financial obligations to the bank. One indicator of this POD is the stability of the company itself. I identified three pillars, which represent aspects a bank reviews to assess the firms stability. Firms can accentuate stability by means of exemplification of their management, stability in their governance and illustrating their the regional anchoring of the company. Those IM tactics are elaborated separately in the following sections.

Management and Successor Exemplification

The quality of management was one of the most frequently mentioned qualitative factors from both the bank and the firms. Highlighting the quality and professionalism of management is thus the first aspect mentioned in connection with non-family specific factors. This “soft” factor in qualitative credit ratings is people-related and is considered very important by the banks to assess the company's stability better. For example, one bank advisor affirmed: *“Personally, I find the quality of the management to be the decisive assessment because that is the most important thing from my point of view”* (Bank 1, Senior Advisor). In the results of the interviews with the FFs, the quality of the management was mentioned several times as an assumed factor in the rating (Company 2, Company 4, Company 8). For example, the CEO and Co-Owner of Company 1 stated: *“So first and foremost certainly the quality of the people they do business with. That is, how successful have we been? How did we also implement our promises and successfully manage past activities?”*. The quality of management can be assessed based on previous successes, qualifications, and experience: *“How was the management in the past? How did it manage crises in the past? Some kind of track record to look at”* (Bank 3, Former Member of the Board). But also, in the case of successors, increasing

attention is being paid to the qualifications and quality of the management. Even if succession planning proves to be less critical in NFFs, the quality of the successor can nevertheless be attributed to both forms of business. To better grasp the quality of successors in FFs, the statement of a banker described the following: *“Even as a family member, you don’t necessarily start as a managing director, but you start in other departments and can prove the relevant experience. Where we have the scope to get an impression ourselves”* (Bank 1, Senior Advisor).

Highlighted is the track record, which is seen as significant by the bank and is an aspect that plays a role in qualitative credit ratings and can be exemplified by FFs. However, the statement in one interview: *“It does not matter if it is a family business or not, that they look at the professionalism and quality of the management”* (Company 1, Chairman, and Owner), also shows the non-specificity of this aspect in relation to FFs. Nevertheless, it is apparent in the context of FFs that management competence is seen across generations. It can be deduced from this that, in addition to family membership, competence must also be considered when selecting successors. Since, as already indicated, it is a matter of assessing the company’s stability, maintaining quality at the management level is essential. This opinion is held by the CEO/Owner of Company 7 and clarified in the statement: *“Banks evaluate the person in terms of his or her manner and competence. Especially in the case of succession, whether only someone who comes in from the profession of a son who is not trusted to do it”*. However, it should also be emphasised that the competence of the successors is built up through experience in the company and creates a derived trust. FFs can thus pass on the quality of their management and the associated trust to the NextGen. One banker described this as a *“leap of faith”* that family members can earn through the continuity of the firm over history and refers to this as: *“that they have stood the test of time, that certainly makes a lot of difference and is also an advantage of family businesses from the banks’ point of view”* (Bank 3, Former Member of the Board). In the results of the interview statements, a general tendency to exemplify the quality of the management and the successors could be identified, leading to the IM tactic of *management and successor exemplification*. The repetition of statements on the quality of management in the interviews was intuitively obvious. However, the individual statements provide clarification regarding the relevance of this aspect and possibilities for IM to find application.

Governance Stability Conformity

The derivation of the stability of a company from its governance was also recognisable in the interviews. This is closely related to the mentioned aspect of management and successor exemplification, as this result also links to the people acting on the firm’s behalf. Since, as already indicated, bankers need to get a sense of the company to better assess stability and the associated POD, governance is another approach to consider. For example, one banker stated that

when assessing the company in the qualitative part of the rating, the company’s organisational chart is looked at first, and the past changes at the management level. The continuity and stability of the management is of particular importance as an interview expressed: *“The question is whether there have been two managing directors in the last three years or three, so there has been constant change, or whether there is continuity in the management, which is certainly an important factor.”* (Bank 2, Head of Corporates). From this finding, it can be deduced that companies should strive for conformity about the long-term nature of management. This is also a business-specific aspect but one that FFs can take advantage of due to their long-term orientation. This becomes evident in the statement of a Co-Owner who points to the continuity of management in FFs and reinforces the use of this potential advantage by stating: *“there is continuity and a card we play”* (Company 1, CEO and Co-Owner)

In a further finding, a banker supported the owner’s previous statement of actively using continuity by pointing to the trust associated with continuity, which he puts as follows: *“Can the company demonstrate transparency and continuity in governance over the years, which is basically a trust-building process”* (Bank 3, Former Member of the Board). Based on these views, it can be perceived that companies, whether FF or not, should align their governance stability to be consistent with bankers’ sentiments. Nonetheless, governance stability is an advantage for FFs, as a similar statement by an owner emphasised.

“That is inherent in the family, and it cannot be assumed that it [the firm] will be sold tomorrow. But it is also unlikely that the actors will leave the company tomorrow and go somewhere else. That can happen, of course, but I believe that it is simply less the case than in other forms of enterprise.”
(Company 1, Chairman and Owner)

Regional Impact Illustration

Next, I found a factor and resulting IM tactic, that was less to be expected but was raised more frequently by the interview partners. The qualitative factor underlying this result is the influence of the company’s reputation on the credit rating. However, it became apparent during the interviews that the company’s reputation is more concerned with regional impact and anchoring. This aspect flows into the assessment of the stability of the company. This became evident, for example, in the interview with the CEO/Owner of a leading luxury furniture manufacturer. In the interview, he expressed that his reputation in the region was important in addition to his commitment as a family (Company 7, CEO/ Owner). He underlined this by adding: *“I stand here with my skin and hair and above all with my good name, which I then also burn here in the region”*, which emphasised the importance of the reputation of a FF. This also applies to NFFs, but the business owner also stated that banks perceive this quite positively compared to, for example, an external manager: *“Who*

is paid now and if it does not work out, he leaves with a severance package" (Company 7, CEO/Owner). Another interviewee's statement reinforced the anchoring in the region and the importance of the firm's name. She described it as the extent of the company's commitment to the region, referring to the scientific concept of social capital. She emphasised verbatim: "So the level of social capital of the family business has a big impact" (Company 6, Former CEO). Even though she associated the concept of social capital with FFs, the regional impact can also be transferred to NFFs and is therefore attributed to the finding of business-specific factors. However, the impression firms can make through social capital becomes explicit in the statement of a banker connecting this aspect to credit ratings. Thus, he affirmed: "what you know about family firms giving back to society is quite a lot. I know some examples where I thought, oh, hats off, that's enormous what they achieve, and that, that plays a role for us" (Bank 5, Director Corporate Clients).

Considering the regional impact or the regional commitment of the companies lends importance to this aspect. The illustration of companies' engagement can therefore be seen as a valuable IM approach within the context of qualitative credit ratings. To highlight the special nature of FFs despite the possible generalisation of the regional commitment of companies, I found the following statement in an interview: "it is proven that family firms only cut jobs at the very end, when it is no longer possible, and are more likely to invest during the crisis. That is why they can scale up more quickly after a crisis. This is also a reputational factor that the banks definitely observe" (Company 6, Former CEO).

4.3. Relationship-Specific Impression Management

4.3.1. Building Trustful Relationships

I found one central result that was emphasised and considered important by all almost all interview partners. Since the qualitative rating is a subjective assessment of the bank's corporate client advisor, the business relationship between the bank and the company was increasingly emphasised. The aspect of relationship building, as well as relationship nurturing, thus determines the final findings of the interviews. This result only described a qualitative factor to a limited extent but showed facets that impact a rating or credit granting. In addition to relationship building, communication is a further component of this result. Both aspects are examined in more detail to define a possible application of IM.

Interpersonal Nurturing

"For us, it is essential that the bank likes us and build up a relationship with us on a personal level" (Company 1, CEO and Co-Owner). This quote was one of many, emphasising the importance of a close business relationship between the firm and bank. Using the phrase "on a personal level", thus highlights the interpersonal relevance for firms while working with banks. Furthermore, the statement showed that the interview respondent is concerned about building this busi-

ness relationship on a personal level by adding in a subordinate clause: "This is an active thing we do". This interest in relationship building is similarly reflected in the length of the business relationship. For example, many of the interviewed firms hold business relationships that have lasted longer than 20 years. One respondent illustrates this by noting: "We haven't had that many banks. I have had my house bank for 40 years, you could say" (Company 1, Chairman and Owner). The importance of the relationship was further exemplified in an interview with a senior bank advisor. Thus, the banker explained the necessity and advantage of long-standing relationships and the possible influence on a rating.

"But of course, the longer you know your customers, the better you can get a picture of them, and the more I see myself in a position to present them as positively as possible." (Bank 1, Senior Advisor)

This statement puts the relationship and partnership between bank and firm in the foreground. Since most German FFs belong to the middle market, one entrepreneur's thesis underlined the importance of close cooperation between medium-sized firms and banks. Thus, he formulated the thesis that: "The German Mittelstand (...) has always boasted that they don't need a bank. (...) They are sure that they finance everything themselves. But some firms independent on the sector, even in great sectors, are driven into the ground" (Company 4, Member of the Supervisory Board). The interviewee expresses his resentment that medium-sized firms do not need banks. Even though this is a harshly formulated thesis, the importance of close cooperation can be confirmed. Within the results, I found only one statement that opposed a close partnership between banks and firms. As one interview respondent stated: "So bank partner, I don't know that word because that [a bank] is not a partner. (...) I don't hate banks, but the bank is a money supplier, a financial service provider" (Company 3, CEO/Owner). Both statements oppose each other, but the frequency with which the relationship between bank and business was emphasised suggests generalisability and relevance.

In the opposing statement by the CEO, he referred to banks as "financial service providers" and financiers. This is contradicted in an interview with a bank representative regarding the risk distribution between the bank and the company. The interviewee emphasised: "But the bank is more than a service provider; as a lender, it is also a risk bearer and thus becomes a partner for the entrepreneur" (Bank 3, Former Member of the Board). The perception of the advantages of a relationship is underpinned by the bank's interest in partnering. One banker related to the competitive nature of the banking sector and emphasised that the bank secures business through a relationship if it can build an interpersonal connection with the company or the owner. He puts it succinctly: "Because the entrepreneur simply says, come on, you're worth that to me now" (Bank 2, Head of Corporate Accounts). I showed that there is a mutual interest in building and nurturing relationships. This is particularly evident in the case

of FFs, with one banker stating: *“If you as a bank advisor deal with a family, and you now know the senior well, and you may also know the successors well, then you have a long exchange and also a completely different relationship with these people”* (Bank 3, Specialist Financial Engineering).

The relationship of the bankers to the firms, which is recognisable in the statement, is clarified additionally by the phrase: *“I have a very good relationship with the management and the owner. He might invite me to his 60th birthday party or something similar”* (Bank 2, Head of Corporate Accounts). The nurturing of long-term relationships with banks is based on intrinsic long-term thinking, especially in the case of FFs. For instance, one interviewee described it as a depository from which one invests and can draw. In his opinion, it is: *“For a medium-sized company, essential to find a bank (...) that values the long-term relationship”* (Company 5, CEO/Owner). This indicated that long-term relationships and relationship nurturing is important for firms, especially FFs, in the context of credit ratings and thus creates the IM tactic of *interpersonal nurturing*.

Communicative Expressiveness

Last, in terms of relationship building and relevance for firms in the business context of credit ratings, communication was emphasised by firm respondents and explicitly by banks. Since the credit rating through bank advisors refers to external parties increased emphasis was placed on trustful communication and interaction. This is evident in the statement of an interview partner, among others. *“Communication is actually always the most important topic for me”* (Bank 1, Senior Advisor). The highlighted subject of communication represents the final finding of the interviews and forms the basis for trustful business relationships. One interviewee summarised all related aspects of communication in his statement: *“Transparent, open, proactive communication is enormously important for us, but also compliance with financial or other agreements”* (Bank 4, Head of Corporate Banking). Supporting this, another interviewee added: *“If they leave us in the dark, it becomes a risk factor for the banks, and then it becomes negative”* (Bank 3, Former Member of the Board). In the overall consideration of both statements, the result could be linked to the credit rating. Thus, a lack of transparent communication is described as an increased risk for the banks. This increased risk must be minimised in credit negotiations and credit ratings to obtain the most favourable rating possible. This stressed the role of communication in the business relationship between the firm and the bank. It should be noted that this result applies regardless of the ownership structure and, thus, independently of FFs. In the context of communication, the importance of how entrepreneurs should behave when communicating with banks became increasingly apparent to me. It is about convincing the bank of projects and investments or loans in a trustful communication. Through communicative expressiveness, companies can present and position themselves towards the bank. The changed ability to achieve this presentation was pointed out

in an interview concerning FFs. *“So that’s probably not only the case with the bank, but in general, at least until a few years ago, it wasn’t the strength of family businesses. They tended not to be very good at presenting themselves”* (Company 6, Former CEO). The interviewee sees the reason for the change and the need for a more professional presentation in the changed culture of dialogue with banks. She explained that in the past, loans may have been negotiated over *“dinner and a cigar”*, but today the challenges for FFs have increased considerably and they are therefore dependent on a professional presentation, including a *“pitch deck”* (Company 6, Former CEO). She sees the younger generations among FFs as the drivers of change, using new forms of communication and being aware of the circumstances in which they operate with stakeholders such as banks.

This was also confirmed by another interview statement, in which a banker described: *“I think the older generation, maybe they didn’t have as much understanding of a lot of things that need to be disclosed or that we just need. That is also changing a bit”* (Bank 2, Head of Corporate Accounts). In the context of communicative expressiveness, I observed in the interviews that persuasion comes from enthusiasm increasingly. In one interview, the following statement was made: *“And if I am somehow enthusiastic about the company, then the account manager is also enthusiastic about the management and the family”* (Company 8, CFO). In this result, *“enthusiastic”* gives the communication a new significance. Besides transparency and trust, communicative expressiveness can affect the perception of banks in general. This is useful within the rating on the one hand and outside the rating on the other. An important core statement on perception, behaviour and communication and the associated impression of companies became clear in the following interview response:

“At the end of the day in a credit decision, whether I accompany in the bad phase or help through a liquidity hole (...) the rating is also important, but not the decisive factor, but these factors of the soft kind are actually very, very decisive” (Bank 2, Head of Corporate Accounts). This includes all the above-mentioned *“soft”* rating factors within the qualitative credit rating. It should be emphasised that the rating is, of course, used to determine the loan price and the amount of required equity. However, the result implied that the qualitative factors and the impression conveyed by firms are decisively used for the cooperation. This once again illustrated the relevance of the company’s overall appearance in this business context and portrays IM as a possible approach to influence the company’s image.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This section places my findings in the context of the relevant theory and classifies the results concerning the appointed theory of IM. To systematically discuss my research results I present a model of the core statements and dimensions found. This aims to present the interplay and illustrate the interaction between IM and qualitative credit ratings. My thesis is mainly concerned with the aspects of (1)

understanding which qualitative factors are relevant for a credit rating of FFs, and (2) identifying possible symmetries or asymmetries in the understanding of qualitative factors between banks and FFs, and (3) identifying IM tactics and strategies of FFs that are ascertainable in credit negotiations. On this basis, modelling the results will serve as a basis for the discussion and to answer the research questions: “*What are relevant qualitative credit rating factors for family firms?*”, and “*How do family firms use impression management to leverage their qualitative credit rating, and which family firm-specific characteristics drive this strategy?*”.

5.1. Leveraging Credit Ratings – Interplay and Dimensions of Impressions

I distinguished between approaches of IM for FFs and NFFs that can be applied to credit ratings. In the comparison, *family-, business- and relationship-specific dimensions* could be distinguished. Figure 3 shows how these different dimensions interplay with each other and in which scope IM is applied in the context of credit ratings.

The reason for the differentiation and separation of *family* and *firm* lies in the interaction between family members and the firm described by Habbershon and Williams (1999). Although the family is closely linked to the firm, the interaction can still lead to a differentiation between the family and the firm. Furthermore, Sirmon and Hitt (2003) show that FFs built on the human and social capital of the family. This underlines the need to look at the firm and family separately but in close connection. Additionally, Bolino et al. (2008) stated that besides IM on an individual level: “(..) IM theory and concepts also have been applied to the study of various organizational phenomena.” (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1090), for which the firm is presented as a separate entity. Moreover, I identified that some IM approaches are not entirely attributable to FFs in particular but present more generalisable business-specific approaches.

The scope of IM in the context of credit ratings essentially takes place between three parties. Intuitively, the first two are the *bank* and the *firm*. Within the empirical results, however, the party of the *family* has emerged more strongly. Thus, in the context of the discussed topic of the use of IM for FFs, the *family* represents the third and complementary party. At the outset, reference needs to be made to the theoretical concept of IM, which refers to the process by which an *actor* attempts to control or influence the perceptions a *target* has of them (Bolino et al., 2008). Among the three parties, the bank can be regarded as the *target* and the family as the *actor*. Taken together, the dimensions of family-, business- and relationship-specific IM approaches can be assigned to different types of interaction. The *business-specific dimension* occurs between the bank and the firm. Within this interaction, the *target* can gain an impression through aspects and information purely related to the firm. Even though the closeness between the family and the firm was emphasised more strongly in the results and is in line with Habbershon and Williams (1999), in this dimension the IM scope is purely limited to the *firm*. Moreover, I found that

the dimension of *relationship-specific* IM forms the cornerstone of effectiveness of all dimensions. This classification is underpinned by the business relationship between banks and firms. Literature has highlighted this significance especially in reference to German firms through the house bank principle (Becker & Ulrich, 2015). So have Gama and Geraldes (2012), pointed out the advantages of close relationships between banks and firms by referring to minimised information asymmetries and enhanced likelihood of engagement and commitment of banks. Within this dimension, the *actor* can build trust through the relationship with the *target*, which is directly related to the other dimensions described.

In addition to this dimension, however, it can be stated that the *family-specific dimension* of IM is also situated between the *target* and the *actor*. In contrast to the firm, the family is at the centre of IM approaches. Overall, the families try to convey a positive impression of themselves as company representatives. Since Bolino et al. (2008) define IM at the organisational level as “any action that is intentionally designed and carried out to influence an audience’s perception of the perceptions of the organisation” (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1095), the *family-specific dimension* of IM would, according to the literature, be assigned to the organisational level of IM. However, the focus is on the family and the impressions relate to the individual level and the family members due to the special nature of FFs and the associated closeness between family and firm (Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). However, no explicit ranking or exclusivity could be established when considering the identified *family and business-specific dimensions*. Rather, depending on the degree of effectiveness, both dimensions can be orchestrated together and used separately. Thus, evaluating the interview partners’ statements made it apparent that the *target* perceives an impression via different channels. Conversely, the *actor* can create an impression via different channels. This impression flows outside the IM scope through the *target* into the rating carried out. Thus, a reflection of the impression from the applied dimensions is reflected within the rating. The actual rating further quantifies impressions created by the *family* while directly impacting the *firm* in the rating result. As the credit rating represents the input in form of a rating scale output, the qualitative credit rating can be termed quantified impression.

Taken together, I identified the family’s importance for the firm. This is seen in the family’s effect on the qualitative impression through the rating. In the triangular view of all parties involved, the *family* influences the rating of its company while, as an *actor* in this process, not receiving a rating of its own. Therefore, the *family* primarily controls and influences the three dimensions’ interplay.

5.2. Credit Rating and Qualitative Factor Perception for Family Firms

Credit Rating Factors. My empirical results represent an extension of the theory concerning relevant qualitative credit rating factors. Based on the standardisation and stronger regulation in the banking sector, the literature predominantly

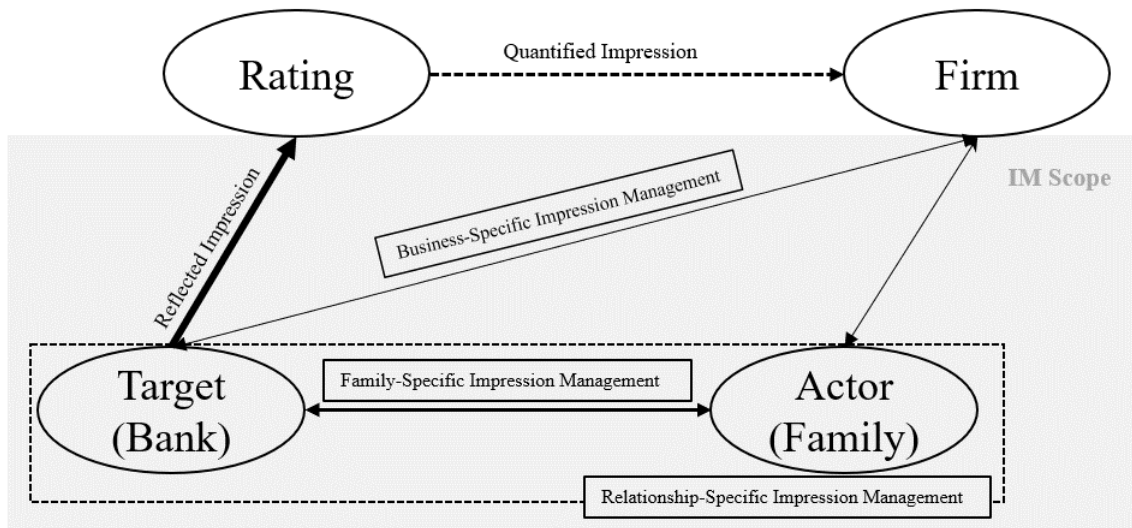


Figure 3: Family-, Business- and Relationship-Specific IM Dimensions (Own Illustration)

focused on quantitative factors of a credit rating (Marek et al., 2022; Matthies, 2013). This is, on the one hand, to the simpler data procurement determined by the analysis of a company's financial data and, on the other hand, to the general focus on quantitative assessment due to Basel III (Marek et al., 2022). However, quantitative data is insufficient to calculate an accurate POD and assess the stability of a company in terms of its financial obligations and debt repayments. For this assessment, the less regulated and non-standardised qualitative factors are important (Grunert et al., 2005). Since the lack of uniformity of these factors, the literature contains far fewer significant and company-specific factors for the qualitative credit rating. The literature used for this research on qualitative factors of a credit rating is based on studies that have been conducted some time ago. However, I have increasingly confirmed the consistency of these factors. Thus, I found the rating factors of management quality, succession, competitiveness, and industry (Crouhy et al., 2001; Krahnert & Weber, 1999; Matthies, 2013), in my interview statements with bank and company representatives. However, to extend the knowledge of qualitative rating factors, I found the relevance of additional factors in my findings. To ensure following the intention of qualitative research, in my analysis, I additionally paid attention to "new" qualitative rating factors than to those mentioned in the literature. In the literature dealing with qualitative credit rating factors, no explicit distinction is made according to the type of company (Camanho et al., 2022). The qualitative factors mentioned are universal, and no company-specific characteristics can be identified. However, I found attributes in the context of FFs that indicate company-specific characteristics. Wiener-Fererhofer (2017) has already pointed to an adaptation of the credit rating of FFs. My results suggest that qualitative rating factors explicitly pertinent to FFs can be identified within the qualitative credit rating. These are represented in *the family-specific IM dimension*.

Thus, I found in the interviews that, concerning FFs, banks focus on the family and assess them in different aspects. I identified that aspects such as family values and harmony within the family are assessed within a credit rating. This shows that Wiener-Fererhofer's (2017) assumption of valuing FFs differently to meet their specific characteristics is pertinent. The long-term orientation of FFs described by Chua et al. (1999) and the general aspect of ownership and control presented by Becker and Ulrich (2015) support these family-specific characteristics in credit ratings. However, I found a stronger correlation with the concept of "familiarity" described by Habbershon and Williams (1999), which refers to the interaction between the family, its individual members, and the company. The results of my work illustrate that the affinity between family and firm determines parts of the rating factors of FFs. Aspects were identified that can be divided into three essential pillars. I identified that family-related aspects are broken down into subordinate points when considering and evaluating FFs. In my results regarding the qualitative factors, I identified an expansion of the factors mentioned in the literature. The family's commitment to the business was highlighted several times in the context of FFs.

Explicitly, the rating factor here refers to the family's wealth situation in terms of financial contributions and support from the family in addition to the bank's commitment. Camanho et al. (2022) refer to a derivation of the qualitative factors of the leading rating agencies, in which this factor is not included. This highlights that it is feasible to expand the rating factors to include the family's wealth situation in the case of FFs. The banks' interview responses also clarified that this is purely a rating factor attributed to FFs. However, on closer examination of my findings, I identified that the rating factors as such play a role in the calculation of the equity required by the debtor or the pricing of a loan, but that other aspects are also considered. Thus, the qualitative factors'

role in credit ratings remains ambivalent, as Grunert et al. (2005) point out. It was, however, possible to lessen the ambivalence of non-financial factors (Grunert et al., 2005) to a certain extent by, on the one hand, finding a variety of other factors for assessing the stability of a company and, on the other hand, highlighting the importance of these factors beyond the credit rating. This leads to the assumption that aspects of the family image and the dynamics between the family members are considered within the credit rating framework.

However, it should be noted that these factors are not evaluated in a qualitative credit rating by the bank but are included in the perception of the bank advisor. Furthermore, in the case of FFs, the focus lies on generational change and the associated succession. Although this factor is addressed in the literature by Matthies (2013) and Camanho et al. (2022), it has an overarching significance in my findings. Thus, the literature includes the rating factor of succession but can, throughout my findings, be identified as one of the most significant qualitative rating factors. In this context, an aspect was elaborated in the results that, like the previously mentioned factors, does not receive an explicit rating but is included in the overall construction of a credit rating by banks. Family values and the passing on of these values to the NextGen are seen in the results. The predominantly narrow literature on qualitative rating factors does not differentiate between company types. Moreover, the analysis of my thesis results indicates an adapted credit rating framework of FFs in credit ratings. However, this adaption is limited due to purely polar questions that do not reflect aspects such as family values, family image and family dynamics. I confirmed the need for a modified approach to the credit rating of family firms, as suggested by Wiener-Ferrhofer (2017). I showed that the factors mentioned in the literature are largely reflected in my results and that occasional family-specific factors are included in a credit rating. However, a rigid polar questioning cannot address the factors mentioned, such as family values and dynamics, so there is still a limitation to the credit rating of FFs, even if I found that banks take these aspects into account in a credit rating.

Concordance of Credit Rating Factors. To evaluate the IM approach in credit ratings, the analysis and comparison of statements on qualitative rating factors served as a basis for comprehending these factors. In addition to the IM approach, my thesis dealt with the issue of whether asymmetries or symmetries exist in the perception between banks and FFs about relevant qualitative rating factors. By comparing the statements of the interview partners, I established a consensus. This is mirrored in the results and shows that the FFs are aware of the relevant qualitative factors referred to by the banks. Furthermore, I found answers to the first research question, "What are relevant qualitative rating factors for family businesses?". The extension of the literature concerning the type of business can be referred to again at this point. The hypothesis of whether there are symmetries or asymmetries concerning the qualitative factors is based on non-uniformity. Nevertheless, homogeneity in the individ-

ual statements of the banks could be identified in the concordance of the factors between banks and FFs. This thus represents a further extension in the theoretical context of credit ratings. Analysing five different banks showed that the banks have the same assertions regarding the qualitative rating factors. Furthermore, including a bank based in Switzerland made it possible to show homogeneity in the German-speaking region. It can be stated that, as indicated in the literature, the banks do not follow uniform approaches in terms of qualitative credit ratings, but there is a tendency towards convergence.

5.3. Adequacy of Impression Management in Credit Ratings

Broadening of IM Applicability. The concept of IM developed in sociology finds various fields of application in the literature. These primarily relate to interactions between individuals in business contexts, such as career or interview processes (Bolino et al., 2016; Goffman, 1959). IM's intention is to attempt to control and influence the perception of others (Bolino et al., 2008). The literature on this attempt to control or influence is explained through major areas of tension. IM at individual and organisational level, conscious or unconscious approaches, and direct or indirect approaches (Bolino et al., 2008; Mohamed et al., 1999; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). The theoretical perspective of IM relevant to my thesis is the multi-level review by Bolino et al. (2008). The results of my work serve to follow the call of the authors that: "researchers should examine the use of IM behaviours outside the commonly researched contexts of job interviews and performance appraisals" (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1090) and place its described characteristics in new business contexts. My research was done similarly to Parhankangas and Ehrlich (2014) researching how IM can influence the success of entrepreneurs in business angel funding. However, I placed the IM approach in the context of credit ratings, which has not been studied before, in contrast to the study by Parhankangas and Ehrlich (2014), who drew on previous research in their respective field. Thus, my findings represent two extensions to the existing literature on IM. First, my results have confirmed the applicability and recognisability of the IM tactics defined by Bolino et al. (2008) in a different business context. Secondly, my research has led to an extension of the literature on this approach by adding new IM tactics. The review of the identification of IM tactics and generating new tactics and underlying factors not previously considered will be presented separately. IM is divided into dimensions in the literature relating to the individual and organisational levels. Mohamed et al. (1999) conducted a classification of IM at the organisational level and categorised commonly used IM tactics into a 2×2 matrix (see **Table 2**). It is important to emphasise that the multi-level review by Bolino et al. (2008) cited in this paper also differentiates between individual and OIM but does not clearly separate these levels. Thus, OIM is defined as an approach to creating, protecting, and maintaining an image by spokespersons of an organisation (Bolino et al., 2008; Elsbach et al., 1998). This definition provides a general link between the individual and the organisational

level. Explicitly in the case of the FFs studied, the results showed that hybridisation of both levels is discernible. The business context studied builds on the strengths of the OIM literature. The hybridisation confirms earlier findings that “IM takes place at the organisational level” (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1097). This is due to the importance of the family for FFs and shows no clear separation between IM at the individual and organisational levels. I furthermore confirmed the correlation Bolino et al. (2008) found, yet in a new business context investigated. Although the individual and organisational levels are closely related, the organisational level’s characteristic of “others-as-audience” described by Leary and Kowalski (1986) can be identified as the defining approach to FFs’ IM in the business context studied. It should be noted that although IM tactics are increasingly found at the individual or organisational level, Mohamed et al. (1999) developed matrix contains overly generic approaches that are not fully applicable in the investigated credit rating business context.

I showed that the dimension of IM at the organisational level requires an integration of tactics from the individual level. This integration relates to the research context of FFs, as family members being individuals, representing their organisation. This, furthermore, made the impact of IM tactics at the individual level more evident. The IM tactics elaborated in my findings (see Appendix D) compare parts of the 31 commonly used IM tactics defined by Bolino et al. (2008). In the business context of credit ratings of FFs studied, I found a general focus on assertive IM, as in previous studies on IM (Nagy et al., 2012; Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014). This form of IM refers to “proactively managing impressions about themselves” (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082) and reflects conscious and direct IM tactics. I identified several tactics in my findings that are described as OIM by Mohamed et al. (1999) on the one hand but are also applied at the individual level by Bolino et al. (2008). While considering IM in a new business context, the fundamentals of IM described by Bolino et al. (2016) and Leary and Kowalski (1986) are considered. In this context, impression motivation is of particular importance. In the investigated business context of credit ratings of FFs, the goal relevance and the goal value described by impression motivation must first be accounted for (Leary & Kowalski, 1986).

From the FFs’ point of view, impression motivation reflects obtaining the best possible credit rating. The approaches pursued to obtain this motivation are characterised by the three dimensions of the *family-, business- and relationship-specific* approach (see Figure 3). Within these dimensions, impression motivation can be understood as a building block. In addition, once the relevance of the goal has been established, impression construction can be identified by the FFs. Here, the literature describes the decision path of which of the different IM tactics to apply to achieve impression motivation (Leary & Kowalski, 1986). I related this impression construction and the tactics found directly to the specifics of FFs to identify possible adaptations or significances. Within my findings, I have recovered various tactics of assertive IM (see Appendix D), which break down

into more advanced tactics. IM tactics outlined in the literature could be identified based on the existing and extended qualitative rating factors. The concept of familiness defined by Habbershon and Williams (1999) classifies most applied IM approaches in the *family-specific dimension*. To emphasise the pertinence and commitment of the family, tactics that directly address them are identifiable. I found that FFs primarily use enhancement, ingratiation, and demonstration tactics in this context. These tactics take a proactive approach and serve to shape and influence perceptions. Ingratiation refers to a higher form of IM and, according to Mohamed et al. (1999), serves as a strategic behaviour to increase the actor’s attractiveness. Enhancement denotes the approach of claiming “that the positive outcomes for which the actor is responsible are greater than generally assumed” (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082). Demonstration or demonstrative IM is defined as the provision and detailed display of activities specific to the organisation.

These IM approaches focus on the qualitative credit rating factors, which both FFs and the banks have confirmed outlined in Chapter 5.2. The aspect of family pertinence shows that FFs try to convince the bank of their positive qualities in various areas. Thus, the pertinence of the family became apparent in the recurring statements of the interview partners. In addition, the pertinence and significance of the family in FFs are also referred to in the literature (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). This became explicitly evident concerning occurring family dynamics. I adapted the IM approach of favour rendering used in the literature (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082) to develop a targeted method for this factor. The IM tactic of *family dynamic rendering* can be depicted using the existing approach of favour rendering. In its originality, the IM approach of favour rendering describes rather the appearance as likeable through helping or doing favours. This tactic is a sub-form of ingratiation, which can also be assigned to assertive IM (Bolino et al., 2008). However, the basic principle of favour rendering can be applied to the family dynamics described. Because banks pay attention to the dynamics within the family in the context of a credit rating and inconsistencies are assessed negatively, the highest possible attractiveness can be achieved through the representation of minimised family dynamics. Thus, it is not about actually helping and doing favours as defined in the literature, but about presenting the family dynamics in the most likeable form. Within this tactic, the assertive IM approach is illustrated, as FFs are aware of banks’ influence and perception of potential intra-family dynamics and proactively try to manage them. Further, literature has reviewed the role of dynamics within FFs from different perspectives. According to Baur (2016), these can be either value-creating or value-consuming. The author stated, that, most ostensibly and publicly interesting, the reason for most struggling FFs is disputes within the family (Baur, 2016). Following, managing, and rendering family dynamics most favourably have two beneficial aspects. First, minimising the risk of the demise of FFs, and second, enabling to create the impression towards banks in qualitative credit ratings in this specific business context.

Moreover, I refuted the stated demise of FFs in Western societies due to the declining role of the family as an institution in FFs and the alignment of the interests of owners and management regarding governance structures leading to an increasing exit of families (Baur, 2016). Moreover, the highlighted relevance of the families in credit ratings and the necessity to manage family dynamics supports Simon et al. (2009), stating that the family itself has no stabilizing characteristic for the firm if caused by cyclic family constellations. The authors stated that high divorce rates or flexible family forms as interim single or long-term partners potentially lead to destructive and unsupportive family constellations affecting the FF (Simon et al., 2009). As I have identified the family's close association with the firm, the IM tactic of *family dynamic rendering* to create a cohesive appearance further gains relevance, especially due to the possibility of complex family constellations. This demonstrates the applicability of IM in this business context, as the use of different IM tactics can be identified in relation to FFs. Concerning the IM literature, it should generally be noted that the impression construction and the associated choice of IM tactics depend on the context and the actors (Bolino et al., 2008, 2014). Due to this dependency, I developed extended IM tactics from my results for the specific FFs' credit rating context. Moreover, Bolino et al. (2008) highlighted that "it also may be useful to develop new models of IM that go beyond these extensions to ensure that they capture the unique aspects found only at the organizational level" (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1100).

Due to its relevance, I assigned my developed IM tactics to the previously described *relationship-specific dimension*. Since the results of my thesis show the importance of the relationship between the FF and the bank, additional IM tactics not yet defined in the literature could be generated in this context. The broadest tactic relates explicitly to the relationship, which I termed *interpersonal nurturing*. The development of this IM tactic and the expansion of existing tactics by Bolino et al. (2008) is based on the relationship between the *actor* and the *target*, recognisable in the results and fundamentally necessary for IM. Nurturing the relationship between the actor and the target creates a trusting framework to use the respective tactics effectively and convince the target of the impressions conveyed by IM. *Interpersonal nurturing* as an IM tactic aims to better convey impressions by being used within an existing and nurtured relationship between actor and target. All IM tactics mentioned in the literature show different forms of IM, but the influence and relevance of the relationship have not been addressed so far. The tactic of *interpersonal nurturing* was complemented by the focus on the relationship shown in my findings. Following the business context of credit ratings, this IM tactic is also characterised by the house bank principle (Becker & Ulrich, 2015; Gama & Geraldes, 2012). However, this reflects a fundamental IM tactic that can directly influence existing tactics and should be denoted as an expanding IM tactic. This IM tactic can be related to existing tactics such as others-focused IM, which describes behaviours that make the target perceive them as likeable or attractive (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082).

In a holistic view, however, a link can be derived from this tactic to the fundamental aspects of IM described by Leary and Kowalski (1986). In the business context of credit ratings, I considered that FFs *nurturing* of the bank relationship plays an attendant role in addition to impression motivation and impression construction.

The recurring emphasis on the relationship in my findings suggests that the other IM tactics' effectiveness is limited in its absence. In the context of credit ratings, I recognised that this aspect has an elementary and underlying relevance. This relevance can also be identified in a further tactic that became apparent within my findings. In addition to the subdivided aspects of the primary assertive IM retrieved (see Appendix D), communication was notable in the actor's impression. The verbal IM tactic, which describes the use of "spoken or written words to attempt to actively manage impressions" (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1082) can be found in the literature, but a more in-depth tactic could be identified in this case. Thus, I found additional aspects to the concept of verbal IM. These are also, like interpersonal nurturing, related to the *relationship-specific dimension* of IM within credit ratings. The IM tactic developed refers to the expressiveness of communication. Particularly, I showed that trustful, open, and proactive communication influences the rating by the bank and can thus be actively used by the firm. Generally, it can be observed that the IM tactics synthesised in the literature by Bolino et al. (2008) can be applied in the business context of qualitative credit rating. Following, I adapted and focused on FFs, and identified a division of the IM tactics into three main areas. The classification of Mohamed et al. (1999) shows that IM tactics such as ingratiation, promotion and exemplification can primarily be distinguished on an organisational level. These are also found in my results. Apart from these, however, other IM tactics came to the fore, which can be assigned to the tactics of demonstration and illustration. Furthermore, given the second research question of my thesis: "How do family firms use impression management to leverage their qualitative credit rating, and which family firm-specific characteristics drive this strategy?" I determined that the actor in this research context, the FFs, and their characteristics, influence the extent to which these tactics are used. It has proved necessary to consider IM tactics tailored to FFs.

From a perspective of generalisation, my thesis has led to the inclusion of the characteristics of the actor in the theoretical approach of IM. Thus, the research question could be answered specifically by identifying family-specific IM tactics such as family value enhancement, family dynamic rendering or generational change demonstration. In addition, it became apparent that there are various approaches to IM in the context of qualitative credit ratings in the interplay of the three parties shown (see Figure 3). As outlined previously, FFs can apply different target-oriented IM tactics in a qualitative credit rating context. The scope of this application is fundamentally guided by the goal relevance and goal value of Leary and Kowalski (1986). Moreover, it is necessary to consider the rating of a company's stability identified in the results and accordingly apply tactics that maximise the influ-

ence and perception of this stability in the most significant aspects. Therefore, my results and the tactics developed are to be adapted to the situation and applicability of FFs.

5.4. Practical Implications

In addition to examining the applicability of IM in the context of credit ratings and filling research gaps, this work aims to identify possible approaches to improving or maintaining credit rating scores. The results of this study show how FFs act in negotiations with banks and how these are perceived by banks. Family-owned firms or managers of FFs can use this study as guidance to orient themselves as to which aspects a bank pays attention to in a qualitative credit rating. The targeted use of the IM approaches and tactics identified in the study can potentially improve the final rating scores. Since FFs are found in the Mittelstand in the German market, they form the economic backbone of the German economy (Foundation for Family Businesses, 2023). The results show that a mutual interest between FFs and banks exists to facilitate long-term cooperation. The IM tactics described serve to make this long-term cooperation as efficient and successful as possible. Although this study focused on the analysis of FFs, family-specific factors and family-independent approaches are considered. These must be taken into consideration to be able to apply the IM tactics described in practice. Depending on whether it is an FF, an externally managed FF or another type of business, the respective IM dimension can be used and applied accordingly.

However, in addition to the adjustment depending on the type of business, the results also show that one dimension or aspect is independent of the type of business. Both FFs and NFFs should take the *relationship-specific dimension* into elementary consideration for cooperation. Since the results showed that the relationship between the bank and the business is the cornerstone of successful IM, this aspect is particularly important. Furthermore, this study incentivises families to become aware of their relevance to their business on an ongoing basis. The results highlighted that the family is in the foreground and consistently represents the company. Besides, the study clarifies that within a qualitative credit rating, this presence and representation of the family is reflected. This also applies to family members who are not actively involved in the company. Linked, the study demonstrates the importance of succession in FFs. This aspect is repeatedly addressed in the results. In spite, this study focused on succession and related aspects, such as the passing on of tradition and values.

The interview respondents confirmed that the credit rating process does not only focus on succession planning but also on the NextGen. In this respect, this study incentivises FFs to place the NextGen in the firm early to strengthen the relationship between the company and the bank across generations. The explicit aim is to convey the company's values to the NextGen and to transfer responsibility. As described initially, this aspect primarily relates to FFs and is less relevant for NFFs. In addition to the effects of the IM approaches discussed, the study confirms the relevance of the interaction

between the bank and the business outside the rating. The interview statements confirmed several times that the impression left is decisive for whether the firm will be supported by the bank even in difficult economic times. This describes an aspect of the long-term that permeates the entire study. The long-term nature of the FFs and the long-term nature of the relationship between the bank and the firm. The study thus provides orientation for FFs and their NextGen to be aware of the relevance of these aspects for a qualitative rating and to orientate themselves on the IM tactics shown to sustain the continuity of the business about financing by banks. Even if the results highlighted that quantitative factors are given greater weight in credit ratings, the qualitative aspects are not to be neglected and can be supported by IM tactics through targeted and appropriate application and adaptation to the respective situation.

5.5. Generalisation

To ensure the generalisability of the results, care was taken to maintain a high degree of heterogeneity among the FFs regarding both size and business activities when selecting the interview partners. Thus, a total of nine FFs were interviewed as part of this study, both family-managed and externally managed firms. The size of the firms was measured in terms of turnover and the number of employees, ranging from 30 employees and five million annual turnovers to 14,000 employees and 3.2 billion turnovers. The industries in which the FFs operate range from the automotive industry to the service sector and manufacturing and care was taken to consider firms located in Germany. This enabled the results to be generalised for the German market. Furthermore, in respect of the banks, it was ensured that a distinction was made between cooperative banks and universal banks. Therefore, banks were selected that are generally believed to finance the German Mittelstand. These banks, however, also differed in size in terms of the total assets, which is a typical key figure for the banking sector. This ensured that the statements made in this study can be generalised for FFs and banks. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this generalisation refers to the qualitative rating factors stated by the banks and, based on them, the IM tactics for German FFs.

5.6. Limitations and Future Research

The very specific context chosen for this thesis enabled to expand on various aspects of the literature and to explore the theory of IM, which was increasingly used in sociology, and its usefulness for the qualitative rating of FFs. The need emphasised by Bolino et al. (2008) to investigate the theory in new business contexts not previously considered could be fulfilled with this thesis. However, due to the specific context, several research limitations arise for this thesis. The first limitation consists of the fact that the adequacy or applicability of the theory could be shown. Still, the measurability of the applied tactics is not given. As the present study is a qualitative investigation, the applicability and adequacy of the theory could be demonstrated as described. Since, in

the case of the qualitative credit rating, a strongly subjective assessment by the bank was found, there is a significant limitation in determining the actual effect, which can result from family-, business- and relationship-specific dimensions. However, this limitation gives rise to a potential need for future research on the measurability of the identified IM tactics in qualitative credit ratings. My thesis and the results contained therein form the foundation on which to build to explore the illuminated business context of credit ratings and the impact of IM in terms of its effectiveness.

The second limitation of this thesis is that the results are based exclusively on interviews with banks and FFs. Again, the interviewees' strongly subjective views of the topic cannot be excluded. Although it can be assumed that the respondents gave truthful information about their behaviour in bank negotiations, verifying the implementation of the described statements concerning appearance and behaviour was not possible. Here, the present work reaches its limits but points to possible forms of future research. For instance, future research should include field studies for verification, in which the behaviour of both parties can be actively documented and analysed to substantiate a definiteness of IM usage in the business context. The third and last limitation resulted from the findings of this thesis. Since the focus was placed more on the successor generation, the limitation lies in the interviews conducted for this thesis. Thus, the data primarily includes interviews with one company representative. Although several interviews were conducted with the same company in isolated cases, they were not conducted with different generations. Particularly in the case of FFs, future research should investigate the extent to which behaviour, and thus also IM, differs between generations. This outlook on future research in the field of FFs is based on the recurring importance of the NextGen. This could allow differences in approach between generations and, thus, different approaches of IM to be explored. In summary, my research provides a starting point for the study of IM in FFs, highlighting wide-ranging aspects accompanied by limitations that need to be addressed in future research.

5.7. Concluding Statement

In conclusion, this thesis has examined the aspect of IM in FFs, which to the best of my knowledge, has not been considered before. My research brought out essential findings on the (1) applicability, and (2) specific aspects of IM tactics for FFs in particular. In the course of my research, I identified the relevance of the family to the business. However, by embedding IM into the consideration of qualitative credit ratings, I showed how FFs can potentially gain advantages for their company from this relevance. As this work relates to the specific case of qualitative credit ratings, the results must be classified accordingly. As part of the research, new IM tactics were added alongside the review of existing ones. This essentially covered two areas of research. Firstly, IM research in general by confirming and expanding the literature. Secondly, research on FFs, as there has been little to no IM research on FFs in the German market so far. As

the results show, IM can also be applied outside the research context I studied. This gives the topic a new significance, as FFs can gain advantages through an appropriate presentation and use of IM. In my research, these were initially limited to credit ratings, but as the research progressed, an overarching effect became apparent that is also gaining relevance outside of ratings. As, it became apparent that, especially in economically challenging times, the impression conveyed and the trust in the company, the family and the NextGen are important.

Referring to the introduction of this thesis and the renewed emphasis on the relevance of FFs for the German economy, this thesis can be incorporated into the extensive research literature, although it has potentially highlighted a need for further research. Nevertheless, special attention should be paid to the complexity of IM and the related fields of application. In this manner, I have answered the call of Bolino et al. (2008) to examine IM in new contexts and have made a scholarly contribution to the vast and, at the same time, influential topic of IM. After all, it should always be kept in mind:

“You never get a second chance to make a good first impression.”

(Will Rogers, n.d.)

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Multiple Case Study Analysis on the Consequences of Mandatory Sustainability Reporting in Private German Family Firms

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Abstract

This study explores the consequences of the Corporate Social Responsibility Reporting Directive (CSRD) on family firms. The European Commission (EC) extends under the CSRD the number of reporting companies from approximately 12,000 to 50,000, with the greatest increase in Germany. For 2025, around 13,000 German private family firms must disclose a sustainability report for the first time. Preparing a sustainability report that meets the requirements of the CSRD involves its own consequences. Based on a multiple case study of ten private German family firms, I develop a framework that illustrates implementation challenges and provides guidance to unlock business opportunities. Building on family business research, I contribute to the literature by differentiating family firms based on their sustainability strategy and maturity of sustainability reporting. This allows us to derive three archetypes facing varying implementation challenges. The analysis reveals direct and indirect opportunities along a firm's value chain. After introducing a reporting process, all archetypes can benefit from direct opportunities, whereas a proactive sustainability strategy needs to unlock indirect opportunities.

Keywords: corporate sustainability; corporate sustainability reporting directive; family firms; mandatory sustainability reporting; socioemotional wealth

1. Introduction

“Without a sense of purpose, no company, either public or private, can achieve its full potential. It will ultimately lose the license to operate from key stakeholders.”

Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock (Forbes, 2018)

The continuous rise and record high of global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in 2022 (World Economic Forum, 2022), the growing development of social inequality across countries (The Economist, 2022) or the increased fossil-fuel extraction due to the invasion of Ukraine has accelerated

the importance of how to improve sustainable performance among corporate stakeholders (Pérez et al., 2022). Companies' actions and their linked externalities have considerable effects on sustainability issues, governments impose rules and use regulatory instruments like reporting directives to modify economic behavior (Christensen et al., 2021; Pérez et al., 2022). Organizations that fail to comply will face penalties (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) or may even lose their license to operate (Gunningham et al., 2003).

The regulatory landscape on sustainability led to a “wave of regulation” in the European Union (EU) (Lykkesfeldt & Kjaergaard, 2022). The membership of all EU Member States (MS) in the United Nations influences the development of sustainability legislation in the EU (United Nations, 2007). Several cooperations arise from this alliance, including the field of sustainable development. Especially the binding 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement transformed the sense of purpose for sustainable change and climate action around the globe (Bauer et al.,

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2021; Olsen et al., 2019). To implement the agreed goals of the United Nations and transmit this purpose to the EU, the European Commission (EC) published the European Green Deal in 2019 (European Commission, 2019). Its implementation and, thus EU's sustainability transition requires one trillion euros (European Commission, 2020). To facilitate financing and direct investment decisions into sustainable funds, the EU taxonomy calls for the disclosure of sustainability information from public companies that fall under the Non-Financial Reporting Directive (NFRD) (Action 9, COM (2018) 97 final) (European Commission, 2018). In 2018, the NFRD was the EU's starting point for mandatory sustainability reporting¹ (Hummel & Jobst, 2021). In 2022, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) succeeds the NFRD (European Commission, 2022). The most drastic change relates to the extended company scope, which will apply from 2025 (Art. 5, CSRD) (European Union, 2022) and increases the number of reporting companies regardless of their capital market orientation from 12,000 to 50,000, with a much larger increase in Germany (Baumüller & Grbenic, 2021).

German reporting companies increased from 500 to 15,000 (DIHK, 2023). The resulting delta of 14,500 corresponds to the number of companies required to disclose a sustainability report according to EU guidelines for the first time. Among them, around 88% are private family firms since this is the share of companies privately owned by families in Germany (Stiftung Familienunternehmen, 2023). The former German Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action further underlines the importance of family firms: "Our economic model is based on medium-sized, family-owned firms. Quite appropriately, they are described as the "engine" of our national economy" (Handelsblatt, 2019).

Research on mandatory sustainability reporting has shown that first-time reporting companies (Hoffmann et al., 2018; Pedersen et al., 2013) and private small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; Parker et al., 2009) have difficulties in implementing a sustainability reporting mandate. Hoffmann et al. (2018) analyzed the change from voluntary to mandatory non-financial reporting in German companies based on the NFRD. They concluded that introducing a reporting mandate led to decreased reporting quality due to the number of new reporters, indicating implementation challenges.

Private SMEs have obstacles to coping with a reporting mandate, as they have little experience with norm-based sustainability reporting due to missing pressure from financial markets (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015) or limited financial resources (Parker et al., 2009). Specifically, family firms differ in their sustainability disclosure behavior due to their socioemotional wealth (SEW) (Arena & Michelon, 2018; Au-

reli et al., 2020; Biswas et al., 2019; Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; Gavana et al., 2017; Terlaak et al., 2018; Venturelli et al., 2021). Losing the license to operate for a family firm would hurt its SEW, as one key goal of families is passing the business to future generations (Berrone et al., 2012; Zellweger et al., 2010). However, research on voluntary sustainability reporting has shown that such a report and the underlying processes can also serve as an opportunity.

It is difficult for those firms to learn from research or previous lessons learned since the consequences of integrating a sustainability reporting mandate are highly context specific (Gulenko, 2018). Both in terms of institutions' motivation to impose a sustainability reporting mandate (Christensen et al., 2021) and the firm-specific context (De Micco et al., 2021). Thus, it is not useful to extrapolate the findings on the research of listed companies under the NFRD (Fiechter et al., 2022; Ottenstein et al., 2022) to the effects of the new CSRD. Beyond that, research on family firms' sustainability reporting refers only to voluntary reporting in listed firms (Arena & Michelon, 2018; Gavana et al., 2017; Terlaak et al., 2018).

Given the importance of family firms for the German economy, the motivation of my study is to build an inductive framework for German private family firms (PFF) that shows the potential challenges and opportunities of implementing a sustainability reporting mandate based on the new CSRD. Thus, my study analyzes the following research question: *What challenges do private family firms face regarding the introduction of a sustainability reporting mandate, and how can a standard framework provide guidance to meet or even exceed the legal requirements and unlock business opportunities?*

To answer the research question, I conducted an exploratory, inductive qualitative study with multiple cases (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). My study is based on the theoretical sampling approach by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The sample selection criteria include (1) German PFF, (2) family ownership of at least 50%, and (3) the firm's operation in the business-to-business (B2B) market. The final sample consists of ten PFF from seven industries. As a primary data source, I interviewed one sustainability expert or board member in each case of the sample. The data analysis relied on the inductive method of Gioia et al. (2013). The resulting data structure of the within- and cross-case analysis formed the basis for creating an inductive framework. I confirmed my findings by a sustainability expert from a leading advisory firm. The study refers to the status quo of family firms' heterogeneous sustainability strategies as a theoretical basis. Thus, my analysis relies on the SEW concept (Gómez-Mejia et al., 2007) to explain the unique behavior of family firms, in addition to Lee's (2011) theoretical framework combining institutional and stakeholder theory. Lee's configurational concept, which is also a proven approach in family business research (Hsueh et al., 2023), helps to classify the cases according to their sustainability strategy as a response to a sustainability reporting mandate.

My findings and the derived framework show theoretical and practical relevance. First, I contribute to research of family firm's heterogeneous sustainability strategy (Cam-

¹ This study refers to the term "sustainability reporting", which aligns with the CSRD. Previous studies often use the term "non-financial reporting", which refers to the predecessor, the NFRD. Due to the vagueness of the term "non-financial," the EC changed the name with the amendment of the new directive (Baumüller & Grbenic, 2021).

popiano & De Massis, 2015; Cennamo et al., 2012; Hsueh et al., 2023; Sharma & Sharma, 2011) and reporting behavior (Arena & Michelon, 2018; Aureli et al., 2020; Biswas et al., 2019; Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; Gavana et al., 2017; Terlaak et al., 2018; Venturelli et al., 2021). Going beyond existing findings, I differentiate family firms based on their sustainability strategy and maturity of sustainability reporting. This allowed me to derive three PFF archetypes (i.e., *conservative sustainability denier*, *cautious first-time reporter*, *visionary early adopter*) that face varying degrees of the identified sustainability reporting implementation challenges. Regarding the second part of my research question, I identified direct and indirect or “locked” opportunities in different business functions. Irrespective of the archetype, all firms can benefit from direct opportunities (e.g., process transparency) that arise after the introduction of a reporting process. In contrast, the indirect opportunities (e.g., product innovation) need to be unlocked through a proactive sustainability strategy. Hence, my study contributes to the knowledge about how configurations of SEW and external influences (i.e., the imposition of a sustainability reporting mandate, including stakeholders’ expectations for meeting these legal requirements), shape family firms’ sustainability strategy. I show that PFFs’ sustainability strategy indicates the type and degree of reporting challenges and the possibility of gaining a more comprehensive set of opportunities.

Second, I extend the literature on the impact of mandatory sustainability reporting in general (Christensen et al., 2021; Ioannou & Serafeim, 2017) and on the EU’s disclosure directives in particular (Fiechter et al., 2022; Ottenstein et al., 2022), as my findings contribute to the sparse research on the CSR. The framework highlights the challenges and opportunities associated with the new directive. Therefore, my framework also highlights practical implications for family and non-family firms by supporting them on their path to preparing for one of the most pivotal milestones of sustainability reporting in the EU.

My study encompasses five further chapters, starting with the theoretical background. I provide a brief overview of research on family firms’ sustainability strategy and reporting behavior, followed by the theory of Lee (2011). An outline of the EU sustainability disclosure directives, including the status quo on their impact, continues stressing the need for building theory in this field. Chapter three explains the methodological approach for my inductive framework, which is illustrated and described in chapter four. The fifth chapter discusses my results, which will be concluded in chapter six.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Definitional dilemma and family firms’ heterogeneous behavior

Academia’s interest in family businesses is constantly increasing (Pieper, 2010), which is underlined by the fact that over 70% of the world’s gross domestic product is generated by family firms (UNCTAD, 2021). Despite this high momentum, the ambiguity of the term “family firm” confronts

researchers with a definitional dilemma (Brockhaus, 2004; Lansberg, 1988). There is no consensus among the concepts to define family firms (Harms, 2014). For this reason, Chrisman et al. (2005) recommend focusing on a particular definition before proceeding with research. Although a family’s involvement in the firm through management or ownership appears to be the most evident characteristic, the real essence of a family firm is rather captured by its specific behavior and corresponding vision (Chua et al., 1999). Hence, Chua et al. (1999, p. 25) developed a definition that considers both the family’s involvement and the family firm’s essence:

“The family business is a business governed and/or managed with the intention to shape and pursue the vision of the business held by a dominant coalition controlled by members of the same family or a small number of families in a manner that is potentially sustainable across generations of the family or families.”

The dominant coalition of a family firm is composed of family members or a mix of family and non-family members nominated by the controlling family, ensuring the family’s influence in determining members’ composition and the business strategy (Chua et al., 1999; Sharma & Sharma, 2011). Therefore, family members mostly hold top management positions or sit on the board (Chen et al., 2008). As I analyze family firm-specific consequences induced by a sustainability reporting mandate that aims to change a firm’s behavior (Christensen et al., 2021), it was reasonable for this study to choose a definition based on a behavioral approach. In this vein, the SEW concept (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007), which extends the behavioral agency theory (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2000; Wiseman & Gomez-Mejia, 1998), has become the key differentiating factor for family firms (Berrone et al., 2012). The initial behavioral agency theory assumes that a firm’s dominant principals make choices based on their reference point to preserve accumulated endowment. In contrast, the SEW concept is based on the notion that family principals instead care about their socioemotional endowment or wealth, which captures non-economic utilities like the enjoyment of family influence (Berrone et al., 2010, 2012; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007). Hence, for any issue that could negatively impact the SEW, such as introducing a sustainability reporting mandate, a family principal is even willing to bear financial losses or put the business at risk to preserve its SEW (Berrone et al., 2010, 2012; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007). Consequently, family firms pursue a set of economic and non-economic goals (Berrone et al., 2010; Kotlar & De Massis, 2013) with a higher risk aversion to SEW (Berrone et al., 2012).

However, as emotions vary within the family of the controlling firm (Berrone et al., 2012; Hoy & Sharma, 2010), SEW as a psychologically anchored concept (Berrone et al., 2010) implies heterogeneity in family principals’ reference frames and therefore, also in family firms’ behavior (Cennamo et al., 2012). Going one step further, as emotions emerge from situation-specific activity (Pugh et al., 2022),

looking from a socioemotional lens would therefore mean that family firms' behavior also depends on its specific context (Lumpkin et al., 2011; Wright et al., 2014). Within family business research, Wright et al. (2014) distinguish between an organizational context, which refers to internal firm factors like goals or governance, and an institutional context, which refers to external political and legal institutions. Given the fact that stakeholders are defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984), including governmental officials (Gómez-Mejia et al., 2011), these external institutions (Wright et al., 2014) can be attributed to family firms' major stakeholder group. Family firms are more responsive to external stakeholders (Cennamo et al., 2012; Gómez-Mejia et al., 2011), especially regarding sustainability demands (Vardaman & Gondo, 2014). Therefore, how would PFFs respond to an external demand from an institution such as the EC to disclose a sustainability report?

Considering this context-affected and heterogeneous behavior within the SEW framework, researchers developed sub-dimensions of SEW (Berrone et al., 2012; Venturelli et al., 2021). These dimensions serve as instruments to measure and validate the belief that non-economic goals can lead to positive performance outcomes (Berrone et al., 2012). Berrone et al. (2012) refer in their model to five dimensions which were condensed into the FIBER acronym that includes (1) *family control and influence*, (2) *identification of family members with the firm*, (3) *binding social ties*, (4) *emotional attachment*, and the (5) *renewal of family bonds to the firm through dynastic succession*. Family firms prioritize these dimensions differently, which results in company-specific behavior (Berrone et al., 2012). The isolated consideration of these dimensions allows to derive characteristics of family firms. For instance, (1) *family control and influence* are exerted over the dominant family coalition (Berrone et al., 2012) and desired by family members (Zellweger et al., 2012). The main derived attribute is family members' preservation of control over strategic decisions (Chua et al., 1999) and day-to-day operations (Vardaman & Gondo, 2014). (2) *Identification of family members with the firm* describes the strong connection between the family and the firm (Berrone et al., 2012) that results in one unique identity (Berrone et al., 2010). This is mainly due to the frequent coincidence of family and firm names, which is also a reason why stakeholders perceive the family and the firm as one entity (Berrone et al., 2012). (3) *Binding social ties* refer to a family firm's social relationships (Berrone et al., 2012). The existing social bonds and inclusion within the family can also extend to non-family members and thus promote commitments to the firm (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005). (4) *Emotional attachment* between the family and the firm is vital due to familial intergenerational relationships and the underlying history (Felden et al., 2016). (5) *Family bonds to the firm through dynastic succession* emphasize the goal of passing the business to future generations (Zellweger et al., 2012). This sense of dynasty implies a long-term planning horizon (Berrone et al., 2012; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006).

Another multidimensional model that supports the approach of Berrone et al. (2012) was developed by Vardaman and Gondo (2014). Their model is based on the hypothesis that family firms face conflicts or trade-offs between different SEW dimensions. They cluster SEW into an internal dimension, the desire to retain control and influence, and into an external dimension, the preservation of the firm's image and reputation. The key between those elements is that family principals use internal SEW as the default reference point but switch to external SEW if an event harms the firm's reputation or identity (Vardaman & Gondo, 2014).

In conclusion, my study focuses on the upcoming CSRD imposed by the EC. Translated into a theoretical context, this would correspond to sustainability demands from external stakeholders in an institutional context. The aim is to analyze PFF's potential challenges and opportunities when pushed into this setting. As combinations of SEW dimensions together with specific contexts are responsible for family firms' heterogeneous behavior, Agostino and Ruberto (2021) call for empirical evidence, as these heterogeneous behaviors make it ambiguous how family firms would respond to sustainability regulations. Also, Gómez-Mejia et al. (2011) support further research in this area, as references to stakeholders in family business research are often indirect and simplistic. Finally, to provide nuanced considerations, the following chapters refer to the FIBER model (Berrone et al., 2012) and the internal and external SEW perspectives of Vardaman and Gondo (2014).

2.2. Family firms' heterogeneous sustainability strategy and reporting behavior

2.2.1. Family firms' proactive and reactive sustainability strategy

A sustainability strategy helps me to determine how family firms behave towards external demands (e.g., sustainability reporting mandate) because a sustainability strategy is a construct in response to external influences, which consists of stakeholders including institutions (Lee, 2011). In the case of family firms, decision makers' interpretation of external influences is guided by salience (Vardaman & Gondo, 2014) or configurations (Hsueh et al., 2023) of SEW dimensions. At this point, it is essential to consider Vardaman and Gondo's (2014) reasoning about the family firm's default script. According to their concept, family firms prioritize preserving SEW dimensions related to external stakeholders. In this vein, the literature refers to the second (*identification of family members with the firm*), third (*binding social ties*), and fifth (*renewal of family bonds to the firm through dynastic succession*) SEW dimension (Cennamo et al., 2012; Hsueh et al., 2023; Vardaman & Gondo, 2014). Nevertheless, Cennamo et al. (2012) add that the rationale for prioritizing external stakeholders is only valid when family firm decision-makers consider at least one of the dimensions mentioned above as their primary reference point. If this is the case, family firms respond to their external stakeholders proactively (Cennamo et al., 2012) and in the context of sustainability with a formalized sustainability strategy (Hsueh et al., 2023). If not,

family firms respond reactively to incoming (sustainability) demands (Cennamo et al., 2012). The motivation behind family firms' proactive stakeholder engagement and the underlying prioritization of SEW dimensions are manifold.

First, the strong (2) *identification of family members with the firm*, and stakeholders' perception of the family and the firm as a single entity increases the family's concern about their externally perceived image (Micelotta & Raynard, 2011). Thus, family members' identity with the firm links the family's reputation with the company's survival (Anderson et al., 2002). Consequently, reputational threats to the family are perceived as a risk to the identity and the existence of the family itself (Zellweger et al., 2010). Therefore, a proactive stakeholder approach serves not only as a preservation but also as an improvement of reputation combined with the gain of legitimacy, i.e., seeking social acceptance and credibility (Cennamo et al., 2012; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2011; Hsueh et al., 2023; Suchman, 1995).

Second, family firms with a reference point dominated by (3) *binding social ties* engage proactively with stakeholders to develop social capital (Carney, 2005; Cennamo et al., 2012). Social capital relates to stakeholder management (Cennamo et al., 2012; Rowley, 1997) and is a source of wealth for the family (Gavana et al., 2017). Hence, family firms seek social capital to enhance their relationship with external stakeholders (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003), to enable partnerships with different sectors (Boehm, 2005), or facilitate the implementation of external norms (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Third, instead of a single salient SEW dimension, the co-presence of the (2) *identification of family members with the firm* and the (5) *renewal of family bonds to the firm through dynastic succession* leads to a formalized sustainability strategy (Hsueh et al., 2023). It relates to a proactive sustainability strategy in family business research (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; de la Cruz Déniz Déniz & Cabrera Suárez, 2005; Hsueh et al., 2023; Sharma & Sharma, 2011). Families with a configuration of both dimensions are forward-looking, as they want to transfer their business to the next generations (Berrone et al., 2012) and develop a positive identity in the future (Hsueh et al., 2023). Hence, family firms pursue a proactive sustainability strategy to reduce information asymmetries with external stakeholders by formally communicating sustainability information (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; Terlaak et al., 2018).

As a result, in case of external sustainability demands, family firms either respond with a proactive or reactive sustainability strategy (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; de la Cruz Déniz Déniz & Cabrera Suárez, 2005; Hsueh et al., 2023; Sharma & Sharma, 2011). There is no consensus on which type of strategy is more prevalent (Hsueh et al., 2023). The nomenclature of a proactive or reactive sustainability strategy is not consistent within family business literature, but the definitions of both strategies share common features.

In family business research, a sustainability strategy that is proactive, as Sharma and Sharma (2011) call it, is also defined as formal (Hsueh et al., 2023), philanthropic (de la Cruz Déniz Déniz & Cabrera Suárez, 2005), or explicit (Cam-

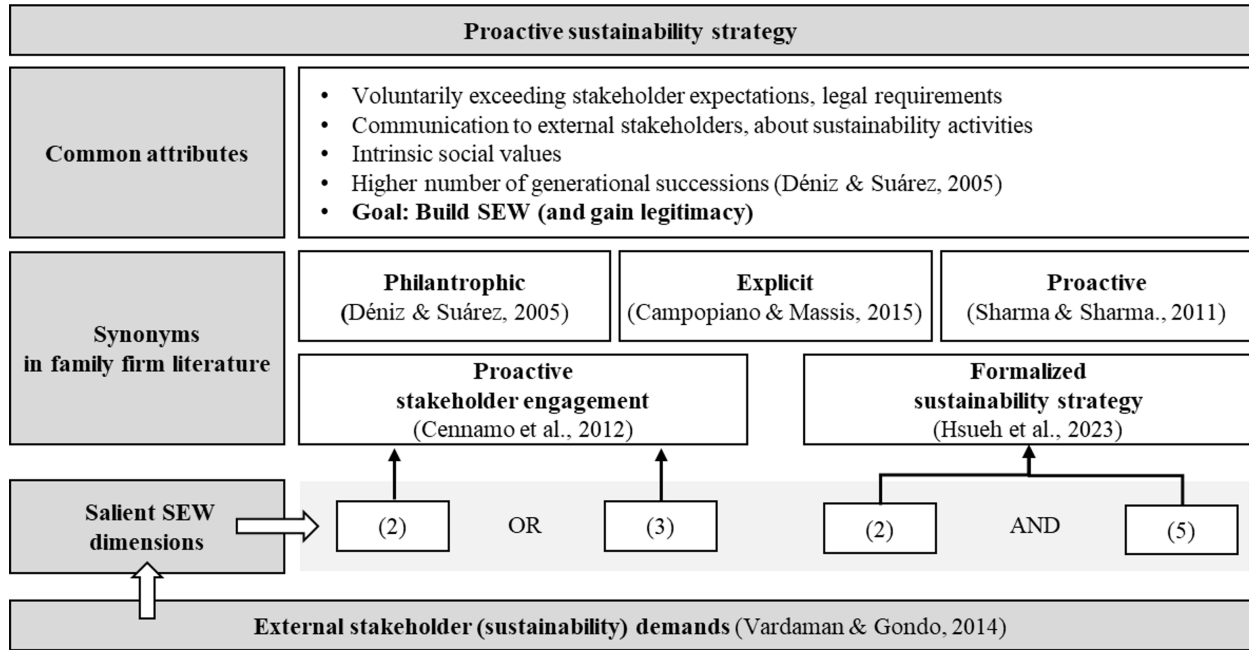
popiano & De Massis, 2015) (see Figure 1). Independently of its specific name, pursuing such a strategic approach is a voluntary decision by the family. Therefore, it captures the characteristic of going beyond expectations or regulatory requirements (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; de la Cruz Déniz Déniz & Cabrera Suárez, 2005; Hsueh et al., 2023; Sharma & Sharma, 2011). Further common features include the firm's communication of its sustainability activities to stakeholders in addition to intrinsic social values by the family firm's management (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; de la Cruz Déniz Déniz & Cabrera Suárez, 2005; Hsueh et al., 2023; Sharma & Sharma, 2011). Moreover, de la Cruz Déniz Déniz & Cabrera Suárez (2005) figured out that a higher number of generational successions characterize family firms in the philanthropic group. This finding is in line with the observation of Hsueh et al. (2023) to follow a proactive sustainability approach.

In contrast, a sustainability strategy that is reactive (Sharma & Sharma, 2011) is described as informal (Hsueh et al., 2023), socioeconomic (de la Cruz Déniz Déniz & Cabrera Suárez, 2005), or implicit (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015) (see Figure 2). The main commonality is to comply with the legal requirements and thus to stay within the "rules of the game" (de la Cruz Déniz Déniz & Cabrera Suárez, 2005; North, 1990). Another shared characteristic of all reactive typologies is the family firm owner's limited sustainability knowledge (Fassin et al., 2011). Beyond that, de la Cruz Déniz Déniz and Cabrera Suárez (2005) conclude that family firms in the socioeconomic group have a limited commitment to sustainability due to their smaller size (i.e., turnover and headcount) and resulting limited access to resources. Ultimately, family firms that react reactively to external demands have the central premise of gaining legitimacy and thus preserving their SEW (Berrone et al., 2010; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2011).

As illustrated in Figure 1 and 2, family firms' sustainability strategies are heterogeneous due to different priorities (Cennamo et al., 2012; Vardaman & Gondo, 2014) or configurations (Hsueh et al., 2023) of SEW dimensions. The critical differentiator between a proactive and reactive approaches lies in the fact that family firms with a proactive strategy are more likely to build SEW instead of maintaining it. In contrast, the main commonality lies in the achievement of legitimacy.

2.2.2. Family firms' sustainability reporting behavior

Regardless of whether a family firm is pursuing a reactive or proactive sustainability strategy, external stakeholders should recognize that their sustainability demands have been implemented (Gavana et al., 2017). Therefore, firms go into a dialog with their stakeholders (Gray et al., 1995) and use the governance practice of sustainability reporting (Venturelli et al., 2021) as a tool to communicate their sustainable actions (Campbell, 2004). In this context, communication is the key to recognizing a firm's legitimacy by its stakeholders (Gavana et al., 2017). At this point, it is essential to mention that the current literature on sustainability reporting in



Note: SEW dimensions (2) identification of family members with the firm; (3) binding social ties; (5) renewal of family bonds to the firm through dynastic succession

Figure 1: Family firms' proactive sustainability strategy (Source: Own figure)

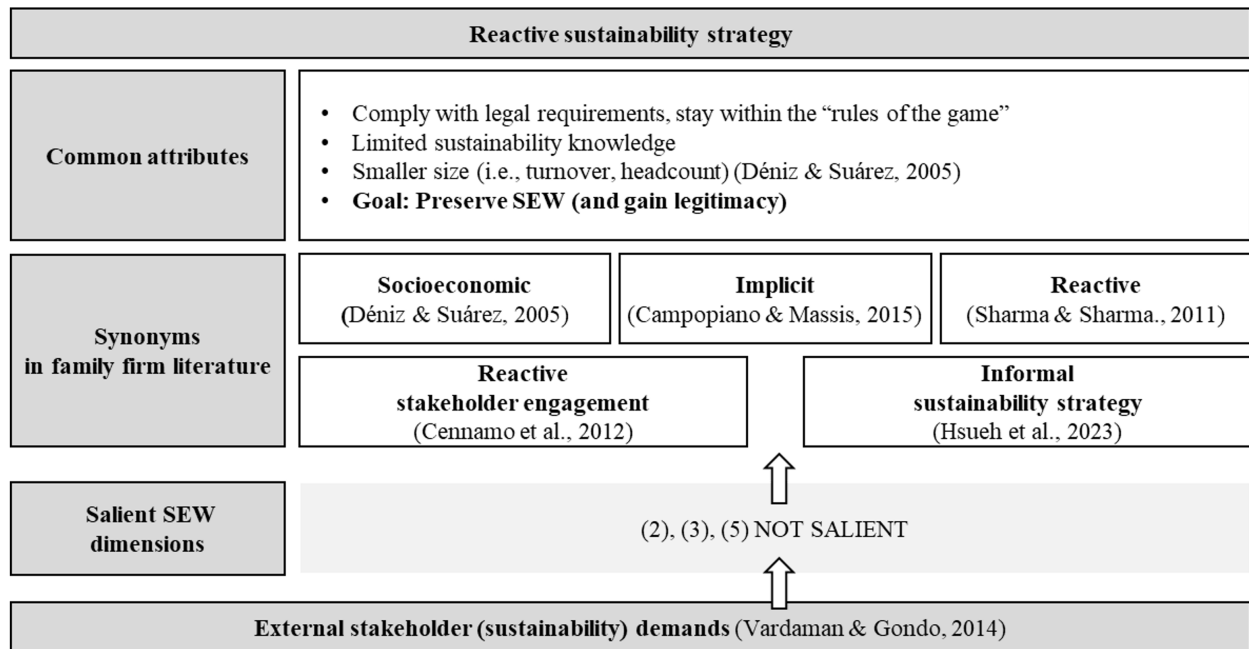


Figure 2: Family firms' reactive sustainability strategy (Source: Own figure)

family firms refers either to voluntary reporting (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; Venturelli et al., 2021), to publicly listed firms (Aureli et al., 2020; Biswas et al., 2019), or to both (Arena & Michelon, 2018; Gavana et al., 2017; Terlaak et al., 2018). Internationally, the regulations on mandatory sustainability reporting have referred so far to publicly listed companies (Jiang et al., 2023). In the EU, for example, pri-

vate companies are only affected by a sustainability reporting mandate through the extension of the company scope by the CSRD in 2025 (Lange-Snijders, 2023). Hence, for my research purpose, it is not ideal to derive characteristics of the behavior of voluntary sustainability reporting from publicly listed family firms for three reasons. First, the public status of listed family firms leads to pressure from capital mar-

kets, impacting governance practices (Carney et al., 2015). Shareholders' demand for high short-term returns and risk-taking distances public firms from family values such as non-economic goals (Kotlar & De Massis, 2013) or long-term orientation, which usually implies sustainable behavior (Miller et al., 2009). Second, according to Jiang et al. (2023), almost all publicly listed firms publish sustainability reports besides their financial reports. In contrast, first-time reporting companies show a lower reporting quality, indicating implementation challenges (Hoffmann et al., 2018). Hence, considering reporting characteristics of more experienced publicly listed companies would not be beneficial either. Third, it is unfavorable to derive best practices from voluntary sustainability reporting due to its specific firm context (Arena & Michelon, 2018). This variability is particularly strong for family firms, as the decision on the reporting content lies at the discretion of family managers (Arena & Michelon, 2018).

However, three of the mentioned studies (Aureli et al., 2020; Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; Venturelli et al., 2021) overlap with the use case of mandatory sustainability reporting in PFF. Aureli et al. (2020) indicate that introducing a sustainability reporting mandate encompasses both challenges and opportunities, supporting the necessity to further research both consequences. In their single case study, the authors conclude that the firm perceived the legal obligation of sustainability reporting as a requirement from multiple stakeholders (e.g., employees, local communities, family). However, within a year, the company changed its attitude towards sustainability reporting. Further opportunities were recognized from the initial pressure to comply with regulations and to gain legitimacy. Contrarily, Campopiano and De Massis (2015) do not focus on mandatory sustainability reporting but examine the differences in voluntary disclosure of sustainable actions between family and non-family firms but also between private and listed companies. According to their analysis, the listing status and family's influence significantly impact the reporting behavior. For example, private, and listed family firms are less compliant with reporting standards and disclose less information on employee-related topics, but more on environmental issues than their non-family counterparts. Only private family firms tend to report more on their philanthropic activities (e.g., engagement with the local community, donations, sponsorship). Their findings underline the importance of distinguishing between family, and non-family-owned, but also between private and listed companies when analyzing corporate sustainability reporting. Also, Venturelli et al. (2021) indicate the specificity of sustainability reporting within private family firms. They investigated the impact of the first SEW dimension on voluntary sustainability communication and practices in predominantly private SMEs. According to them, family involvement has a negative impact on voluntary sustainability communication due to the family's fear of disclosing confidential information that could harm their SEW. Thus, the authors support the argument that voluntary sustainability communication is less prevalent in (mainly private) family-run SMEs because of their lower regulatory and stakeholder pressure.

2.3. Sustainability strategy - a configuration of external demands

A relevant theory for my research is Lee's (2011) framework, which uses a configurational approach and combines institutional with stakeholder theory. Specifically, family business research supports Lee's approach as a configurational perspective enriching the understanding of family firms' heterogeneous behavior (Hsueh et al., 2023). Lee (2011) states that a firm's sustainability strategy is a construct in response to the intensity and coherence of external influences that consists of institutions and stakeholders (Lee, 2011). The essence of his framework is that only the configuration of the two external influences can explain the intensity and coherence and, thus a firm's chosen sustainability strategy (Lee, 2011). This rationale also applies to family firms, as the absence of regulatory and stakeholder pressure reduces the motivation to communicate sustainability information (Venturelli et al., 2021) or use sustainability standards (Dyer & Whetten, 2006).

On the one hand, institutional theory assumes that institutions exert pressure on organizations to behave in certain ways and to achieve desired outcomes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Hence, institutions are the "rules of the game" comprising formal written rules and informal, unwritten codes of conduct (North, 1990). In particular, formal institutions have the authority to monitor and enforce compliance (Webb et al., 2015), such as the EC with its CSRD. Compliance with rules leads to legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), which enables access to market opportunities (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Organizations that fail to comply face penalties (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) or even lose their license to operate (Gunningham et al., 2003).

On the other hand, the stakeholder theory by Freeman (1984) embeds firms in a broad spectrum of social relations. Freeman (1984) characterizes it as "*groups and individuals who can affect the organization, and is about managerial behavior taken in response to those groups and individuals*" (p. 48). Therefore, firms must balance the interests of different stakeholders and manage their influences (Lee, 2011). Overall, both theories are interdependent and drive companies to respond to social demands (Lee, 2011). Consequently, Lee (2011) justifies his configurational approach with the fact that "[...] stakeholders can mediate institutional effects by acting as either buffers or amplifiers of institutional influences. Institutions can also mediate stakeholder effects by legitimating or de-legitimating a stakeholder group's claim" (p. 282). Firms scan their environment and pay attention to the external signal with the most vigorous intensity and coherence, leading to different responses and variable sustainability strategies (Lee, 2011). Lee (2011) differentiates between four strategic responses (see Figure 3).

Obstructionist ("Reactive") sustainability strategy. A strategy that results from a configuration of weak external influences. Companies see no incentive to engage in sustainability matters. Moreover, today's markets often force companies to compete on cost, preventing companies from engaging in costly social activities (Lee, 2011). The literature

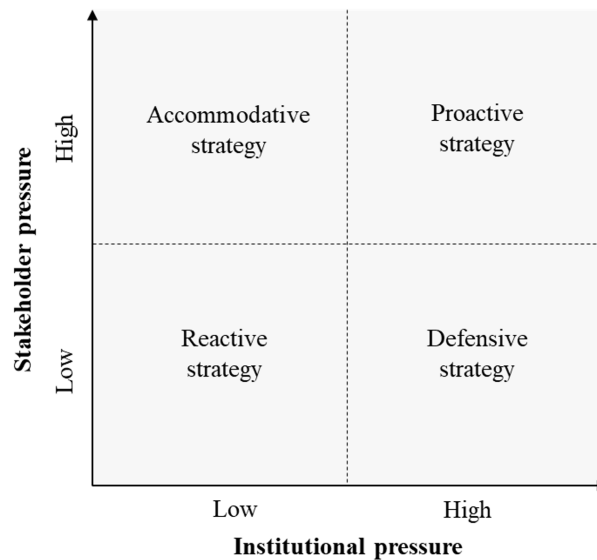


Figure 3: Configuration of external pressures and sustainability strategies (Source: Lee (2011))

calls this approach also a reactive sustainability strategy (Bini & Bellucci, 2020).

Defensive sustainability strategy. Firms follow a defensive approach when facing intense institutional but low stakeholder pressure. They will meet the legal requirements but not go beyond compliance. Hence, firms show no real commitment to sustainability (Lee, 2011).

Accommodative sustainability strategy. A combination of weak institutional and high stakeholder pressure leads to an accommodative strategy. Companies are motivated to respond to specific stakeholders' sustainability demands to protect economic interests (Lee, 2011).

Proactive sustainability strategy. The joint presence of high institutional and stakeholder pressure results in a proactive strategy (Lee, 2011). Firms surpass the minimum requirements and often integrate sustainability into the value-creation process (Bini & Bellucci, 2020). According to Lee (2011), the main incentive for companies is to be prepared for uncertain demands and to ensure continued legitimacy.

2.4. Mandatory sustainability reporting and its consequences

2.4.1. Regulatory overview of sustainability reporting directives

Researchers complain about the unspecified reporting requirements by the NFRD (La Torre et al., 2018; Mittelbach-Hörmanseder et al., 2021) and the limited comparability of disclosed sustainability information (Hummel & Jobst, 2021) led to an amendment of the NFRD. The succeeding CSRD was adopted in November 2022 (Hummel & Jobst, 2021) and entails more guidelines that increase the institutional pressure on reporting companies.

Starting in 2018, the NFRD requires public-interest entities (PIEs) with more than 500 employees and an annual net turnover of at least EUR 40 million or a balance-sheet sum higher than EUR 20 million to disclose a sustainability

report (Art. 1, 3, 4, NFRD) (European Union, 2014). EU MS had to transpose the NFRD into national law (Art. 4, NFRD) (European Union, 2014). The directive consists of five key reporting aspects, i.e., (1) *definition of PIE*, (2) *reporting content*, (3) *reporting framework*, (4) *disclosure format*, (5) *external audit*, that each MS can adapt (CSR Europe, Global Reporting Initiative, 2017). Germany almost identically transposed the NFRD by the Corporate Social Responsibility Directive Implementation Act (CSR-RUG) into commercial and corporate law in 2017 (Uwer & Schramm, 2018). The adjustments refer to the (1) *definition of PIE*, which in Germany corresponds to capital market-oriented companies (§ 264d HGB) in addition to insurance and credit institutions, and (5) *the external audit*, which remains voluntary (CSR Europe, Global Reporting Initiative, 2017). Regarding the (2) *reporting content* that aligns with the NFRD, German public firms must disclose general information about their business model and policies, including their outcomes, risks, and key performance indicators (KPIs) in relation to the environment, social and labor issues, human rights, anti-corruption, and bribery matters (Art., 1, NFRD) (European Union, 2014). The information should follow the "double materiality" principle. Thus, the report includes information that is of significance for an understanding of the firm's performance (outside-in) and the impact of its activities on the environment and society (inside-out) (European Parliament, 2021). The directive does not mandate a (3) *reporting framework* but recommends for instance the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards (Recital 9, NFRD) (European Union, 2014). A comparable framework is the Deutscher Nachhaltigkeitskodex (DNK). The (4) *disclosure format* provides for integration into a company's management report or a publication in a separate report (Recital 6, NFRD) (European Union, 2014).

The amendments of the CSRD relate to all five reporting aspects, including a scope expansion of the covered compa-

nies. The expansion occurs in several phases, starting in 2024 for companies already subject to the NFRD (Art. 5, CSRD) (European Union, 2022). For research on private firms, it is essential to note that for the financial year 2025, large companies, regardless of their capital-market orientation, must disclose a sustainability report in 2026 (Art. 5, CSRD) (European Union, 2022). On top, the CSRD adjusts the definition of large companies, lowering the employee threshold to 250 (Art. 5, CSRD) (European Union, 2022). In comparison to the NFRD, the (2) *reporting content* (Recitals 30-36; Art. 1, CSRD) (European Union, 2022) must be structured according to the compulsory (3) *reporting framework*, i.e., European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). The ESRS is based on delegated acts adopted in several sequences (Hummel & Jobst, 2021). The final draft in November 2022 comprises two of three categories, i.e., cross-cutting standards (ESRS 1-2), topical standards regarding the environment (ESRS E1-E5), social (ESRS S1-S4), and governance (ESRS G1-G2), in addition to sector-specific standards, while the third standards are under development (EFRAG, 2022d). A mandatory sustainability report under the CSRD must report on ESRS 2 (general disclosures, strategy, governance, materiality), ESRS E1 (climate change), and ESRS S1 (own workforce). The concretized double materiality principle and the measurement of scope 3 emissions are noticeable. According to the current ESRS draft, a topic is identified as material if it fulfills one of the two conditions, i.e., outside-in or inside-out (EFRAG, 2022a). Thus, the amount of information classified as material increases. ESRS E1 refers to the classification of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by the Greenhouse-Gas-Protocol and demands to disclose emission data on scope 1 (i.e., direct emissions from firm-owned and controlled resources), scope 2 (i.e., indirect emissions from the generation of purchased energy) and, scope 3 (all indirect emissions along firm's value chain and not included in scope 2 (EFRAG, 2022c). Especially the data collection for scope 3 emissions, which requires the involvement of suppliers, could be challenging (PwC, 2022). CSRD's (4) *disclosure format* requires the inclusion of sustainability information in the management report in an electronic format (Art. 1, CSRD) (European Union, 2022). Lastly, an (5) *external audit* also becomes mandatory (Recital 60, CSRD) (European Union, 2022). The transposition of the CSRD into German law is expected to last until mid-2024 (Ebner Stolz, 2022) (see Table 1). Thus, what might be the consequences for German PFF?

2.4.2. Twofold hierarchy on the consequences of mandatory sustainability reporting

Introducing a sustainability reporting mandate aims to drive change (Christensen et al., 2021). The EC used the disclosure directives to initiate a change process that should result in higher transparency for investors (Ottenstein et al., 2022). In addition to lower firm externalities given the increased importance of double materiality (Christensen et al., 2021; Fiechter et al., 2022). As a result, firms make real changes to their business operations (Christensen et al., 2021). Thus, mandatory sustainability reporting drives or-

ganizational change (Garcia-Torea et al., 2023; Ioannou & Serafeim, 2017), which is challenging to manage (Kotter, 1996).

Nevertheless, if challenges are adequately addressed, they can turn into opportunities (Schaltegger et al., 2017). Particularly studies on voluntary sustainability reporting provide insights that companies experience benefits from producing a sustainability report (Gamerschlag et al., 2011; Ryou et al., 2022). However, this dual mission of creating sophisticated accountability mechanisms for sustainability reporting and deriving benefits from it is not straightforward (Nigri & Del Baldo, 2018). It is essential to distinguish between the challenges of integrating voluntary or mandatory sustainability reporting. Due to the induced external pressure, these real changes or "real effects" are more likely to result from a reporting mandate than voluntary disclosure (Christensen et al., 2021). After the financial crisis in 2007-09, many countries started to mandate the disclosure of sustainability information (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2017). In Germany, sustainability reporting only became binding ten years later through the CSR-RUG (Gulenko, 2018). Considering the national and institutional context when analyzing a sustainability reporting mandate's challenges and opportunities is crucial for two reasons (Christensen et al., 2021; Ferri, 2017; Gulenko, 2018).

First, institutions' motivation to force companies to publish sustainability reports varies. Thus, Christensen et al. (2021) distinguish between the narrow and broad regulatory approach, while the first aims to meet investors' need for sustainability information. Firms must disclose sustainability information showing the financial impact of sustainability issues on their business and are thus material to investors. In contrast, the broad approach follows the double materiality principle and aims to target the need for sustainability information of society as a whole. Therefore, disclosing a sustainability report based on the double materiality principle is even more challenging due to its diverse target group and varying sustainability knowledge (Christensen et al., 2021). It can be difficult for a company to write a report that is both easy to understand and sufficiently informative.

Second, the disclosure of sustainability information depends on the institution's domestic policy, culture, and religion (Ferri, 2017). Specifically, German society has developed an increased awareness of sustainability, marked by the rise of the Green Party. Besides the external context, the internal context also plays an important role. A few studies addressed Italian companies' challenges in implementing the NFRD but also stressed their high firm-specificity as a limitation (Aureli et al., 2020; De Micco et al., 2021).

As a result, it is not ideal to extrapolate the consequences of implementing a sustainability reporting mandate from previous research. Due to the high specificity of my research context (i.e., German PFF), I searched for a context-independent systematization for the consequences of a sustainability reporting mandate. In this vein, I refer to the classification of first- and second-order consequences (Gulenko, 2018; Ioannou & Serafeim, 2017). Gulenko (2018) established a liter-

Table 1: NFRD and CSRD in comparison (Source: Own table)

Reporting aspects	NFRD (EU directive)	CSR-RUG (German transposition)	CSRD (EU directive)	CSR-RUG 2.0 (German transposition)
Definition of PIE / Company scope	Large PIEs with > 500 employees and > EUR 40m net turnover or > EUR 20m balance sheet sum + Credit/insurance institutions	Large public firms, with > 500 employees and > EUR 40m net turnover or > EUR 20m balance sheet sum + Credit/insurance institutions	Applies progressively Category 2: Large (incl. private) undertakings meeting min. 2 criteria: > 250 employees > EUR 40m net turnover > EUR 20m balance sheet sum	Pending (Release mid 2024)
Reporting content	Report on dimensions about matters Dimensions: • Business model • Policies • Outcomes of policy • Risks • KPIs		Reporting content according to ESRS • ESRS 2 (General disclosures, strategy, governance, (double) materiality • ESRS E1 (Climate change) • ESRS S1 (Own workforce)	
Reporting framework	Voluntary choice (e.g., GRI, DNK)		ESRS	
Disclosure format	Annual report or separate report		Annual report in electronic format	
External audit	Member states' decision	Voluntary	Mandatory	
Estimated number of reporting firms	~12,000	~500	~50,000	

ature review on the consequences of mandatory sustainability reporting and sorted the studies according to the concept of first-and second-order consequences by Ioannou and Serafeim (2017). First-order consequences (FOC) refer to the direct results of a reporting mandate. In contrast, second-order consequences (SOC) include the results of changes in firms' reporting practices (Gulenko, 2018). In my study, these direct results, i.e., FOC, refer to the challenges a PFF must face due to a reporting mandate. Given that SOC are themselves consequences of FOC, I use the term SOC for opportunities that may arise from implementing a sustainability report.

2.5. Research gap and question

The research stream on the effects of a sustainability reporting mandate for companies in general (Christensen et al., 2021; Ioannou & Serafeim, 2017) and in particular with a focus on the NFRD (Aureli et al., 2020; De Micco et al., 2021; Fiechter et al., 2022; Ottenstein et al., 2022), is evolving. In contrast, research on the effects of the new CSRD and its extended target group (i.e., private firms) is relatively scarce. Hence, Ottenstein et al. (2022) and Fiechter et al. (2022) call

for research on the effects of the CSRD. Given the relevance of internal and external context combined with the reduced reporting quality in Germany due to the NFRD (Hoffmann et al., 2018), underlines the importance of focusing on the effects and, more specifically, on the challenges (i.e., FOC) and opportunities (i.e., SOC) in German PFFs.

Beyond this, Gulenko (2018) concludes that research on SOC, and especially on the link between FOC and SOC, are missing. She highlights that research on mandatory sustainability reporting could benefit from analyzing a firm's decision to adopt sustainability reporting in response to new regulations due to individuals' decision-making processes, organizational level, and external forces. This call builds the bridge to my second research stream on the organization of PFFs and their socioemotionally influenced decision to report on sustainability.

Current research on sustainability reporting in family firms focuses on voluntary reporting in listed companies (Arena & Michelon, 2018; Gavana et al., 2017; Terlaak et al., 2018). All mentioned studies focus on SEW dimensions that are easily accessible such as family ownership and con-

trol. Therefore, Arena and Michelon (2018) or Venturelli et al. (2021) call for research on sustainability reporting in private family firms that consider different SEW dimensions. For this purpose, Gavana et al. (2017) recommend using case studies.

Building on the heterogeneity of sustainability strategies at family firms (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; de la Cruz Déniz Déniz & Cabrera Suárez, 2005; Hsueh et al., 2023; Sharma & Sharma, 2011) and Lee's (2011) model as a theoretical basis, I investigate PFF-specific challenges and opportunities. My study focuses on the link between the effects of a sustainability reporting mandate and the theories on family firms' sustainability strategy. As a result, I explore the following research question: *What challenges do private family firms face regarding the introduction of a sustainability reporting mandate, and how can a standard framework provide guidance to meet or even exceed the legal requirements and unlock business opportunities?*

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design and sample selection

I conducted an exploratory, inductive qualitative study with multiple cases to uncover the challenges and opportunities of German PFF caused by the CSRD and thus to answer the research question and build theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). The units of analysis (i.e., German PFF) and the observation unit (i.e., the implementation process of a sustainability reporting mandate including its consequences) gave reason for a qualitative research method. Since family firms exhibit SEW configurations that lead to heterogeneous sustainability reporting (Hsueh et al., 2023), experts recommend using qualitative methods for family firm research (De Massis & Kammerlander, 2021; Fletcher et al., 2016). In addition, a qualitative approach is suitable for research with changing study conditions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), which are also given within the field of sustainability reporting due to the continuous amendments in reporting regulations (Baret & Helfrich, 2019). Another purpose of qualitative research is reflected by its inductive nature and the fact that researchers use qualitative methods for theory-building (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Furthermore, the case study format can be justified by context-specific challenges arising from sustainability reporting (De Micco et al., 2021) and the type of research question (Yin, 2018). Exploratory case studies are suitable for theory-building and the combination of "what" and "how" questions, which is consistent with the research question of my study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). Nonetheless, using multiple cases increases the robustness of the developed theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

The population of my study focuses on German PFF due to the extended company scope of the CSRD and several research calls (Arena & Michelon, 2018; Fiechter et al., 2022; Ottenstein et al., 2022). To capture the population of German PFF facing the consequences of the upcoming directive and thus to extend existing theory and replicate previ-

ous cases (Eisenhardt, 1989), this study follows the theoretical sampling approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The sample selection within qualitative research is usually purposeful (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Hence, Glaser and Strauss (1967) used guided selection criteria in their research. In my study, the selection of German PFF is guided by an ownership threshold and the firm's market focus. As I choose the definition of a family firm according to Chua et al. (1999), I additionally consider minimum family ownership of 50%. This threshold still justifies a dominant coalition and facilitates an extraction from the population (Chua et al., 1999). Beyond that, all firms must operate in the business-to-business (B2B) market to avoid any distortion due to the market focus. This is because the disclosure behavior regarding sustainability information differs between B2B and business-to-customer (B2C) companies (Johnson et al., 2018). According to the selection criteria, potential companies were randomly selected on the business networking platform LinkedIn. After creating a long list of German PFFs active in the B2B market, I searched for potential interview partners (e.g., sustainability experts) within this pre-selection and contacted them.

The final sample consists of ten family firms with an average founding year of 1926 (see Table 1). Hence, every firm was passed on to at least the second or up to the eighth generation, indicating that the sample considers the family firm's typical intergenerational succession within the SEW concept (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007) and its importance in sustainability (Berrone et al., 2010; García-Sánchez et al., 2021; Labelle et al., 2018). Seven firms have already published a sustainability report, one firm is in the process of creating one at the time of this study, and two firms do not have a sustainability report. The firms have, on average, a headcount of ~6,750 employees and a revenue of ~EUR 1,600 million in 2021 and act in seven different industry clusters.

3.2. Data collection

In case study research for theory building, Eisenhardt (1989) recommends using multiple data collection methods to triangulate and thus substantiate the results, whereas interviews have become the most common primary data source (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In addition, Yin (2018) proposes maintaining a chain of evidence in case study research. As this explorative multiple case study relies on the research advice of both authors, the database consists of primary and secondary data, according to Eisenhardt (1989), and is supported by Yin's (2018) chain of evidence.

The primary data comprise semi-structured interviews conducted with sustainability experts of all family firms of the sample. My study followed the rules of the case study protocol, which can be found in the Appendix 4 (Yin, 2018). To further support qualitative research guidelines, I used mainly open-ended questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) clustered into three thematic fields. The first field contained general questions related to the interviewee's professional position, the family firm structure, and sustainability. The goal was to gain some descriptive firm-specific information and motivational insights into sustainability. The topic of the

Table 2: Case overview (Source: Own table)

Company	Industry	Founding year	Family generation	Family's role	Turnover ^a [EUR M]	Headcount ^a [#]	Sustainability report
Alpha	Forest products, paper & packaging	1895	5	Executive management	1,050	3,700	Yes
Beta	Forest products, paper & packaging	1807	8	Executive management	950	2,100	Yes
Gamma	Metals	1967	2	Executive management	90	850	No
Delta	Automotive & mobility	1901	6	Supervisory board	3,700	15,700	Yes
Epsilon	Automotive & mobility	1908	4	Executive management	5,300	25,000	Yes
Zeta	Industrial goods	1974	2	Executive management	65	750	In progress
Eta	Transportation & logistics	1946	3	Executive management	1,300	6,400	Yes
Theta	Forest products, paper & packaging	1961	2	Executive management	1,400	7,000	Yes
Iota	Machinery & Equipment	1906	4	Supervisory board	2,200	5,400	Yes
Kappa	Software	1988	2	Executive management	101	600	No

^a Rounded figures

second cluster was consciously selected concerning the concept of Ioannou and Serafeim (2017) and Gulenko (2018) on FOC and SOC. Therefore, the questions in the second field targeted possible reporting challenges and emerging opportunities or synergies that may result from a sustainability reporting mandate. On the one hand, those thematic fields represented Eisenhardt's suggested predetermined constructs in the interview protocol, which can be adapted over the research process (Eisenhardt, 1989). If these constructs prove essential, they should ground the built theory. On the other hand, this procedure allowed me to create links to the existing literature, which enhanced the internal validity of my study (Eisenhardt, 1989). The third field referred to the outlook regarding introducing a sustainability reporting process. Lastly, the interview questions were overviewed by colleagues to ensure an easy understanding.

The interviews were conducted between February and March 2023 with sustainability representatives, as Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) recommend interviewing highly experienced informants who can assess the unit of observation from different perspectives. If the firm did not have a sustainability-related job position in place at the time of the study, I instead interviewed board members, as they significantly impact sustainability reporting (Michelon & Parbonetti, 2012). Since the workplaces of the interviewees are spread across Germany, the interviews were conducted via video conferencing platforms. Each interview was prepared in advance by reviewing the company's website to collect ad-

ditional clarifying questions. At the beginning of each interview, I assured the anonymization of the interview data and asked permission to record the conversation to facilitate the interview guidance (Eisenhardt, 1989). All interviews were subsequently transcribed to increase familiarity with the database and to facilitate data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After the tenth interview, the increase of new insights became smaller as the information began to be repeated. According to Eisenhardt (1989), I stopped adding new cases because theoretical saturation seemed to be reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I recorded 395 minutes and collected 108 single-spaced pages of transcripts. The Appendix 3 includes the breakdown of the interview data.

As the unit of observation relates to the disclosure of sustainability information, I intuitively included secondary data from available sustainability reports of the family firms (e.g., applied reporting standard) and supplemented that data with information from their websites. Here I included information about accreditations by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) or EcoVadis (EcoVadis, 2023). The most important standards for sustainability are ISO 14001 (environmental management), ISO 26000 (social responsibility), and ISO 50001 (energy management) (ISO, 2023). I chose these criteria to have nuanced indicators that help me justify the identified reporting challenges and facilitate the archetype classification for users of my framework.

Yin (2018) emphasizes the chain of evidence as it increases the validity of information in the case study. This

method allows readers to follow the development of my results by tracing evidence for and backward between the research question and the derived findings (Yin, 2018) (see Figure 4). In my study, the chain of evidence is maintained by covering all five chain elements (see Figure 4) and by ensuring a clear link through consistent wording between those elements. This rationale is also in line with my coding approach, according to Gioia et al. (2013), where the reader can see data-to-theory connections.

3.3. Data analysis

Eisenhardt (1989) emphasizes that data analysis is at the core of theory building from case studies. Therefore, I looked at comparable case studies in family business research to build on best practices. Strike and Rerup (2016) published a case study on family firms in the renowned *Academy of Management Journal* using the inductive case analysis method of Gioia et al. (2013) in the context of multiple cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). My data analysis is based on a similar approach that can be summarized in three phases.

In the first phase, I conducted a within-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989) based on case data from several sources (i.e., transcribed interviews, sustainability reports, company websites) to better understand each case as a standalone entity. First, I highlighted the main challenges and opportunities of mandatory sustainability reporting in the transcript of each case. Consequently, I synthesized the highlighted quotes into 57 first-order categories while preserving mostly the terms used by the informants (Gioia et al., 2013). The summarized categories and the corresponding quotes were presented in a table (see Appendix 2) to provide evidence regarding the created constructs (Strike & Rerup, 2016). Moreover, I added missing descriptive information (e.g., sustainability norms, founding year, family generation) to the cases from the other data sources.

The second phase focused on the cross-case analysis that builds on the categories and patterns of the previous phase (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). The analysis of similarities and differences between categories (Gioia et al., 2013) and their comparison across cases (Eisenhardt, 1989) enabled me to explore relationships and replicate my findings (Yin, 2018). Thus, I grouped the categories into 23 second-order themes (Gioia et al., 2013). The first 10 themes refer to the reporting challenges and thus to the “what” part of the research question, while the remaining themes refer to the opportunities and thus to the “how” part. Beyond that, based on the synthesis of categories to themes and the descriptive firm information, I was able to group and categorize the cases (Eisenhardt, 1989) into three firm archetypes that will be explained in chapter four.

In the third phase, like Strike and Rerup (2016), I analyzed the second-order themes at a higher theoretical level of abstraction and developed aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013). I built a data structure after creating first-order categories, second-order themes, and aggregated dimensions (see Appendix 1). It connects and graphically illustrates these three levels and thus also addresses the pre-

viously mentioned data-to-theory link (Gioia et al., 2013). The data structure was the basis for building an inductive framework grounded in data and connecting informants' experiences in theoretical terms (Gioia et al., 2013).

4. Results - mandatory sustainability reporting framework

Based on the within- and cross-case analysis and applying Lee's (2011) theory, I build an inductive framework that illustrates PFF-specific challenges due to a sustainability reporting mandate and provides guidance to unlock business opportunities. The framework consists of three phases (see Figure 5), with phase 1.1 describing the assignment of any PFF to one of the three archetypes, which depend on PFF's individual configuration of external forces (Phase 1.2). Phase 2 depicts which challenges, i.e., FOC, each archetype faces through the implementation of a sustainability reporting mandate. A PFF must face up to four challenge cluster depending on its archetype. Lastly, phase 3 elaborates on how the reporting mandate can be used as an opportunity, i.e., SOC, in different business functions. Accordingly, I recommend that companies applying my framework follow these three phases. My findings show that the nature and extent of the challenges depend on the archetype, while the direct benefits of the opportunities are archetype independent.

4.1. Archetypes and sustainability strategy - know your starting point

Family firm archetypes. The first phase of my framework refers to identifying PFF's archetype and its corresponding sustainability strategy. I started by identifying similarities and differences between the cases regarding PFF's market and sustainability characteristics. From this segmentation, I derived three archetypes (i.e., *conservative sustainability denier*, *cautious first-time reporter*, *visionary early adopter*). Of my sample, two cases (i.e., *Gamma*, *Kappa*) belong to the *conservative sustainability denier*, two further falls under the *cautious first-time reporter* (i.e., *Zeta*, *Iota*), and the remaining (i.e., *Alpha*, *Beta*, *Delta*, *Epsilon*, *Eta*, *Theta*) to the *visionary early adopter* (see Figure 6).

The market characteristics consist of macro (i.e., institutional sustainability pressure) and micro factors (i.e., stakeholder sustainability pressure) according to the theoretical framework of Lee (2011). The micro and macro factors are industry-specific and can be either low or high. I determined the level of external pressure based on the interview data. The sustainability characteristics refer to the firm's sustainability mission or vision, its maturity of sustainability reporting, including the use of standards (e.g., GRI, DNK), and accreditations by ISO or EcoVadis. Both accreditations are not mandatory but demonstrate a firm's proactive behavior toward quality, safety, and sustainability.

Ultimately, the assigned sustainability strategy per archetype depends on the configuration of the macro and micro factors. The sustainability characteristics are descriptive information

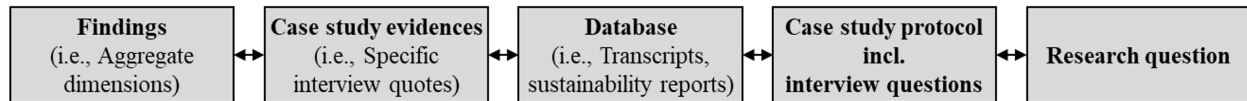


Figure 4: Chain of evidence (Source: Own figure adapted from Yin (2018))

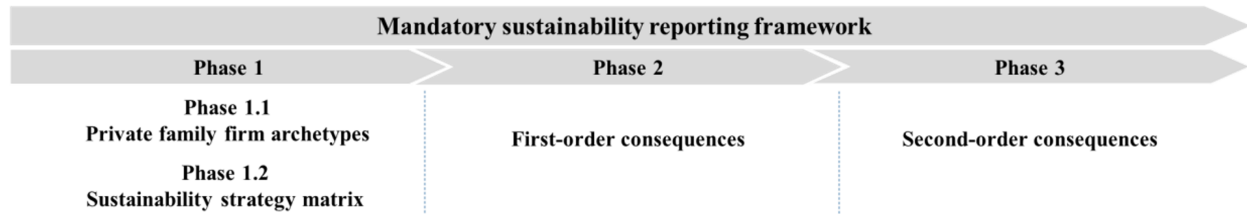


Figure 5: Sequence of phases for the mandatory sustainability reporting framework (Source: Own figure)

of the archetypes and side effects of the respective sustainability strategy. They are not included in the determination of the strategy. In the following, I will describe one representative case study per archetype illustrating the driving factors of the institutional and stakeholder pressure that result in the assigned strategy, but also to give an understanding of the underlying PFF-specific sustainability characteristics.

Conservative sustainability denier. *Gamma* is run by the second generation and operates in the metal processing industry. Its firm size (i.e., headcount, turnover) ranks in the lower quartile of the sample. The interviewee was a non-family board member. To date, *Gamma* has not received any request for a sustainability report from its stakeholders. It seems to be an industry-wide phenomenon. “I have never seen a [sustainability] report from any of our competitors.” Therefore, *Gamma* shows low external pressure in both categories. Regarding *Gamma*’s sustainability focus, it does not embed sustainability in its mission or vision. No information on that could be found in the interview data or on the company’s website. It appears that the intrinsic values for sustainability are missing. Accordingly, the firm does not have a sustainability department or representative. Therefore, typical for a *conservative sustainability denier* is its missing sustainability report and thus its lack of experience about reporting standards or the upcoming CSRD. Lastly, *Gamma* has no ISO 14001, 26000, 50001, or EcoVadis accreditation. In summary, *Gamma*’s current weak external sustainability pressure and conservative attitude suggest that this archetype would respond to a sustainability reporting mandate with a reactive sustainability strategy. Those firms see no incentive to go beyond legal requirements and want to stay within the “rules of the game” and thus maintain their legitimacy.

Cautious first-time reporter. *Iota* is owned by the fourth family generation. The company sells agricultural machinery; its turnover is slightly above the sample’s average, and its headcount slightly below. The interview was held with *Iota*’s sustainability manager. In contrast to the first archetype, the industry-related stakeholder pressure is high. “We received requests from customers, especially banks and insurance companies, and they often asked for a sustainability report.” Also,

Iota’s sustainability focus is more pronounced “[...] Sustainability is part of every family firm’s DNA. This applies to us as well [...]” *Iota* included sustainability in its mission, which indicates a strong identification of the family with the firm. They care about their externally perceived image by sustainability-oriented stakeholders. *Iota* holds close ties to its local community through social investments or school projects, which allows them to build social capital. *Iota* has a sustainability manager but no sustainability department. Furthermore, the sustainability manager is not yet fully integrated into corporate governance. “There is not a separate sustainability department yet. I spend 100% of my hours on the topic of sustainability in my role as a sustainability manager. Personally, however, I am part of the Construction and Investments department.” Nevertheless, the topic of sustainability reporting is already evolving. To communicate *Iota*’s philanthropic activities, “[...] in 2019/20, [...] [Iota] published [its] first sustainability report, but it was not based on a reporting standard. [Iota] collected all the sustainability activities [it is] involved and summarized them in the report.” Thus, PFFs that belong to the archetype of the *cautious first-time reporter* have already published one sustainability report or are in the process of doing so, like *Zeta*, but without considering any reporting standard. Due to their voluntary interest in sustainability reporting, these firms know upcoming mandatory reporting regulations such as the CSRD. Another common feature of this archetype is the accreditation by at least one of the ISO standards for sustainability. *Iota* holds ISO 14001 and 50001 certifications. In conclusion, *Iota*’s high stakeholder demands for sustainability led to a proactive sustainability behavior influenced by philanthropy. This archetype wants to be visible in local communities and communicate its activities to specific stakeholder groups (e.g., banks, insurance companies) to increase social capital and reputation. Hence, *cautious first-time reporting* companies pursue an accommodative sustainability strategy.

Visionary early adopter. *Theta* was founded in 1961 and is managed and owned by the second generation. Its company size (i.e., turnover, headcount) is close to the average firm size of the sample. The product portfolio includes pack-

Market characteristics		Company specific sustainability characteristics						
Macro and micro factors		Sustainability focus		Sustainability reporting			Sustainability norms/ratings	
Industry-related institutional sustainability pressure	Industry-related stakeholder sustainability pressure	Sustainability embedded in mission and/or vision	Sustainability department or representative	Sustainability report	Application of reporting standards (e.g., GRI, DNK)	Familiarity with mandatory CSRD regulation	Sustainability ISO norms and/or Ecovadis	
Family firm archetypes [Company]	Low	Low	No	No	No	No	No	Reactive strategy
Conservative sustainability denier [Gamma, Kappa]	Low	High	Yes, without direct link to board	Yes, or currently in progress	No	Yes	Yes, only ISO	Accommodative strategy
Cautious first-time reporter [Zeta, Iota]	High	High	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, ISO and partly Ecovadis	Proactive strategy
Visionary early adopter [Alpha, Beta, Delta, Epsilon, Eta, Theta]	High	High	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, ISO and partly Ecovadis	Proactive strategy

Figure 6: Private family firm archetypes (Phase 1.1) (Source: Own figure)

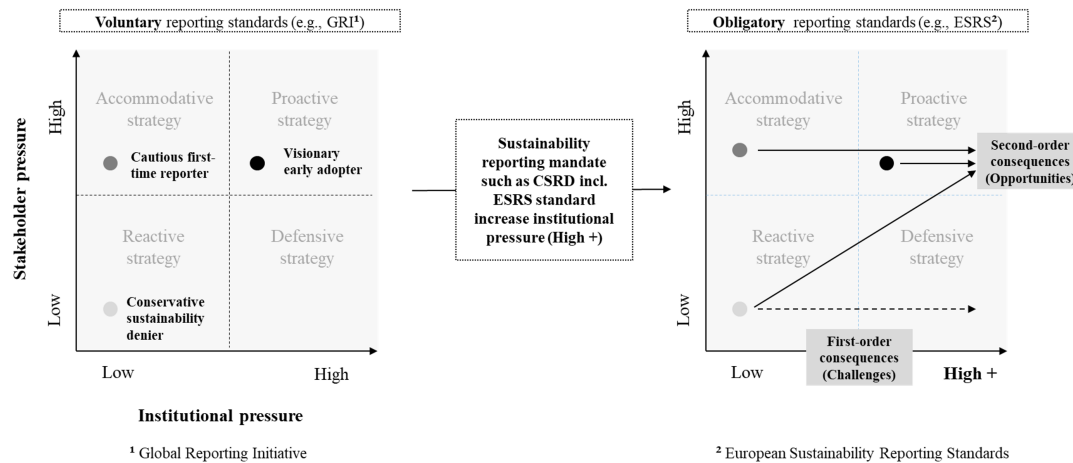


Figure 7: Sustainability strategy matrix (Phase 1.2) (Source: Own figure)

aging machinery and packaging materials for fast-moving consumer goods (e.g., food). I interviewed *Theta*'s project manager for corporate strategy and sustainability. *Theta* must face high multi-stakeholder (i.e., end customers, direct customers, applicants) and formal institutional sustainability pressure. An increased sustainability awareness among end customers increased the pressure on *Theta*'s direct customers. "[We] noticed that the end consumers of our packages, the people who buy sausage and cheese in the supermarket [...] put pressure on our direct customers, and that, of course, comes back to us." Some customers even contact them directly. "We are busy responding to customer requests [regarding sustainability]." The human resources department gets sustainability questions from applicants. "[...] even if we want to hire new staff, young people always ask for [sustainability]." In contrast to the industries of the first two archetypes, high regulations apply to food packaging, which results in high institutional pressure. "In the packaging sector in particular, the issue of sustainability, depending on the packaging segment [...] has risen considerably in recent years, and we are also quite strongly influenced by regulators, especially when it comes to the food sector." *Theta*'s sustainability focus includes a sustainability vision, social initiatives (e.g., support of social grocery shops) and a sustainability representative. Its motivational drivers toward sustainability are comparable to the second archetype. The main difference is the integration of sustainability and its representative into the management and governance processes. *Theta* has a formalized sustainability strategy and four strategic fields (i.e., infrastructure, products, governance, social engagement) in which sustainability is anchored, implemented, and tracked. "[Sustainability] is part of the management process. We have a sustainability steering committee, which consists of the management and me." Hence, besides the family's strong identity with the firm, *Theta* cares about its dynastic succession. "[...] we see it as our responsibility to preserve an environment in which future generations can live." The family is forward-looking and wants to develop a positive family identity for future generations. To communicate its social activities and

values, *Theta* has voluntarily published a sustainability report for several years. In contrast to the *first-time reporter*, the *visionary early adopter* uses reporting standards. *Theta* used for its sustainability reports the DNK standard. Two additional upgrades in contrast to the last archetype are first, the knowledge about the CSRD and its concrete preparation. Second, all PFF in the sample belonging to the visionary archetype have at least the bronze EcoVadis in addition to sustainability-related ISO certifications. In summary, *Theta*'s joint high institutional and stakeholder pressure, including its transgenerational values, led to a formalized strategy and communication. This enables external stakeholders to monitor and evaluate the firm's status quo toward sustainability. Consequently, a PFF within this archetype follows a proactive sustainability strategy beyond minimum requirements.

Sustainability strategy matrix. According to my framework, each PFF can be assigned to one of the archetypes and its corresponding sustainability strategy. The mapping between archetype and sustainability strategy can be determined through the sustainability strategy matrix (see left side Figure 7).

My sample does not include a case with a configuration of low stakeholder and high institutional pressure. One explanation could be the recognized "trickle-down" effect by Ottenstein et al. (2022). This effect states that some non-listed companies might be indirectly affected by a sustainability reporting mandate (e.g., NFRD) of listed companies in the same supply chain. Thus, I assume that due to the trickle-down effect, listed corporate customers in a B2B market will also demand sustainability from their (non-listed) suppliers. Thus, high institutional pressure through norms and regulations in a B2B market would lead to increased stakeholder pressure (i.e., sustainability pressure from customers) in its supplier market. A supplier's defensive sustainability strategy that consists of low stakeholder and high institutional pressure would become obsolete.

However, introducing a sustainability reporting mandate leads to FOC and SOC (Gulenko, 2018) for the *conservative sustainability denier* and the *cautious firm-time reporter*. The

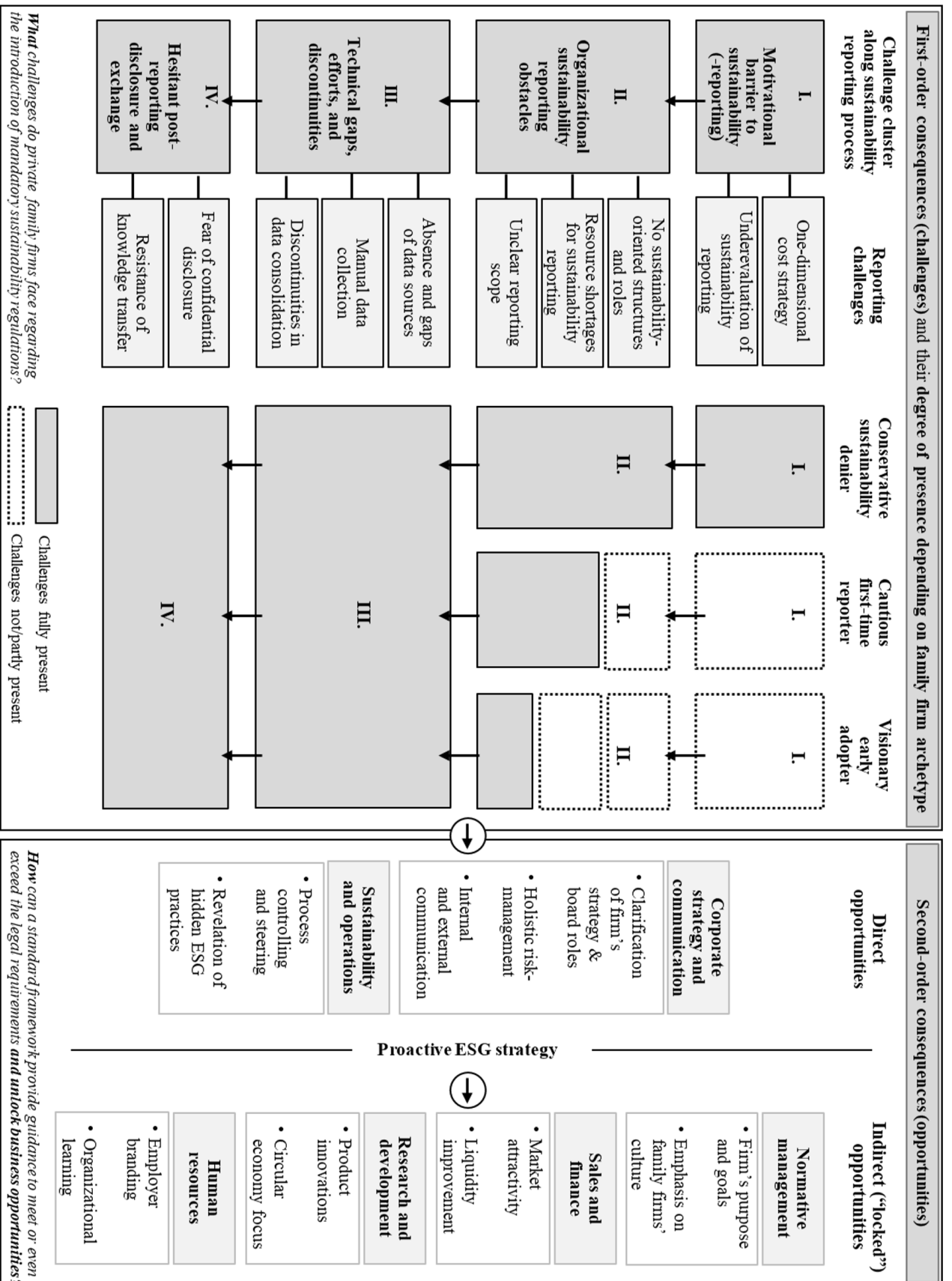


Figure 8: First- and second-order consequences (Phase 2, Phase 3) (Source: Own figure)

CSRD regulation will further increase the intensity of formal institutional pressure through additional rules (e.g., ESRS standards), indicated by “high+” (see right side Figure 7). Companies thus have much less flexibility in disclosing their sustainability information than before the CSRD. This is why even the *visionary early adopter* will face FOC and SOC. As depicted in the following chapter, it would be beneficial for the *conservative sustainability denier* not to follow a defensive strategy (see dotted line right side Figure 7) but rather a proactive strategy to benefit from SOC.

4.2. Challenges - be aware of obstacles

The second phase of my framework illustrates archetype-specific challenges (i.e., FOC) along the implementation process of a sustainability reporting mandate (see left side Figure 8). My analysis revealed that the type and degree of challenge a PFF faces depend on its archetype and the corresponding sustainability strategy. Thus, users of my framework can guide through the process according to their assigned archetype. I identified four challenge clusters (i.e., I. Motivational barrier to sustainability (-reporting), II. Organizational sustainability reporting obstacles, III., Technical gaps, efforts, and discontinuities, IV. Hesitant post-reporting disclosure and exchange) that represent the aggregate dimensions of my data structure. The clusters are further subdivided into granular challenges reflecting the second-order themes.

Two attributes distinguish the clusters and their associated challenges. The first and partly fourth cluster refers to intrinsic barriers to sustainability and its reporting, while the other clusters exhibit operational reporting barriers. PFFs that belong to the *conservative sustainability denier* face the highest obstacle in adopting the reporting requirements, as they must overcome all four challenge clusters. Instead, most *cautious first-time reporters* and *visionary early adopters* can skip the first cluster because of their intrinsic motivation and progress in sustainability reporting. Nevertheless, as reporting challenges depend on their context (De Micco et al., 2021; Gulenko, 2018), the first challenge cluster might still partially occur for those two archetypes (see dotted boxes in Figure 8). Without considering the status quo of a user of my framework, the *cautious first-time reporter* and *visionary early adopter* show only minor differences in the extent of operational challenges. Continuing the implementation process, given the precise requirements of the new CSRD, the status quo of an archetype becomes irrelevant. Thus, my results show that regardless of the archetype, all PFFs face the same challenges after overcoming the second challenge cluster.

In the following paragraph, I provide illustrative evidence of each challenge cluster and describe how each challenge impedes the implementation process of a sustainability reporting mandate in the related archetype. I also include best practices of the *cautious first-time reporters* and *visionary early adopters* that justify omitting the first and partly the second challenge cluster. Those examples could also be an inspiration for improvement to the *conservative sustainability*

deniers. To make use of my rich data, I include representative quotes for each challenge cluster.

I. Motivational barrier to sustainability reporting.

The first implementation challenge is an intrinsic motivational barrier to sustainability and its reporting. I observed strong evidence for this attitude among the *conservative sustainability denier* and weak to no evidence among the other archetypes. The rejection of reporting is based not only on the reporting itself but also on a fundamental aversion to sustainability. I found two behavioral reasons that need to be overcome in the case of a sustainability reporting mandate.

First, a one-dimensional cost strategy. “*The typical entrepreneurial approach in SMEs is, what does it cost and what are the benefits*” (Gamma). This mindset prevents seeing meaning in sustainability and reporting. Atypical for family firms, but these companies’ management focuses on costs and prioritizes economic utility. They perceive any sustainable measure as a costly burden. The lack of external pressure makes them less concerned about reputational damage due to a missing commitment to sustainability. Although this archetype tends to be the smallest, this does not mean these PFFs lack financial resources. They are rather unwilling to release a budget for sustainability. “[...] *there is a budget for certain things [...]. As long as this budget is not dedicated to sustainability, this topic will not be pursued further*” (Gamma). For example, Gamma invested in a carbon-efficient nitrogen generation plant to avoid transportation costs from nitrogen suppliers. Kappa, a software provider, renewed isolation in all its offices to save energy costs. Thus, a *conservative sustainability denier* would invest in a sustainable project when it reduces costs. This rationale builds the bridge to the second driver.

The *conservative sustainability denier* sees no (economic) value in sustainability reporting. “*I employ someone who takes beautiful photos throughout the year. In the end, we bind [the report] into a book. Then I ask myself what is sustainable about [the report] if, in the end, no one is interested*” (Gamma). Reporting is solely perceived as an additional burden unrelated to sustainable activities. In this way, family management’s motivational barrier to sustainability reporting also hinders employee empowerment in contributing to sustainability. Management sees no incentive to motivate employees to drive sustainability, including collecting and recording sustainability data. “[...] *When I prepare such a report, I must collect data and consolidate them in a report. [...] This report has not made my staff more sustainable. [...] Why should I motivate them for a report at all?*” (Kappa). This would make implementing the mandate even more difficult because sustainability reporting is a holistic process requiring multi-stakeholder support.

To conclude, the practice of sustainability and its reporting contradicts the conservative values of the sustainability denier. A sustainability reporting mandate would force them to change their mindset, at least to the point of meeting the minimum requirements. In other words, a mandate would push sustainability values into PFF decision-makers’ reference points; they would typically prioritize less. For exam-

ple, to avoid this inner conflict of values the *visionary early adopters* *Delta*, a sixth-generation automotive supplier, and *Eta*, a third-generation logistics service provider, follow different approaches. *Delta* integrated into its formalized sustainability strategy sustainable KPIs that have the same value as financial KPIs. *Eta's* Head of Sustainability sees the CSRD as an opportunity. "I like the CSRD because it is so much more than a reporting directive. It is such a huge lever."

II. Organizational sustainability reporting obstacles.

The second challenge cluster starts dealing with the operational reporting process. These obstacles affect all archetypes at this implementation stage but to different degrees. My analysis showed that the main issue is the organization implementing a sustainability reporting process. The issues start with a lack of organizational structures and roles, followed by resource shortages and an unclear reporting scope. The first two of these second-order themes relate to challenges due to internal firm reasons, and the third due to external political reasons outside the company's control.

The *conservative sustainability denier* has difficulties approaching an incoming sustainability reporting requirement due to missing responsibilities and standardized sustainability management systems (e.g., ISO 14001). For example, the strategic advisor to *Kappa's* CEO seemed overwhelmed. "What does the CSRD look like? What do I have to do to fulfill it? Who can deal with it? How can relevant fields of action be defined and work packages derived?" In contrast, for the more advanced archetypes, their clear responsibilities and management systems facilitate the development of project structures for a new reporting requirement. For instance, *Case Delta* created several sustainability reports in the past and thus assigned data owners for each chapter in their sustainability report. The sustainability manager of *Iota* confirmed the benefits of ISO sustainability certificates. "I have the advantage that our sites have existing certifications, for example, in the energy sector, ISO 50001, and in the environmental sector, ISO 14001, [...] many things that I need for the CSRD are already documented."

Following implementation, resource shortages for sustainability reporting are the next identified challenge. The most frequent resource shortages relate to knowledge and time. At this point, the *cautious first-time reporter* starts to experience the full extent of the challenges. The cases belonging to this archetype just began establishing a reporting process. Thus, reporting resources are not yet properly aligned. In terms of knowledge, the first two archetypes have no to little expertise in sustainability reporting. I found that the first point of contact for these PFFs is the quality department, as this business function is already familiar with the requirements of external authorities through audits. "[...] the topic [of sustainability reporting] was handed over to me because the quality department has no capacity at all [...]" (*Kappa*). The opinion involving external knowledge between those two archetypes is mixed. *Gamma* and *Iota* are unwilling to work with external consultants, while *Kappa* and *Zeta* are not. "[...] One of the biggest challenges is knowledge. [...] but we need support from external consultants who show

us what we need to look at" (*Zeta*). *Gamma's* cost focus can explain its hesitation toward external support. Regarding time constraints, the cases of the first two archetypes worry about the missing time capacities for implementing the reporting process rather than maintaining it. This is due to the lengthy familiarization with the reporting obligations, impeded by an oversupply of training materials. "[...] the very first report under the new standard takes an enormous time to prepare [...]" (*Iota*). Followed by the subsequent instruction of the employees in the reporting obligations. "[...] first we have to train the management level, and then transfer it to the whole workforce" (*Zeta*). This is confirmed by the cases of the *visionary early adopter* that experienced time savings after the first reporting cycle. "The initial materiality analysis took the most time" (*Eta*).

The last obstacle within the second challenge cluster relates to the unclear reporting scope due to constant changes in reporting regulations by policymakers. The transposition of the CSRD into national law has not yet taken place. The new CSR-RUG may deviate from the CSRD. "[...] it is currently quite difficult to stay up to date with the latest regulatory changes. It feels like there are always new laws and the 50th draft of a law or standard [...]" (*Delta*). In addition, the new ESRS reporting standards and their changing requirements require firms to conduct several gap analyses on their current reporting standard. "[...] in terms of the CSRD [...] we would like to take a closer look what this change from the GRI standard to ESRS means. Thus, we will probably conduct a gap analysis [...]" (*Delta*). This is also an obstacle for the first two archetypes that have never used any standard. "[...] the first sustainability report is an exercise where we want to approach this ESRS standard to the best of our ability. We will see the results of the first sustainability report at the end of this year and then publish the gap analysis [...]" (*Iota*). Thus, regardless of the archetype, any change in regulations means additional effort to understand the new requirements.

To summarize, archetypes' (i.e., PFFs') heterogeneous sustainability strategy still influences the extent of organizational challenges due to an incoming sustainability reporting mandate. The more advanced archetypes can benefit from their proactive sustainability and reporting behavior (e.g., clear responsibilities, ISO certifications, expert knowledge). However, these benefits seem to diminish based on the specific and changing requirements of the new CSRD. In other words, without considering these external reasons (i.e., unclear reporting scope), the *visionary early adopter* could also have skipped the second challenge cluster.

III. Technical gaps, efforts, and discontinuities.

The third challenge cluster relates to the second because of its operational attributes. The challenges of the third cluster are independent of the archetype. Implying that any PFF, either with a proactive or a reactive sustainability strategy, will face similar challenges at this stage. All sub-challenges (i.e., second-order themes) involve hurdles in managing the required data. Difficulties in data management include a lack of relevant data sources, followed by a high manual effort

for data collection and inconsistencies in data consolidation. The absence and gaps of data sources pose a twofold challenge. First, all archetypes must identify their specific data sources required for the ESRS 2, ESRS E1, and ESRS S1 standards. If business processes along the value chain are not designed to measure these specific sustainability indicators (e.g., GHG emissions), it is almost impossible to find and obtain the required data at all. *“The challenge is to design the processes in such a way that the information needed can be presented transparently and also in a form in which it can be tracked. For example, with the CO₂ calculation, we need to disclose scope 1, 2, and 3”* (Theta). This hurdle is particularly intense for processes beyond a firm’s borders, like for the measurement of scope 3 emissions. *“Data management in the supply chain will be one of the biggest challenges in the coming years”* (Epsilon). *“We are now starting to go deeper into scope 3. I feel like I’m running into walls”* (Eta). *“[...] what I find very challenging are the scope 3 emissions”* (Beta). All these quotes are from cases belonging to the *visionary early adopter*, although they have the most experience in sustainability reporting. However, once identified, a suitable and measurable process may still have data gaps that need to be filled subsequently. *“[...] trying to get exact figures from your own processes, from the supply chain, to request them [...], these are huge challenges”* (Epsilon). Most PFFs collect their data manually, which is a timely process. *“For the CO₂ balance, I have 150 waste invoices in my folder, all of which I have to read through manually”* (Kappa). *“[...] last year, when we prepared the first carbon footprint [...] we had to adapt certain things to get data more quickly. [...] to get digital data and not manual evaluations [is a challenge]”* (Zeta).

After data collection, the next step is to merge the sustainability information from the different sources and departments, which is challenging due to system discontinuities. *“The departments have their own measurement systems or digital programs. For example, in HR, some programs that use training information, [...] employee structures. In the energy sector, we have an internal digital energy management system, which means that the indicators can also be read out here. And this is how it works in each department, and in the end, we have a [Excel] document, filled out by the respective departments, which we put together with marketing in a sustainability report”* (Theta). For companies with international locations, the hurdle of system breaks is even more severe. Here, the technical consolidation is additionally impeded by a cognitive obstacle. Cultures from different countries have diverse sustainability perceptions. Specifically, understanding the social dimension varies across cultures influencing how sustainability is approached, e.g., regarding labor equality or safety. Thus, consolidating inconsistent data collections due to different interpretations of sustainability makes coherent reporting difficult.

Overall, some technical difficulties arise from the specific requirements of the CSRD (e.g., scope 3 emissions). Thus, even more, experienced firms that have already voluntarily prepared a sustainability report face challenges. This is due to the reason that voluntary reports are often summaries of

existing sustainability information. *“Through the voluntary report, we have created transparency and simply written down everything that we are already doing in the area of sustainability”* (Theta). Therefore, institutions’ requests for sustainability data from processes not yet designed to be reported are challenging for any archetype.

IV. Hesitant post-reporting disclosure and exchange.

The last challenge cluster reflects a dilemma that affects every archetype. On the one hand, PFFs hesitate to disclose their data to the public after organizing and collecting relevant data. *“Of course, there are certain topics where you consider whether you want to disclose this information. In particular, sensitive data relating to compensation [...]. These topics pose challenges for a family firm, especially if you are locally based”* (Iota). This concern is particularly pronounced for the *first-time reporter* due to its accommodative sustainability strategy. These PFFs built strong relationships with external stakeholders, especially to their local communities, where they want to be visible and enjoy a good reputation. Thus, the communication of content that has not been selected by the firm but by a political institution is a concern for those PFFs. On the other hand, PFFs appreciate reading the disclosed reports from industry peers or joining firm associations to learn about best practices. *“[...] we are in regular exchange with other companies that are at the same point as we are. [...] we look what the others are doing, can we copy anything, what can we do better or how are their processes organized”* (Theta). Nevertheless, Theta only exchanges with public firms or firms outside their industry due to their fear of disclosing confidential data.

4.3. Opportunities - go beyond legal requirements

The third phase of my framework reveals opportunities (i.e., SOC) that result after the introduction of a sustainability reporting process and reports disclosure (see right side Figure 8). I differentiate between direct and indirect or “locked” opportunities along a firm’s value chain. Irrespective of the archetype, all PFFs can benefit from the direct opportunities that arise after meeting the minimum reporting requirements. In contrast, a proactive sustainability strategy needs to unlock indirect opportunities. Two business functions, i.e., (1) corporate strategy and communication and (2) sustainability and operations, can benefit from direct opportunities. The other functions, i.e., (3) normative management, (4) sales and finance, (5) research and development, and (6) human resources, can benefit from indirect opportunities.

Direct opportunities. Business functions (1) and (2) can benefit from the firm’s structured disclosures following the ESRS standards by meeting the minimum reporting requirements without additional effort. Regarding business function (1), using the obligatory ESRS standards provides a strategic structure. *“I derived our sustainability strategy from the ESRS, i.e., E, S, and G, and the chapters [...]. And I think you can show this nicely with the chapter structure of the ESRS. [...] I perceived it very helpful, the structure, to carry this into the organization”* (Iota). More specifically, ESRS 2 standard

requires the disclosure of board members' roles and responsibilities (EFRAG, 2022b), which can be helpful for a clear task allocation among family members and corporate governance. In addition, the report provides firms with a holistic overview of their business activities through the double materiality perspective. Thus, improving the firm's risk management. Moreover, the cases experienced improved internal communication through cross-functional collaboration. "[...] before [the report], each department worked separately, and each department had already done something in the area of sustainability, but it was never really communicated. [...] through this report, it has simply become much more structured, and the individual areas could also inform each other" (Theta). But also, external communication as part of the report preparation. "There are again these synergy effects, such as stakeholder materiality analysis [...]. This [stakeholder] exchange is a positive side effect" (Iota). Regarding business function (2), the holistic view also helps to monitor processes through (sustainability) KPIs and thus to identify inefficiencies more quickly. "[...] KPI is supposed to provide a target and help us to develop certain processes in a certain direction" (Beta). Lastly, sustainability reporting simultaneously leads to recording sustainable activities and uncovers a hidden potential. "[...] we already do a lot but in an uncoordinated way. That means the different departments, environment in development, in materials, in HR. Things are happening everywhere that you can put into this huge topic of sustainability" (Epsilon).

Indirect ("locked") opportunities. The information in the sustainability report and the underlying processes can be further leveraged to derive indirect opportunities. Firms that pursue a proactive strategy can benefit from indirect opportunities because of their attitude to exceed stakeholder requirements. They are willing to make extra efforts to turn the report's information into additional value. Therefore, I recommend for PFFs belonging to the *conservative sustainability denier* respond to a sustainability reporting mandate with a proactive rather than a defensive approach to unlocking business opportunities.

A PFF following a proactive approach would recognize the sustainability purpose behind a sustainability reporting process and could develop further motivation and real values for sustainability. Looking at business function (3), a PFF could integrate these new values into its mission, thus sharpening and questioning its purpose. It would provide transparency to stakeholders on what the company stands for and allow for assessing the "future readiness" of a company's business model. "[...] it is also clearer to everyone what the company is doing. What are the goals? [...] Such a report is, of course, an important component. What is the mission? Where do we want to go? It is simply something that is goal-oriented, a positive side effect of such a report" (Theta). "[...] And it's not just about how do we make the products more sustainable but how fit is our business model for the future" (Eta). Beyond that, such a sustainability report and its double materiality perspective can also enhance a family's SEW by building enduring ties to multi-stakeholders, improv-

ing the firm's reputation, and thus paving the way for future generations.

Another lever of the sustainability report is the facilitated accreditation of sustainability organizations such as EcoVadis. The process transparency and information created by the report can contribute to obtaining other certificates. However, this requires proactive research by firms to identify eligible certifications. In addition, exceeding legal requirements could create a competitive edge if a sustainability report was not an industry standard before the mandate, as for the *conservative sustainability denier*. Thus, even slightly exceeding the requirements can strengthen the brand and increase sales. Reports' resulting process transparency, e.g., through sustainability KPIs, can also reveal waste and resource inefficiencies. Thus, if a report's content is considered correctly, it serves also as a lever to reduce costs. "[...] especially when I consider the topic of water circuits or energy, then this not only pays off in terms of sustainability but also in terms of profitability [...]" (Alpha). Consequently, those revenue and cost-based arguments represent a lever for business function (4).

A multi-stakeholder view along a firm's value chain, e.g., as a requirement of the reporting standard ESRS E1 to track scope 3 emissions, also paves the way for product innovation and therefore an opportunity for business function (5) "[...] if we think in the direction of circular economy, where product development, customers, and also sales sit together, where perhaps from the product development point of view there are ideas that have not been recognized by the customer yet" (Iota).

Lastly, business function (6) can integrate the sustainability report into its workflows to enhance employer branding and organizational learning. *Theta* and *Beta* mentioned that they get unsolicited applications that refer to their sustainability report, especially from young talents that appreciate working for a sustainable employer. However, internally, the report is a learning tool and increases the sustainability awareness of the workforce. "Of course, we also have high standards for our people. Our employees are also interested, and they also want to understand the term sustainability in the context of the company" (Beta).

In summary, mastering the dual task of integrating sustainability reporting and deriving opportunities from it is not effortless. According to the more experienced archetypes, especially the first reporting cycle is a resource-intensive process in terms of time, expertise, and stakeholder engagement. Especially the updated double materiality concept, due to its outside-in and inside-out assessment, results in a high initial burden. Ultimately, it is necessary first to build on the foundations for the direct before attempting to exploit any indirect opportunities.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical implications

The results of my analysis contribute to both the research stream of family firms' heterogeneous sustainability strategy

and reporting behavior and the research stream on the effects of a sustainability reporting mandate.

Regarding the first research stream, my findings build on the distinction between a family firm's reactive and proactive strategy toward external demands (Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; Cennamo et al., 2012; de la Cruz Déniz Déniz & Cabrera Suárez, 2005; Hsueh et al., 2023; Sharma & Sharma, 2011). I contribute to the literature by deriving three PFF archetypes. Regarding family firms' heterogeneous sustainability strategies, the analysis revealed that the attributes of my archetypes and their corresponding sustainability strategy confirm and disconfirm family firm literature in the following aspects.

The PFFs belonging to the *conservative sustainability denier* are cost-driven and subject to low external pressures, leading to a general aversion to sustainability (e.g., no sustainability representative, reporting, vision, ISO accreditation) and a reactive approach. Thus, the cases in my sample showed no motivation to build their SEW, like enhancing reputation or increasing binding social ties with external stakeholders. This is consistent with the findings of Hsueh et al. (2023) and Cennamo et al. (2012), who argue that those family firms place less emphasis on the (2) *family members' identification with the firm*, which is related to reputation, the (3) *binding social ties* and the (5) *renewal of family ties to the firm through dynastic succession* SEW dimension, leading to a reactive approach. Rather untypical for the results of family business research is the *conservative sustainability deniers'* high preference for economic goals (Berrone et al., 2010; Kotlar & De Massis, 2013). Moreover, my findings differ from de la Cruz Déniz Déniz and Cabrera Suárez (2005), who conclude that family firms that adopt a reactive approach do not have sufficient financial resources to engage in sustainability. According to my findings, the problem lies more in the unwillingness to release a budget for sustainability.

The PFFs belonging to the *cautious first-time reporter* and the *visionary early adopter* developed intrinsic sustainability values and are subject to high external pressures resulting in a proactive sustainability strategy. They employ sustainability managers, have a sustainability vision, engage in, and communicate their social activities, are accredited by sustainability organizations, and prepare for the upcoming CSRD. In line with Hsueh et al. (2023) and Cennamo et al. (2012), those family firms care about their externally perceived image, especially in local communities, are forward-looking, develop a positive family identity for future generations, which in sum indicates a salience of the (2), (3) and (5) SEW dimension. Thus, their goal is to build SEW while gaining legitimacy. Beyond that, my analysis revealed that the PFFs in my sample following a proactive approach are larger (i.e., turnover and headcount) and show a higher number of generational successions, following de la Cruz Déniz Déniz and Cabrera Suárez (2005) findings. The difference between the *cautious first-time reporter* and the *visionary early adopter* in their sustainability reporting is the use of standards. PFFs belonging to the *cautious first-time reporter* do not adhere to reporting standards, while the *vision-*

ary early adopter reported for several years according to official standards. This aligns with the findings of Campopiano and De Massis (2015). In contrast, both proactive archetypes are hesitant to disclose sustainability information that they have not purposefully selected or to share insights from reporting practices with industry peers. Venturelli et al. (2021) explain this reluctance with the family's involvement in the firm and the fear of losing their SEW.

Moreover, I contribute to the literature on family firms' heterogeneous sustainability reporting behavior (Arena & Michelon, 2018; Aureli et al., 2020; Biswas et al., 2019; Campopiano & De Massis, 2015; Gavana et al., 2017; Terlaak et al., 2018; Venturelli et al., 2021) via PFF archetypes. My framework shows that the type (i.e., challenge cluster) and degree (i.e., sub-challenges) of challenge regarding implementing a sustainability reporting mandate depend on the archetype and its corresponding sustainability strategy up to a certain implementation stage. This rationale continues with the opportunities. Each archetype can benefit from direct opportunities after meeting the minimum requirements. Only a proactive approach can unlock indirect opportunities. It seems that a major determinant is the type of sustainability strategy, a construct of external forces. Since the prioritization or configuration of SEW dimensions determines how a family firm reacts to external demands, SEW is a preventive lever to mitigate challenges or gain opportunities. This reasoning applies to implementation stages of sustainability reporting influenced by intrinsic motives such as the first and fourth challenge cluster or the gain of indirect opportunities. Beyond that, following the research call from Arena and Michelon (2018) or Venturelli et al. (2021), I extend family business research on sustainability reporting by focusing on PFF. Under the attributes of a multiple case study, I not only relied on easily accessible SEW dimensions such as family control but also family members' identification with the firm or renewal of family bonds through dynastic succession.

Regarding the second research stream, my framework further extends research on the effects of mandatory sustainability reporting (Fiechter et al., 2022; Ioannou & Serafeim, 2017; Ottenstein et al., 2022) in general and on the challenges and opportunities of the CSRD in particular. My framework presents four challenge clusters and opportunities in six business functions along a firm's value chain based on the CSRD in German companies. Thus, I am not only contributing to the current scarcity of studies focusing on the upcoming CSRD (Ottenstein et al., 2022) but also on the link between FOC and SOC (Gulenko, 2018).

5.2. Managerial implications

Managing the dual mission of integrating a sustainability reporting mandate and benefitting from this change process is challenging (Garcia-Torea et al., 2023; Nigri & Del Baldo, 2018). Since the dominant coalition, like the family, is the primary agent for successfully managing such an organizational change (Kotter, 1996), my findings are highly relevant for practitioners. The framework serves as a guide and reveals implementation challenges and opportunities. As my

analysis shows, the influence of a family firm's typical SEW is especially relevant for the first and fourth challenge cluster as well as for the shift from direct to indirect opportunities. Nonetheless, apart from those socioemotionally influenced consequences, my framework is also relevant for non-family firms that want to prepare for the upcoming CSRD. Therefore, the following managerial implications are twofold.

First, I recommend that PFFs belonging to the cost-driven *conservative sustainability denier* integrate sustainability KPIs into their decisions and link them to financial data. In addition, they should recognize the potential opportunities that may arise from a sustainability reporting mandate through my framework. Both suggestions could facilitate overcoming the inner obstacle of seeing no value in sustainability and its reporting. Since a family's strong identification with the firm, binding social ties and transgenerational values are drivers for following a proactive sustainability strategy (Cennamo et al., 2012; de la Cruz Déniz Déniz & Cabrera Suárez, 2005; Hsueh et al., 2023; Sharma & Sharma, 2011), a *conservative sustainability denier* could put relevance on these SEW dimensions to be motivated going beyond legal requirements and thus benefiting from indirect opportunities. Concerning the fourth challenge cluster and the dilemma between the hesitation to share information with the public and the appreciation of reading the sustainability reports of industry peers to mimic best practices, I advise the following. Regardless of the archetype, families who identify strongly with their firm and fear their image in local communities or sharing confidential report practices with industry peers might participate in firm associations outside their region and industry (see case *Iota, Theta*).

Second, for all firms, irrespective of their family or listing status, integrating a sustainability reporting mandate such as the CSRD requires proper organization and data management. My analysis revealed that firms with standardized sustainability management systems (e.g., ISO 14001) could build on these structures, assigned roles, and data. Therefore, I recommend using any sustainability accreditation as an orientation to facilitate the development of project structures regarding the implementation of a sustainability reporting process. Nevertheless, drawing on the best practices of archetypes with more experience in sustainability reporting, it is evident that the sustainability reporting process becomes much smoother after one reporting cycle, which should serve as a motivation to firms. Lastly, the abundance of regulatory amendments to the reporting requirements is an obstacle outside the company's control. It might be helpful to keep informed via webinars or training material from leading advisory firms.

5.3. Limitations and future research

My study is subject to a few limitations that pave the way for future research. The framework shows limits regarding its internal and external context. The challenges and opportunities of the framework suit mainly German PFFs (i.e., internal context) based on the EU's forthcoming CSRD (i.e., external context). Given the strong influence of the internal and

external context in analyzing the consequences of mandatory sustainability reporting (Aureli et al., 2020; Christensen et al., 2021; Gulenko, 2018), future research could address both limitations.

In terms of the internal context, developing and testing hypotheses on the identified consequences would further substantiate my findings. However, regardless of the research method, in family business research, it is essential to cautiously generalize the results due to the heterogeneity of family firms (Chua et al., 2012; Evert et al., 2016). Elaborating further on this argument, I must consider that the SEW dimensions influence my framework (Berrone et al., 2012; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007). Configurations or salient SEW dimensions affect the type and degree of implementation challenges. As indicated in the previous chapter, non-family firms applying my framework must consider this limitation. Thus, it would be interesting to know how a dominant coalition of a non-family firm implements the CSRD and to what extent the consequences differ from my study. Also, a single longitudinal case study could further deepen the consequences and conclude how exactly a family firm manages the path from FOC to SOC. Furthermore, the findings are limited to the industries in the sample. The framework is susceptible to the influence of industry pressure, which may lead to different assigned sustainability strategies. For example, this limitation is reflected by my sample, not including a case with a defensive sustainability strategy. Although I suspect fewer companies are exposed to low institutional and high stakeholder pressure due to the trickle-down effect, this could also lie in my sample's limited number of industries. Future research could validate the findings in a different industry set up.

Regarding the external context, my study presents early evidence. I identified four challenge clusters based on the forthcoming CSRD and its binding ESRS standards, which are not yet transposed into German law. Although the integration should not deviate as much as in the case of the NFRD, a subsequent check on the conformity between the directive and national law is advisable. Furthermore, it is difficult to extrapolate the identified consequences to firms outside the EU. The motivation of institutions to force companies to produce a sustainability report varies (Christensen et al., 2021), which also indicates different implementation issues. Thus, further research could replicate or extend the findings in different institutional settings.

6. Conclusion

By analyzing interview data from multiple cases on the consequences of mandatory sustainability reporting, I created an inductive framework that illustrates which challenges a company faces when implementing sustainability reporting and how the mandate can turn into business opportunities. The sharp scope expansion of the EU's forthcoming CSRD and the associated first-time imposition of a sustainability reporting mandate on most German private family firms gave reason to focus on this specific context. Building on family

business research, my findings contribute to the literature by differentiating PFFs based on their current maturity of sustainability reporting and sustainability strategy that is a construct of external forces. This allowed me to derive three PFF archetypes. The identified implementation challenges entail intrinsic and operational barriers. Thus, family firms psychologically anchored SEW dimensions regarding external demands (e.g., binding social ties) influence the PFF archetype's implementation challenges (i.e., intrinsic barriers). Only a SEW configuration that favors proactive behavior towards external demands enables PFF to benefit from indirect business opportunities. From a practitioner's perspective, the operational obstacles are relevant for all company types that want to prepare for the CSRD. Ultimately, my framework serves as a guide to overcoming the obstacles in meeting the sustainability reporting requirements of the EC, a key stakeholder to European companies. Thus, I can preventively assist in maintaining a company's license to operate and realize its full potential.

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Aufwachsen zwischen „Gefühl und Geschäft“: Wertevermittlung in der Sozialisation von Kindern und Jugendlichen in Unternehmerfamilien

Growing Up Between Family and Business: Transmission of Values in the Socialization Process of Children in Business Families

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Abstract

Values serve as a compass that guide our attitude and behaviour. The values that we are taught as children shape our identity and early career development. In business families, the descendants' socialization process is additionally influenced by the presence of the family business. This thesis discusses how the combination of the emotion-driven family logic and the business-driven company logic affect the transmission of values to the children. The line of argument is based on a qualitative literature analysis and a qualitative evaluation of nine narrative interviews. It can be concluded that particularly the corporate assets and the omnipresent expectation of company succession have a dominant influence on the values that are transmitted to descendants in business families. The dual responsibility for family and business lead to the following core values: freedom to shape one's life, family cohesion and modesty. In business families, the values passed on to the children therefore form the framework for their attitude towards the family business and thus determine the transgenerational preservation of the company.

Zusammenfassung

Werte sind eine Art Kompass, die unsere Haltung und unser Verhalten leiten. Jene Werte, die während der Kindheit und Jugend im Elternhaus erlernt werden, prägen unsere frühe Identitätsbildung und Berufsorientierung. In Unternehmerfamilien ist die Sozialisation der Nachkommen zusätzlich durch die Präsenz des Familienunternehmens geprägt. Die vorliegende Arbeit erörtert, wie sich die widersprüchlichen Logiken von bindungsorientierter Familie und sachorientiertem Unternehmen auf die Wertevermittlung der potenziellen Unternehmensnachfolger auswirken. Diese Sozialisation zwischen Gefühl und Geschäft wird anhand einer qualitativen Literaturanalyse und einer qualitativen Auswertung von neun narrativen Interviews untersucht. Es kann geschlussfolgert werden, dass insbesondere das Vermögen des Unternehmens und die Nachfolgefrage einen dominanten Einfluss auf die Wertevermittlung der Kinder und Jugendlichen haben. Aus der Doppelverantwortung für Familie und Betrieb ergeben sich die Kernwerte der freien Lebensgestaltung, des familiären Zusammenhalts und der Bescheidenheit. In Unternehmerfamilien bildet folglich die Wertevermittlung der Nachkommen den Rahmen für ihre Haltung gegenüber dem Familienunternehmen und entscheidet somit über den transgenerationalen Erhalt des Betriebs.

Keywords: business family; family business; socialization; succession; values

1. Einleitung

1.1. Forschungsinteresse

„Echte Unternehmer essen trockenes Brot, wenn die Firma leidet“ (Hoefle, 2020, S. 1).

Diese Aussage stammt von Wolfgang Grupp, dem 79-jährigen Geschäftsführer des deutschen Textilherstellers Trigma (vgl. ebd.). Das seit über 100 Jahren bestehende Familienunternehmen wird vom alleinigen Inhaber in dritter Generation geführt. Das Zitat verdeutlicht auf etwas provokante Art und Weise die unmittelbaren Auswirkungen der Entwicklungen des Unternehmens auf das Privatleben des dahinterstehenden Unternehmers bzw. der Unternehmerfamilie. Das ausgeprägte unternehmerische Verantwortungsgefühl und die daraus resultierende Bereitschaft die private Lebensweise zum Wohle des Unternehmens (temporär) einzuschränken, ist auf die besondere Unternehmensform des Familienunternehmens zurückzuführen. Als ein solches werden Unternehmen bezeichnet, die „sich ganz oder teilweise im Eigentum einer oder mehrerer Familien ... befinde[n], [die] aus einer unternehmerischen Verantwortung heraus die Entwicklung des Unternehmens maßgeblich [bestimmen]“ (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 28). Entscheidend ist ebenfalls die transgenerationale Dimension, d.h. die „Frage, wie das Eigentum innerhalb des Familienverbandes weitergegeben wird“ (ebd.), welche die Familienmitglieder stets beschäftigt.

Der von Wolfgang Grupp thematisierte Einfluss des Unternehmens auf die Lebensgestaltung der Unternehmerfamilie kann als *enterpriseness* (vgl. Frank et al., 2019; Hasenzagl, 2018) bezeichnet werden und ist charakteristisch für die Dynamiken in Unternehmerfamilien, deren Erforschung noch recht jung ist (Wimmer et al., 2018b, S. 14). Schröder (2011, 2019) hat herausgefunden, dass die Auswirkungen der Unternehmenspräsenz insbesondere in der Phase der Sozialisation und Erziehung der Kinder und Jugendlichen, die als potenzielle Nachfolger in eine solche „Familie eigener Art“ (Hildenbrand, 2002, S. 118) hineingeboren werden, sichtbar werden. Im Sozialisationsprozess spielen vorwiegend die sowohl vom Familienunternehmen als auch von der Familie beeinflussten Werte als „Leitlinien des eigenen Handelns“ (Schröder, 2011, S. 5) und die Art ihrer Vermittlung eine signifikante Rolle für die kindliche Entwicklung.

Letztere wird in Unternehmerfamilien durch die gleichzeitige Präsenz des Unternehmens und der Familie geprägt, weshalb Fritz B. Simon die kindliche Sozialisation als ein Aufwachsen „zwischen Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7) bezeichnet.

Ausgehend von dieser Argumentation untersucht die vorliegende Arbeit die Auswirkungen der Mitgliedschaft in einer Unternehmerfamilie auf die Sozialisation und die Wertevermittlung ihrer Nachkommen. Ziel der Untersuchung ist es zu überprüfen, inwieweit sich die vermittelten Werte aus der Verbindung von Familie, sprich dem *Gefühl*, und Unternehmen, sprich dem *Geschäft*, ergeben. Somit liegt der Arbeit folgende Forschungsfrage zu Grunde:

„Wie beeinflusst die Verbindung von Familie und Unternehmen die Wertevermittlung in der Sozialisation von Kindern und Jugendlichen in Unternehmerfamilien?“

Die Relevanz die Sozialisation von Nachkommen in Unternehmerfamilien zu betrachten, ergibt sich außerdem aus ihrer Bedeutsamkeit für die Nachfolgefrage. Laut Kormann (2018, S. 79) wird der Grundstein für eine erfolgreiche oder scheiternde Übergabe des Familienunternehmens an die nächste Generation bereits in der Kindheit und Jugend der Nachkommen gelegt. Das Phänomen der Unternehmerfamilie verdient zudem besondere Aufmerksamkeit, da 90 % der deutschen Unternehmen als Familienunternehmen bezeichnet werden können und bei zahlreichen von ihnen in den kommenden Jahren ein Generationenwechsel ansteht (Stiftung Familienunternehmen, 2019). Des Weiteren macht die hohe Misserfolgsquote bei innerfamiliären Übergaben eine Betrachtung der Familie hinter dem Unternehmen notwendig, um den Einfluss von nicht-ökonomischen, emotional-familiären Faktoren auf ein Scheitern der transgenerationalen Weitergabe der Familienbetriebe zu untersuchen (vgl. Haubl und Daser, 2006). Schließlich ist die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung von Deutschland als weltweit viertgrößte Volkswirtschaft vom langfristigen Erhalt der leistungsfähigen Familienunternehmen und damit von gelingenden Unternehmensnachfolgen abhängig (vgl. Kleve, 2020a, S. 30).

1.2. Aufbau der Arbeit

Zur Beantwortung der Forschungsfrage baut sich die vorliegende Arbeit wie folgt auf:

Zunächst wird in *Kapitel 2* in den Begriff der Sozialisation eingeführt und von jenem der Erziehung abgegrenzt. Außerdem wird der Stellenwert der Wertevermittlung in der Sozialisation erläutert und die Familie als primäre Sozialisationsinstanz der Heranwachsenden¹ skizziert.

In *Kapitel 3* wird die Unternehmerfamilie anhand des Drei-Kreise Modells als „Familie eigener Art“ (Hildenbrand, 2002, S. 118) vorgestellt. Besonders hervorgehoben wird

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¹ In dieser Arbeit schließt der Begriff der Heranwachsenden sowohl Kinder als auch Jugendliche bis zu einem Alter von 18 Jahren ein.

die Verbindung von Familie und Unternehmen, d.h. die Verbindung von „Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7), die in *Kapitel 4* als Ausgangspunkt für die Vorstellung der Sozialisationsfaktoren in Unternehmerfamilien dient. Ein besonderer Fokus hierbei liegt auf der Frage der Unternehmensnachfolge. Außerdem wird ein theoretischer Überblick über die wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnisse zu den in Unternehmerfamilien vermittelten Werten gegeben. Mit Verweis auf Schwartz (1992, 1994) wird eine Kategorisierung der Werte vorgenommen und auf Arten ihrer Vermittlung eingegangen.

Dieser Theorieteil soll in Kapitel 5 mit einer empirischen Anreicherung von Zitaten und Paraphrasen aus neun narrativen Interviews ergänzt werden. Letztere wurden im Rahmen eines Lehrforschungsprojektes am Wittener Institut für Familienunternehmen (WIFU) geführt. Ihre Auswertung basiert auf der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse nach Mayring (1991). Die daraus resultierenden Ergebnisse werden in Form von drei Kernwerten festgehalten, die aus der Verbindung von Familie und Unternehmen resultieren und die Kinder und Jugendlichen maßgeblich in ihrer Lebensgestaltung und Haltung zum Familienunternehmen beeinflussen. Es soll untersucht werden, inwieweit das Interviewmaterial die begrenzte wissenschaftliche Literatur zur Sozialisation in Unternehmerfamilien ergänzen bzw. einen Ausgangspunkt für weitere Forschungen darstellen kann.

Im *Fazit* werden die Erkenntnisse dieser Arbeit zusammengefasst, die oben aufgeführte Forschungsfrage beantwortet, Handlungsimplicationen für die Mitglieder in Unternehmerfamilien abgeleitet und ein Ausblick für weiterführende Vertiefungen des Forschungsfeldes vorgeschlagen.

2. Sozialisation und Wertevermittlung in Kindheit und Jugend

2.1. Sozialisation und Erziehung

Der Soziologe Hurrelmann definiert den Begriff der Sozialisation als einen „Prozess der Verarbeitung der inneren Realität von körperlichen und psychischen Impulsen und der äußeren Realität von sozialen und physikalischen Umweltimpulsen“ (Hurrelmann, 2002, S. 28). Diese andauernd stattfindende Anpassungsleistung an sowohl innere als auch äußere Reize ist für jedes Individuum ein lebenslanger, nie abgeschlossener Prozess, der in den Phasen der Kindheit und Jugend seinen Ursprung findet (vgl. Schröder, 2019, S. 205). In der Wissenschaft herrscht Unklarheit in Bezug auf die Abgrenzung dieser beiden Phasen. Die vorliegende Arbeit bezieht sich auf die altersgemäße Differenzierung nach Quenzel (2015), welche die Phase vor dem 12. Lebensjahr der Kindheit zuordnet und ab dem 12. bis zum 18. Lebensjahr die Phase der Jugend eintreten sieht.

Es lassen sich drei Sozialisationsinstanzen benennen, die jedes Individuum auf dem Weg zum „Menschwerden“ (Faulstich-Wieland, 2000, S. 10) begleiten und in seiner persönlichen Entwicklung prägen. Die Familie, Verwandte und Freunde stellen die primären „Sozialisationsagenten“

(Schneewind & Lukesch, 1978, S. 11) dar. Die sozialen Einrichtungen des Kindergartens, der Schule und der Bildungseinrichtungen repräsentieren die sekundäre Sozialisationsinstanz (vgl. Caspary, 2018, S. 112). Diverse Freizeitorganisationen, die Medien und der Beruf sind dem tertiären Sozialisationsumfeld zuzuordnen (vgl. ebd.; Hurrelmann, 2002, S. 34). Die vorliegende Arbeit fokussiert sich auf die primäre bzw. familiäre Sozialisation, welche in *Kapitel 2.3* näher erläutert wird.

Während die Sozialisation als „ein permanenter, sozialer Prozess, der die individuelle Entwicklung eines jeden Menschen einbettet und rahmt“ (Kleve, 2020a, S. 18) definiert werden kann, ist es an dieser Stelle relevant eine Abgrenzung zum Begriff der Erziehung vorzunehmen. Unter Erziehung lässt sich der Versuch verstehen, die vermehrt unterbewusst ablaufenden Sozialisationsprozesse bewusst zu steuern. Somit bezeichnet Schröder die von Eltern kommunizierten erzieherischen Maßnahmen als „absichtsvolle, soziale Handlung“ (Schröder, 2019, S. 206), bei welchen die Erziehenden erreichen möchten, dass ihre Kinder zielgerichtet ihr Denken, Erleben und Handeln verändern (ebd.: S. 28). Die Einflussmöglichkeiten durch diese intentionalen Steuerungsversuche der Eltern sind jedoch aufgrund der Unmöglichkeit das nicht-triviale, unberechenbare Verhalten von Kindern zu lenken, sehr beschränkt (vgl. Kleve, 2020a). Kleve (ebd.) argumentiert, dass überwiegend die Art und Weise, wie Eltern ihr Leben führen einen besonders großen Einfluss auf die Entwicklung ihrer Kinder hat.

Um die Anforderungen an das familiäre Sozialisationsumfeld zu verdeutlichen, sollen im Folgenden zentrale Entwicklungsaufgaben von Kindern und Jugendlichen vorgestellt werden. Laut Quenzel (2018, S. 1) werden diese Herausforderungen von den körperlichen Veränderungen und Wachstumsprozessen, die psychisch verarbeitet werden müssen, umrahmt. Diese treiben auch die Entwicklung einer geschlechtsbezogenen Identität voran (vgl. ebd.). Die erste jugendliche Entwicklungsaufgabe umfasst den „Aufbau sozialer Beziehungen“ (ebd.: S. 8), die eine emotionale Distanzierung von den Eltern impliziert und gleichzeitig zu einer sukzessiven Annäherung an die Gruppe der Gleichaltrigen führt. Letztere fungieren als Beobachter und Bewerter des elterlichen Erziehungsverhaltens (vgl. Kormann, 2018, S. 75; Simon, 2007, S. 89). Gleichzeitig zu diesem familiären Abnabelungsprozess sind Jugendliche mit der Aufgabe des „Partizipieren[s]“ (Quenzel, 2018, S. 1) konfrontiert. Durch die Einbettung in verschiedene soziale Kontexte (Familie, Schule, Freundeskreis, Sportverein etc.) entwickeln sie eigene Werte als Orientierungsrahmen zum Engagement in der Gemeinschaft (ebd.). Hierbei lernen sie ein Verständnis für ihre sozialen Rollen und ihre individuelle Bedeutsamkeit als Teil einer Gemeinschaft auszubilden (vgl. ebd.: S. 8). Im Bereich der schulischen Anforderungen sind Jugendliche zudem mit der Aufgabe des „Qualifizieren[s]“ (ebd.) konfrontiert, welche mit der Ausbildung beruflicher Kompetenzen einhergeht. Diese Entwicklung ermöglicht die wertvolle Erfahrung von Selbstwirksamkeit und finanzieller Autonomie. Zum Ausgleich dieser Entwicklungsaufgabe müssen Heran-

wachsende das „Regenerieren“ (ebd.) erlernen. Hierbei geht es um das Kennenlernen und Anwenden von Entspannungstechniken und das Ausbilden eines „emotional souveräne[n] Umgang[s] mit [den] vielfältigen Freizeit- und Konsumangeboten“ (ebd.: S. 1).

Schwierigkeiten bei der Bewältigung dieser Entwicklungsaufgaben können Ausgangspunkt für das Entwickeln psychischer Erkrankungen sein, beispielweise durch Überforderung, eine hohe Erwartungshaltung der Eltern oder unzureichende schulische Leistungen. Deswegen bezeichnet Quenzel die Phase der Adoleszenz als „gesundheitlich vulnerable Phase“ (Quenzel, 2018, S. 8).

Es ist als prägender Faktor hervorzuheben, dass die Entwicklungsanforderungen an Kinder und Jugendliche insbesondere durch das Erleben von Widersprüchlichkeiten beeinflusst werden. So formuliert Quenzel, dass die Heranwachsenden mit der Bewältigung folgender Anforderungen konfrontiert sind:

[W]idersprüchliche Entwicklungsaufgaben zeitlich und inhaltlich vereinbaren, ... mit Überforderungen umgehen und Konflikte zwischen den Erwartungen ihres Umfeldes und ihren persönlichen Bedürfnissen, Einstellungen und Interessen produktiv lösen. (Quenzel, 2018, S. 2)

Diese aus den verschiedenen Sozialisationsumfeldern entstehenden Paradoxien, d.h. „sich logisch ausschließenden, widersprüchlichen Handlungsanweisungen“ (Simon, 2012, S. 29), machen laut Fritz B. Simon (2000, S. 146) für die Kinder und Jugendlichen das Ausbilden eines Paradoxienmanagements notwendig (vgl. von Schlippe und Groth, 2012). Hierbei geht es um das herausfordernde Trennen von Kontexten zwischen dem Innen, der familiären Sphäre, und dem Außen, der gesellschaftlichen Sphäre, als übergreifende Hauptentwicklungsaufgabe von Heranwachsenden auf dem Weg zur Ausbildung ihrer eigenen Identität. Darüber hinaus wirken sich die Paradoxien auf einen essenziellen Teil der Sozialisation aus: die Wertevermittlung, welche im Folgenden näher beschrieben wird.

2.2. Wertevermittlung

Das Verhalten eines jeden Menschen basiert auf bestimmten Prinzipien, die einen großen Teil der eigenen Identität ausmachen. Sie prägen unsere Persönlichkeit im alltäglichen Leben und in den zwischenmenschlichen Interaktionen und schenken uns Orientierung „in kommunikativen Situationen“ (Luhmann, 1997, S. 341f.). In Anlehnung an Schwartz (1992, 1994) bezeichnet Schröder diese anzustrebenden „abstrakte[n] Ziele und Leitlinien des eigenen Handelns“ (Schröder, 2011, S. 5) als *Werte*. Sie lenken als essenzielle „Säule der Identität“ (von Schlippe, 2021, Folie 9) unterbewusst unser Verhalten und unsere Haltung in sozialen Beziehungen (vgl. Kleve, 2020b, Folie 4). Beispielsweise ermöglicht unser Wertesystem das Bewerten und damit das persönliche Einordnen von Handlungen anderer Menschen und unsere Einstellung ihnen gegenüber (Luhmann, 1984,

S. 433). Diese kann entweder anerkennender oder ablehnender Natur sein (vgl. Kleve, 2020b, Folie 4).

Luhmann (1984, S. 434) stellt fest, dass Werte häufig erst dann sichtbar werden und an Bedeutung gewinnen, wenn sie sich von anderen Werten abgrenzen. Durch ein Aufeinandertreffen widersprüchlicher Werte (z.B. Kontrolle und Freiheit) und ihrer gegenseitigen Infragestellung, geben sich die jeweiligen Werte nach von Schlippe (2021) erst zu erkennen.

Außerdem stellt das Entwickeln und das Verinnerlichen eigener Werte im Sozialisationsprozess von Kindern und Jugendlichen eine wichtige psychologische Entwicklungsaufgabe dar (vgl. Quenzel, 2015). Dementsprechend entwickeln die Heranwachsenden ihren eigenen identitätsstiftenden Werterahmen, welcher sich durch das wechselseitige Zustimmung zu und Abgrenzen von Werten aus ihren sozialisationen Umfeldern ergibt. Zudem betont Schröder (2011, S. 5), dass die Wertvermittlung ein elementarer Bestandteil der Beziehung, Erziehung und Kommunikation von Eltern und ihren Kindern darstellt. Werte, die in der Familie geteilt und in „transgenerativer Mission“ (Kreppner, 1991, S. 322) an die Nachkommen weitergegeben werden, können Familienmitglieder über Generationen miteinander verbinden und somit den familiären Zusammenhalt sichern (vgl. von Schlippe, 2021).

Die verschiedenen Arten und Kategorien von Werten betreffend, lässt sich auf die Theorie universeller Werte von Shalom H. Schwartz (1992, 1994) verweisen. Seine Annahmen haben sich in der Sozialpsychologie als häufig angewandtes Konzept bewährt und auch die Argumentation Schröder (2011), auf welcher Kapitel 4.2 basiert, hat seine Wertekategorien als Grundlage. Folglich soll das Werteverständnis von Schwartz vorgestellt werden.

Schwartz benennt die Wertedimensionen „Selbst-Erhöhung“, „Offenheit für Wandel“, „Selbstüberwindung“ und „Bewahrung“ (Schwartz, 1992, S. 45). Diesen übergeordneten Dimensionen ordnet er folgende Wertekategorien unter: Werte der Macht und Leistung fallen unter die Wertedimension „Selbsterhöhung“, Werte des Hedonismus, der Stimulation und der Selbstüberwindung sind der Wertedimension „Offenheit für Wandel“ zuzuordnen, Universalismus und Benevolenz lassen sich der „Selbst-Überwindung“ unterordnen und Tradition, Konformität und Sicherheit fallen unter die Wertedimension der „Bewahrung“ (ebd.: S. 6f.).

In *Tabelle 1* sind die angesprochenen Wertedimensionen mit ihren Unterkategorien und zentralen Beispielwerten dargestellt.

Diese Werte dienen für *Kapitel 4.2* als theoretische Grundlage zur Einordnung der im Sozialisationsprozess in Unternehmerfamilien beobachteten und vermittelten Werte.

2.3. Die Familie als primäre „Sozialisationsagentur“

Als primäre „Sozialisationsagenten“ (Schneewind & Lukesch, 1978, S. 11) haben die Familienmitglieder in der Vermittlung der in *Kapitel 2.2* genannten Werte einen besonders großen Einfluss auf die Entwicklung der heranwachsenden Kinder und Jugendlichen. Aus systemtheoretischer

Tabelle 1: Wertedimensionen und -kategorien. Eigene Darstellung in Anlehnung an Schwartz (1992, 1994).

Selbst-Erhöhung	<i>Macht</i>	Autorität, Vermögen, soziale Anerkennung
	<i>Leistung</i>	Erfolg, Kompetenz, Einfluss
Selbst-Überwindung	<i>Universalismus</i>	Gleichheit, soziale Gerechtigkeit
	<i>Benevolenz</i>	Verantwortung, Hilfsbereitschaft, Loyalität, Ehrlichkeit
Bewahrung	<i>Tradition</i>	Demut und Respekt, Bescheidenheit
	<i>Konformität</i>	Selbst-Disziplin, Höflichkeit, Gehorsam
	<i>Sicherheit</i>	Familiäre Sicherheit, Gesundheit, Sauberkeit
Offenheit für Wandel	<i>Hedonismus</i>	Vergnügen und Genuss
	<i>Stimulation</i>	Abwechslungsreiches Leben
	<i>Selbstbestimmung</i>	Freiheit, Unabhängigkeit, Kreativität

Perspektive kann die familiäre Einheit als soziales System definiert werden, das „über verwandtschaftliche Abstammungs- und enge Gefühlsverhältnisse hinsichtlich ihrer Mitgliedschaft biologisch und emotional geprägt“ ist (Kleve, 2020a, S. 24). Neben dieser emotionalen und verwandtschaftlich-genetischen Verbundenheit ist das Sozialsystem Familie durch seine autopoetische Eigenschaft charakterisierbar. Die interne Reproduktion bzw. das Zeugen von Nachkommen, trägt zum Selbsterhalt des Systems bei (Simon, 2000, S. 141). Somit wird der Familienverbund von Generation zu Generation vergrößert. Jedes einzelne Familienmitglied ist mit der Gesamtheit seines Daseins, das heißt mit seinen biologischen, psychischen und sozialen Grundbedürfnissen in die Familie integriert (vgl. Kleve, 2017, S. 112, Kleve, 2020a, S. 78; Simon, 2000). Diese ganzheitliche Einbettung des Individuums in das System Familie beginnt bereits mit dem Erwerb der familiären Mitgliedschaft durch die Geburt, dessen Kündigung zu Lebzeiten nicht möglich ist (vgl. Claessens und Menne, 1973, S. 328).

Neben der Aufgabe der „sozialen Reproduktion“ (Caspary, 2018, S. 226) hat die Familie laut von Schlippe et al. die „Funktion, ihren Mitgliedern einen Rückzugsraum zu sichern [und] eine Gegenwelt individueller Anerkennung und emotionaler Verbundenheit zu bieten“ (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 98). Hieraus ergibt sich ihre Funktion als familiäre „Sozialisationsagentur“ (Gottschalch et al., 1972, S. 26). Im Sozialisationsprozess sind die Eltern insbesondere für die angemessene Vorbereitung der Kinder auf gesellschaftliche Anforderungen, das Festlegen und Aushandeln von Regeln für ein faires Miteinander, das Demonstrieren von Solidarität und Unterstützung in Krisenmomenten und das Sicherstellen der auf einem Geben und Nehmen basierenden Interaktionen und Kommunikationen zuständig (vgl. Kleve, 2017, S. 111; Kormann, 2018, S. 56). Es ist als familiärer Auftrag zu verstehen, die Kinder auf das „unauffällige“ (Simon, 2000, S. 144) Verhalten in Kontexten in der nichtfamiliären, öffentlichen Sphäre adäquat vorzubereiten (vgl. Caspary, 2018).

Die Familie als „soziales Unterstützungssystem“ (Schröder, 2019, S. 205) und insbesondere die Eltern können als Impulsgeber für die Entwicklung der Heranwachsenden angesehen werden. Dies geschieht primär über das Vorleben von Verhaltens- und Kommunikationsweisen, das angemessene Eingehen auf die „bio-psycho-sozialen“ (Kleve, 2017,

S. 112) Bedürfnisse des Kindes und das Vermitteln von Werten, sozialen (bspw. geschlechterspezifischen) Rollen und Erwartungshaltungen (vgl. Caspary, 2018, S. 183; Schröder, 2019). Durch das Imitieren und Adaptieren der vom Kind beobachteten Werte-, Erwartungs- und Rollenvorstellungen bildet es eine eigene Identität aus, die sich zum Teil an jener der Eltern und der Gleichaltrigen orientiert, jedoch auch klar abgrenzt (vgl. Caspary, 2018, S. 183).

Zusammenfassend kann festgehalten werden, dass der Familie der Auftrag zugesprochen werden kann, Rahmenbedingungen zu schaffen, die dem Kind einen altersgemäßen Umgang und eine eigene Positionierung bezüglich der stetig präsenten Paradoxien von Werten, Rollen und Erwartungskontexten ermöglichen.

3. Die Unternehmerfamilie zwischen „Gefühl und Geschäft“

3.1. Die Unternehmerfamilie als „Familie eigener Art“

Das Forschungsfeld rund um das Phänomen der Unternehmerfamilie ist noch jung, da dieses erst seit den 1990er Jahren von Forschenden aus überwiegend sozialwissenschaftlichen Disziplinen aufgegriffen wird (vgl. Kleve, 2020a). Es gibt folglich keine einheitliche Definition der Unternehmerfamilie, jedoch hat sich die Formulierung nach dem Wittener Modell der Unternehmerfamilie als prominente Größe im Bereich seiner Erforschung herausgestellt. Dementsprechend basiert die vorliegende Arbeit auf folgender Definition:

Von einer Unternehmerfamilie sprechen wir, wenn eine abgrenzbare Gruppe von Menschen in einem verwandtschaftlichen Verhältnis zueinandersteht ... und wenn diese in ihrer Entwicklung durch ein im Eigentum einzelner, mehrerer oder aller Familienmitglieder befindliches Unternehmen geprägt wird. ... Die Frage wie das Eigentum innerhalb des Familienverbandes weitergegeben wird, ist ein Thema, das die Familie beschäftigt. (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 28)

Hieraus lässt sich folgern, dass das Sozialsystem der Familie mit seinen verwandtschaftlichen Verbindungen zwischen

den Mitgliedern (*siehe Kapitel 2.3*) im Falle einer Unternehmerfamilie durch die Präsenz eines in maßgeblicher Weise durch die Familie beeinflussten Unternehmens erweitert wird. Der auf das Unternehmen ausgeübte Einfluss kann in Form einer operativen Tätigkeit oder einer kontrollierenden Gesellschafter- bzw. Aufsichtsrat-Funktion ausgeübt werden (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 28). Aufgrund dieser familiären Lenkungsmacht, die auf die Entwicklung des Unternehmens wirkt, kann von einem Familienunternehmen gesprochen werden (vgl. Klein, 2004, S. 18; Simon, 2012, S. 16).

Des Weiteren definiert Hildenbrand die Unternehmerfamilie als „Familie eigener Art“ (Hildenbrand, 2002, S. 118), da das im Hintergrund stehende Unternehmen die Lebensführung und die Entwicklung der Identität der Familienmitglieder signifikant beeinflusst (vgl. von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 24). Dies impliziert sowohl eine emotionale als auch eine ökonomische Abhängigkeit der Familie in Bezug auf das Familienunternehmen. Somit könnte eine Auflösung des Familienunternehmens einen Verlust des Arbeitsplatzes und der materiellen Existenz der tätigen Mitglieder, eine Beschädigung ihrer Reputation, eine daraus resultierende Verletzung des Selbstwertgefühls und ein Auseinanderfallen der Familienstrukturen bedeuten. Folglich würde das „transgenerationale Lebenswerk“ (Caspary, 2018, S. 13) der Familie auseinanderbrechen (vgl. Rösen und von Schlippe, 2007, S. 317ff.). Durch diese Erläuterung wird deutlich, dass das Unternehmen als sogenanntes „Drittes“ (Wimmer et al., 2018a, S. 192), d.h. als eine familieninterne, identitätsstiftende Aufgabe, wie ein Band fungiert, das die Familienmitglieder untereinander emotional verbindet und zum transgenerationalen Erhalt des unternehmensbezogenen Eigentums verpflichtet (vgl. Kleve, 2021; von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 24). Wimmer et al. bringen diesen generationenübergreifenden Anspruch der Unternehmerfamilie folgendermaßen zum Ausdruck: „Sie sind auf einen längeren Zeitraum, auf Kontinuität, auf die Verlängerung in die Zukunft, auf die Überwindung der Endlichkeit einer Generation hin angelegt“ (Wimmer et al., 2018a, S. 196).

Dementsprechend kann die Familie als Ressource angesehen werden, die Identität stiftet, Zusammenhalt sichert und damit für einen Wettbewerbsvorteil des Familienunternehmens sorgen kann. Dieses als *familiness* zu bezeichnende Phänomen schließt jedoch auch den Fall ein, dass die Unternehmerfamilie zum größten Risikofaktor der betrieblichen Existenz werden kann, sollten familiäre Konflikte die unternehmerischen Prozesse negativ beeinflussen (vgl. von Schlippe et al., 2017). Die vorliegende Arbeit hingegen fokussiert sich nicht auf den Einfluss der Familiendynamik auf das Familienunternehmen, sondern untersucht, wie einleitend erwähnt, die enterpriseness, das heißt die Auswirkungen der Präsenz des familiären Betriebes auf die Familie (vgl. Frank et al., 2019; Hasenzagl, 2018).

In der wissenschaftlichen Erforschung der Unternehmerfamilie haben sich verschiedene Erklärungsansätze herausgebildet, die die Besonderheit dieses sozialen Systems näher beschreiben. Im Folgenden wird dementsprechend das erweiterte Drei-Kreise Modell vorgestellt, um einen umfassenden

Überblick über die Faktoren, welche die Mitglieder einer Unternehmerfamilie beeinflussen, zu erhalten.

3.2. Das erweiterte Drei-Kreise Modell

Tagiuri und Davis (1996, S. 201) beschreiben drei Dimensionen, darstellbar als drei Kreise (*siehe Abbildung 1*), in die die Mitglieder einer Unternehmerfamilie eingebettet sind: die eigentumsrechtliche, unternehmerische und familiär-soziale Dimension. Ausgehend von diesem „dreidimensionale[n]“ (Kleve, 2020a, S. 35) Spannungsfeld lassen sich drei verschiedene ‚Spielfelder‘ ableiten: Gesellschafterversammlungen der Dimension Eigentum, Unternehmenstreffen der Dimension Unternehmen und Familienfeiern der Dimension Familie, die jeweils andere Kommunikationssysteme mit spezifischen Kommunikationsregeln darstellen. Schlippe et al. bezeichnen dies als „andersartige Verknüpfung kommunikativer Ereignisse aufgrund unterschiedlicher Erwartungen“ (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 74). Abhängig davon, welche Mitgliedschaft des Bereichs Eigentum, Unternehmen und Familie eine Person innehält, besitzt sie bestimmte „(Teil-) Identität[en]“ (Simon, 2002, S. 370), die sich überschneiden, jedoch auch klar voneinander abgrenzen können. Während für ein Familienmitglied das Sichern der familiären Verbundenheit und des Zusammenhalts höchste Priorität hat, visieren Gesellschafter eine Maximierung der Rendite durch sachgerechte, effiziente Entscheidungen an, während Geschäftsführer eine „hohe Gewinnthesaurierung“ (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 77–81) priorisieren.

In Familienunternehmen und Unternehmerfamilien ist nicht eine Trennung dieser Mitgliedschaften, sondern ihre stetig präsente Überlappung der Fall (vgl. Tagiuri und Davis, 1996, S. 201; von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 85). Von Schlippe et al. bezeichnen dieses Phänomen der Gleichzeitigkeit von widersprüchlichen Verhaltens- und Rollenerwartungen als „Polykontextualität“ (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 78). Besteht keine Bereitschaft die multiplen Rollen in den interaktiven und kommunikativen Prozessen zwischen den Mitgliedern kontextual zu trennen, können sogenannte „schräge kommunikative Anschlüsse“ (von Schlippe, 2018, S. 248) entstehen. Diese können zu familiären Konflikten und im schlimmsten Fall zum Untergang des Familienunternehmens führen (vgl. Simon, 2002, S. 11). Die Beobachtung, dass in Unternehmerfamilien „in vielen existenziellen und hoch emotional besetzten Fragen Bindungs-, Entscheidungs- und Eigentums-Kommunikation untrennbar zusammen [fallen]“ (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 85), macht es für die Unternehmerfamilie zur überlebenswichtigen Bedingung einen konstruktiven Umgang mit diesen Paradoxien, d.h. Widersprüchlichkeiten, zu finden.

Von Schlippe et al. (2017, S. 96f.) erweitern das Drei-Kreise Modell und stellen die Theorie der „verdoppelten Familie“ vor. Dieses Konzept legt den Fokus weniger auf die überlappenden Rollen einzelner Personen, sondern auf die durchgehend präsente „Doppelgesichtigkeit“ (Kleve, 2021, S. 129) der Unternehmerfamilie. Groth und von Schlippe (2019, S. 274) drücken diesen doppelten Auftrag mit den Aussagen „Sei Familie!“ und „Sei Unternehmerfamilie!“ aus.

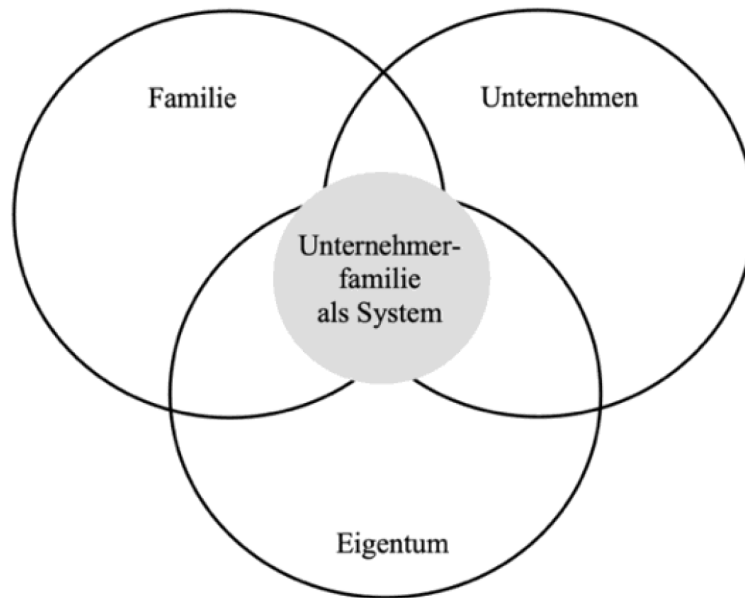


Abbildung 1: Das erweiterte Drei-Kreise Modell nach Kleve (2021, S. 4).

Diese zwei Forderungen werden insbesondere bei wachsenden Unternehmerfamilien stärker, weshalb ein Blick auf die drei Komplexitäts- bzw. Entwicklungsstufen der Unternehmerfamilie als sinnvoll erscheint.

Kleve (2020a) stellt die Unternehmerfamilie 1.0 als Kernfamilie, bestehend aus bis zu drei Generationen, vor. Aufgrund des starken Bezugs zu den Gründern des Unternehmens ist die Familie sehr stark an das Unternehmen gekoppelt und auch die Familiarität zwischen den Mitgliedern ist gegeben. Die Unternehmerfamilie 2.0 wird von Kleve (ebd.) als formell organisierte Familie bezeichnet, für dessen Zusammenhalt die Etablierung eines Familienmanagements relevant wird. Dies ist auf die bei wachsender Anzahl der Familienmitglieder zunehmende Zersplitterung der Eigentumsanteile und räumliche Distanzierung der Personen zurückzuführen, welche insbesondere in der Unternehmerfamilie 3.0, der „dynastische[n] Familie“ (Rüsen et al., 2019, S. 227), beobachtet werden kann. In diesen mehrgenerationalen Familienunternehmen (ab 50 Mitglieder) müssen zum „Erhalt und Zusammenhalt der Eigentümer- und Familiengemeinschaft“ (ebd.: S. 229ff.) kommunikative Netzwerke zwischen den Verwandten etabliert werden (vgl. Rüsen et al., 2021, S. 14ff.; Kleve, 2021). Das Formulieren und Festhalten gemeinsamer Werte (z.B. in einer Familienverfassung) und ihre Vermittlung an die Nachkommen in Unternehmerfamilien kann eine Zusammenhalt stiftende Maßnahme darstellen, auf die in Kapitel 4 näher eingegangen wird.

Im folgenden Kapitel wird die für das „Wesen der Unternehmerfamilie“ (Kleve, 2021, S. 124) charakteristische Gleichzeitigkeit der sachorientierten Unternehmenslogik und der bindungsorientierten Familienlogik vorgestellt. Diese zielt darauf ab die theoretische Grundlage dieser Arbeit, den Gegensatz „zwischen Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7), zu erläutern.

3.3. Zwischen „Gefühl und Geschäft“: Verbindung von Familie und Unternehmen

Zunächst kann festgehalten werden, dass die Unternehmerfamilie und ihre Lebenswelt ein konträres Phänomen zum gesellschaftlichen Trend der „funktionalen Differenzierung“ (Simon, 2012, S. 18) darstellt. Letztere Entwicklung impliziert das Trennen einzelner Funktionsbereiche wie der Bildung, Wirtschaft, Politik etc. und ihre arbeitsteilige Organisation in Subsystemen (ebd.). Diese Ausdifferenzierung der Lebenswelten wird in Unternehmerfamilien umgekehrt: Es kommt zu einem „Ineinanderfließen der ... Lebensräume“ (Wimmer et al., 2018a, S. 189), da sich durch die Präsenz des Familienunternehmens die Trennung zwischen Wohn- und Arbeitsbereich und zwischen Freizeit und Beruf auflöst. Somit stellen Familie und Unternehmen für sich gegenseitig eine unmittelbare Umwelt dar und können als „Entwicklungsgemeinschaft“ (Simon, 2012, S. 31) bezeichnet werden. Von Schlippe et al. wagen die provokante Aussage „Familie und Unternehmen passen eigentlich nicht zusammen!“ (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 72). Im Folgenden soll erläutert werden auf welche Widersprüchlichkeiten „zwischen Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7) diese Aussage zurückzuführen ist.

Sowohl die Familie als auch das Unternehmen können als soziale Systeme bezeichnet werden, die auf den Interaktionen und Kommunikationen der Mitglieder beruhen (vgl. Luhmann, 1984). Der Unterschied jedoch liegt in der Ausgestaltung ihrer Systemlogiken bzw. den ‚Spielregeln‘, die das Miteinander in diesen beiden sozialen Kontexten bestimmen (vgl. Simon, 2012, S. 15). In der Familie sind die Familienmitglieder durch ihre verwandtschaftliche Zugehörigkeit und emotionale Verbundenheit fest aneinandergeschlüsselt (vgl. Caspary, 2018, S. 32; Kleve, 2020a, S. 50). Die Mitgliedschaft wird mit der Geburt eines neuen Familienmitglieds er-

worben und ist in der Regel nicht kündbar (ebd.). Zudem steht die Eingebundenheit eines jeden Mitglieds mit seiner gesamten Persönlichkeit im Fokus der Personenorientierung der familiären Gemeinschaft, was zudem eine Austauschbarkeit der Familienmitglieder ausschließt (vgl. Simon, 2002, S. 20; Wimmer et al., 2018a, S. 185).

Im deutlichen Gegensatz hierzu steht die sach- und funktionsorientierte Logik des Unternehmens (vgl. Caspary, 2018, S. 32). Diese führt dazu, dass der Mitarbeiter auf seine Arbeitsleistung reduziert wird, seine vertragliche Mitgliedschaft kündbar ist und somit die beschäftigten Personen austauschbar sind (vgl. Simon, 2002, S. 20, 2012, S. 21; Kleve, 2020a, S. 50). Die Organisation und sein Mitglied sind kurzfristig und lose aneinandergeschnürt, wobei das „Geld“ (Kleve, 2020a, S. 50) das Medium ist, mit welchem die formell festgelegte Leistung entlohnt wird (vgl. Simon, 2002, S. 21).

Die Familie hingegen wird von Fritz B. Simon als „ökonomiefreie Zone“ (Simon, 2002, S. 12f.) beschrieben, in der das Medium „Liebe“ (ebd.) Verbundenheit und familiären Zusammenhalt zwischen den Mitgliedern stiftet (vgl. Kleve, 2020a, S. 50). Erwartete Gegenleistungen oder ein ‚Lohn‘ werden in ideeller Weise beglichen, wobei „langfristige Kreditlinien“ (ebd.: S. 25) gelten. Dies bedeutet, dass für eine Leistung erst Jahre oder Jahrzehnte später eine Gegenleistung, bspw. in Form einer Pflege der Eltern, eingefordert werden kann. Da in der Familie das Gemeinwohl Vorrang vor individuellen Belangen hat, ist die Aufopferungsbereitschaft der Mitglieder aber auch das Gerechtigkeitsprinzip sehr stark ausgeprägt (vgl. Simon, 2002, S. 25).

Aufgrund der Kündbarkeit der formalen Mitgliedschaft haben in Unternehmen die individuellen Bedürfnisse Vorrang vor den organisationalen Belangen (vgl. Caspary, 2018, S. 32). Es werden primär materielle Ziele und das ökonomische Überleben des Betriebes verfolgt (vgl. Simon, 2012, S. 32ff.). Die stattfindenden Interaktionen und Kommunikationen sind „stark formalisiert“ (Caspary, 2018, S. 32) und nur untergeordnet von Emotionen geprägt (vgl. Simon, 2012, S. 32ff.).

Im Gegensatz hierzu steht die Kommunikation in der Familie, welche überwiegend informell abläuft und von den Gefühlen der anwesenden Familienmitglieder geleitet wird (vgl. Caspary, 2018, S. 32). Wimmer et al. bezeichnen diese bindungsorientierte Kommunikation auch als familiäre „Intimkommunikation“ (Wimmer et al., 2018a, S. 186).

Die aufgeführten widersprüchlichen „Systemrationalitäten“ (Simon, 2012, S. 18) von Familie und Unternehmen können *Tabelle 2* entnommen werden.

Im Fall der Unternehmerfamilie verbinden sich die dargestellten widersprüchlichen Funktionslogiken von „Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7). Die Präsenz des Familienunternehmens bildet den Rahmen, in welchem sich die Familie und das Unternehmen als relevante Umwelten wechselseitig irritieren und als „koevolutionäre Einheit“ (Simon, 2012, S. 119) weiterentwickeln. Diese permanente Gleichzeitigkeit eines sachlich-ökonomischen und emotional-persönlichen Kontextes konfrontiert die Mitglieder von Unternehmerfamili-

en mit „unentscheidbaren Widersprüchen“ (Kleve, 2020a, S. 46) und paradoxen Handlungsanweisungen (vgl. Simon, 2012; von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 87). Dies resultiert insbesondere aus den fehlenden „Kontextmarkierungen“ (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 79), welche eine Zuordnung der Erwartungen, Rollen und Kommunikationen zu den Bereichen der Familie oder des Unternehmens ermöglichen würden. Fehlen diese, kommt es zu einem „double bind“ (Bateson, 1981, S. 374), d.h. zu einem Verschwimmen der widersprüchlichen Kontexte und einer inneren Zerrissenheit „zwischen Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7) (vgl. von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 79). Dementsprechend formulieren Wimmer et al. (2018a, S. 188) folgende Anforderung an diese „Familie eigener Art“ (Hildenbrand, 2002, S. 118):

Unternehmerfamilien müssen die Fähigkeit entwickeln sich sowohl als Familie angemessen zu versorgen wie auch ihrer Eigentümerfunktion und der damit verbundenen unternehmerischen Verantwortung gleichermaßen nachzukommen, ohne diese beiden Dimensionen ständig heillos miteinander vermengt prozessieren zu müssen.

Dies fassen von Schlippe et al. (2017, S. 91) in der zentralen Aufgabe der Unternehmerfamilie „produktive Formen der Paradoxiebearbeitung zu entwickeln“ zusammen, um sowohl die familiäre Verbundenheit aufrechtzuerhalten als auch unternehmerisch handlungs- und entscheidungsfähig zu bleiben.

Diese zu bewältigenden Paradoxien wirken sich unmittelbar auf die Lebenswelten und die individuelle Entwicklung der Familienmitglieder aus. Aufgrund der Beobachtung, dass das „Unternehmen Einzug in das familiäre System“ (Caspary, 2018, S. 267) findet, lässt sich erneut der Begriff der enterpriseness anführen (vgl. Frank et al., 2019; Hasenzagl, 2018). Dementsprechend rahmt das Eindringen der unternehmerischen Logik in die Familiendynamik die Bedingungen, in denen Nachkommen in Unternehmerfamilien sozialisiert werden.

Die Auswirkungen der Verbindung von „Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7) auf die Sozialisation und die Wertvermittlung von Kindern und Jugendlichen in Unternehmerfamilien sollen im folgenden *Kapitel 4* erläutert werden.

4. Theorie: Wertevermittlung in der Sozialisation von Kindern und Jugendlichen in Unternehmerfamilien

4.1. Die Unternehmerfamilie und ihre Sozialisation „eigener Art“

Wie bereits in *Kapitel 2* erläutert, sind Kinder und Jugendliche mit zahlreichen Entwicklungsaufgaben konfrontiert (vgl. Quenzel, 2018, S. 1). Sie müssen einen Umgang mit den widersprüchlichen Erwartungen, Rollen und Bedürfnissen der verschiedenen Sozialisationsumfelder erlernen. Wenn ein Kind in eine Unternehmerfamilie hineingeboren wird, ist es nicht nur Teil einer „Familie eigener Art“ (Hildenbrand, 2002, S. 118), sondern erfährt auch eine *Sozialisation eigener Art*. Der in der alltäglichen Lebenswelt der

Tabelle 2: Widersprüchliche Systemlogiken von Familie und Unternehmen. Eigene Darstellung in Anlehnung an Caspary (2018), Kleve (2020a), Simon (2002, 2012), von Schlippe et al. (2017) und Wimmer et al. (2018a).

Familie („Gefühl“)	Unternehmen („Geschäft“)
Personen- und bindungsorientiertes Sozialsystem	Funktions- und sachorientiertes Sozialsystem
Feste Kopplung der Mitglieder durch das Medium Liebe: verwandtschaftliche Zugehörigkeit und emotionale Verbundenheit	Lose Kopplung der Mitglieder durch das Medium Geld: monetäre Entlohnung für vertraglich festgelegte Arbeitsleistungen/Funktion
Zwangsmitgliedschaft: Erwerb mit der Geburt	Freiwillige Mitgliedschaft: Erwerb durch aktive Entscheidung dafür
Nicht-Austauschbarkeit der Mitglieder und Unkündbarkeit ihrer lebenslänglichen Mitgliedschaft	Austauschbarkeit der Mitglieder und Kündbarkeit ihrer befristeten Mitgliedschaft
Ideelle Ziele: Fokus auf Gefühle	Materielle Ziele: Fokus auf Rationalität
Das familiäre Gemeinwohl hat Vorrang vor Bedürfnissen der einzelnen Mitglieder	Individuelle Bedürfnisse haben Vorrang vor organisationalen Belangen
Informelle Intimkommunikation	Formalisierte Kommunikation

Familie ständig präsente Gegensatz von Unternehmens- und Familienlogik fordert den zu entwickelnden Umgang mit Paradoxien in besonderer Weise heraus. Im Folgenden soll auf die für Unternehmerfamilien charakteristischen Sozialisationsbedingungen für Kinder und Jugendliche eingegangen werden. Ausgangspunkt hierfür ist die in Kapitel 3.3 beschriebene Verbindung von Familie, sprich dem „Gefühl“, und Unternehmen, sprich dem „Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7).

Die Heranwachsenden in Unternehmerfamilien bewegen sich sowohl im familiären als auch unternehmerischen Kontext, die beide nicht „erziehungsfrei“ (Kormann, 2018, S. 74) sind, sondern Umfeldler darstellen, in denen die Eltern oder Verwandte Einfluss auf die Nachkommen nehmen und häufig erzieherisch tätig werden (vgl. Erdmann, 2010). Der Familienbetrieb ist Teil des „selbstverständlichen Erfahrungsraumes“ (Gersick et al., 1997, S. 163) der Nachkommen und meist stellt das Familienunternehmen einen Konkurrenten dar, wenn es um das Gewinnen der elterlichen „Aufmerksamkeit und Anerkennung“ (Stamm, 2013, S. 191) geht. Ein Beispiel für eine kommunikative Verknüpfung der unternehmerischen und familiären Sphäre ist die am Abendbrottisch stattfindende, sachorientierte Kommunikation von Bedenken, die mit der Kontinuität des Familienunternehmens verbunden sind (vgl. Wimmer et al., 2018a, S. 188, 2018b, S. 12). Dementsprechend kommt es zu einer „Verknappung“ (Wimmer et al., 2005, S. 229) der Kommunikation über familiäre und persönliche Belange (vgl. von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 99). Wimmer et al. bezeichnen dieses Phänomen als eine Reduktion der für Familien so wichtigen „Intimkommunikation“ (Wimmer et al., 2018a, S. 186). Dies kann dazu führen, dass sich Kinder mit ihren „bio-psycho-sozialen“ (Kleve, 2017, S. 112) Bedürfnissen und im Besonderen zu Zeiten individueller „Reifungs- und Entwicklungskrisen“ (Wimmer et al., 2018b, S. 13) nicht ausreichend wahrgenommen fühlen und eine abwehrende Haltung gegenüber unternehmerischen Themen entwickeln (vgl. Buchner, 2011, S. 78; Gersick et al., 1997, S. 145f.). Außerdem kann der Fall eintreten, dass Konflikte, die das Sozialsystem des Unternehmens betreffen

auf das Sozialsystem der Familie übertragen bzw. ausgeweitet werden (vgl. Caspary, 2018, S. 238). Diese oft ungelösten oder tabuisierten Konflikte führen zu mentalen Belastungen bei den betroffenen Kindern und Jugendlichen (vgl. von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 46).

Die Aussage „Die Kinder beobachten die Handlungen und Äußerungen der Familienmitglieder über [das] Unternehmen und leiten daraus seine Bedeutsamkeit ab“ (Stamm, 2013, S. 196), verdeutlicht die Rolle der Heranwachsenden als stille Beobachter der Interaktionen und Kommunikationen ihrer Eltern. Die Kinder hören zu, wenn Geschichten und Gespräche über aktuelle oder vergangene Ereignisse zwischen den Familienmitgliedern oder Mitarbeitenden ausgetauscht werden. Daraus leiten sie ab, welche positiven oder negativen Haltungen die jeweiligen Sprecher gegenüber dem Unternehmen haben (vgl. ebd.: S. 191).

Die Präsenz des Unternehmens und damit eines gewissen Vermögens ermöglicht in Unternehmerfamilien häufig einen hohen Lebensstandard, überdurchschnittliche Bildungschancen, z.B. durch das Besuchen einer Privatschule, sowie zahlreiche Freizeit- und Konsummöglichkeiten, z.B. durch das Ausüben von Hobbys und wiederkehrend stattfindende Familienurlaube (vgl. Stamm, 2013, S. 219f.). Durch diese sichtbar werdenden Privilegien bekommen Nachkommen in Unternehmerfamilien einen gesellschaftlichen Status zugewiesen, der auch zur Abgrenzung oder Ausschluss unter Gleichaltrigen führen kann. In einem solchen Fall kann das Unternehmen für die Ausgrenzungserfahrungen schuldig gesprochen werden, sodass die Kinder eine negative Assoziation gegenüber dem familiären Betrieb entwickeln (vgl. ebd.: S. 197).

Diese Schattenseiten, die ein Aufwachsen zwischen „Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7) mit sich bringen kann, veranlassen Fritz B. Simon dazu, die Unternehmenspräsenz als „Risikofaktor“ (Simon, 2007, S. 88) in der Sozialisation von Kindern und Jugendlichen zu bezeichnen. Diese Formulierung ist auf die Beobachtung zurückzuführen, dass das Entwickeln einer psychischen Erkrankung in Unternehmerfa-

milien höher als in Familien ohne Unternehmenshintergrund ist (vgl. Kormann, 2018, S. 74).

Neben den bereits an mehrfacher Stelle erwähnten belastenden Schattenseiten, kann die Präsenz des Unternehmens auch einen positiven, entwicklungsfördernden Einfluss auf die Heranwachsenden haben. Wenn Kinder die Tätigkeit ihrer Eltern im Familienunternehmen mit Freude an der Ausübung ihrer Arbeit und einer Ausgeglichenheit von Berufs- und Privatsphäre verbinden, sind die Kinder dem Familienunternehmen gegenüber meist positiv eingestellt (vgl. Caspary, 2018, S. 131). Dies gilt insbesondere dann, wenn das Familienunternehmen „als ein Zufluchtsort, als eine Mission, als ein Ausgangspunkt von Privilegien und als eine emotionale Heimat“ (Wottawa, 2006, S. 338f.) angesehen wird.

4.1.1. Die Nachfolgefrage

Aufgrund der Verantwortung für die transgenerationale Weiterführung des Familienunternehmens und die innerfamiliäre Weitergabe seines Eigentums ist die Nachfolgefrage ein implizit oder explizit kommuniziertes Thema in jeder Unternehmerfamilie. Stamm formuliert, dass sich die Präsenz des Unternehmens mit einer „phänomenale[n] Wucht“ (Stamm, 2013, S. 191) auf die Lebenswelt und die persönliche Entwicklung von Nachkommen in Unternehmerfamilien auswirkt. Fritz B. Simon führt diese sozialisatorische Eigenheit auf das „Dilemma des Nachfolgers“ (Simon, 2002, S. 187) zurück. Sobald ein Kind in eine Unternehmerfamilie hineingeboren wird, ist seine „soziale Identität“ (ebd.) als potenzieller Nachfolger vorbestimmt, und nicht erst durch das Beweisen von selbsterlernten, berufsqualifizierenden Fähigkeiten im Laufe seines Lebens. Kinder und Jugendliche in Unternehmerfamilien erhalten mit der Geburt den sogenannten „Familienauftrag“ (Wimmer et al., 2005, S. 281) zur Nachfolge. Folglich sehen Eltern ihre Kinder nicht ausschließlich als leiblichen Nachwuchs an, sondern betrachten sie gleichzeitig als zukünftige „Verantwortungsträger“ (Kleve, 2020a, S. 38) im Familienunternehmen (vgl. Haubl und Daser, 2006, S. 34). Die Motivation und Bereitschaft der Nachkommen diese Nachfolge anzutreten, wird laut Gottschalk et al. (2010, S. 45) systematisch durch die Sozialisations- und Erziehungsprozesse im Elternhaus aufgebaut (vgl. Schröder, 2019, S. 205).

Die Nachkommen entwickeln eine „Doppelidentität“ (Caspary, 2018, S. 71), da sie in teilweise widersprüchlichen Umwelten des „Gefühl[s]“ und des „Geschäft[s]“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7) aufwachsen, die jedoch beide wichtige, identitätsstiftende Bezugsrahmen darstellen. Der Grad der zu bewältigenden Paradoxien bestimmt, ob sie den Unternehmenshintergrund als Privileg oder als Belastung wahrnehmen (Caspary, 2018, S. 161).

Wie bereits in Kapitel 2.3. thematisiert, ist ein Ablöseprozess der Kinder von den Eltern insbesondere in der Phase der Adoleszenz zu beobachten, in welcher nicht-familiäre „Sozialisationsagenten“ (Schneewind & Lukesch, 1978, S. 11) im schulischen oder beruflichen Umfeld und im Freundeskreis zu relevanten Bezugspersonen werden. In Unternehmerfamilien hingegen bleibt die Bedeutung der Familie im Sozialisati-

onsprozess stets präsent, insbesondere wenn die Nachfolger im Unternehmen tätig werden und dementsprechend die Familienmitglieder zu den eigenen Arbeitgebern oder Kollegen werden (vgl. García-Álvarez et al., 2002, S. 190). Um trotzdem eine familiäre Abgrenzungserfahrung zu erleben, besuchen Kinder in Unternehmerfamilien häufig ein Internat oder sammeln früh Auslandserfahrung, um „Abstand von Familie und dem Familienunternehmen“ (Schröder, 2011, S. 8) zu gewinnen.

Des Weiteren lässt sich der Literatur entnehmen, dass die Eltern als „Verbindungsglied“ (Caspary, 2018, S. 252) zwischen dem Unternehmen und der Familie häufig die Nachfolgerwartungen in paradoxer Art an ihre Kinder kommunizieren und infolgedessen widersprüchliche Botschaften senden. Fritz B. Simon drückt dies folgendermaßen aus:

Du kannst dich auch gegen die Nachfolge entscheiden, solange du dich nur für die Nachfolge entscheidest. Das heißt, mir ist wichtig, dass DU [Hervorhebung im Original] dich ohne jeden Druck und ganz freiwillig dafür entscheidest, mich nicht zu Tode zu enttäuschen. (Simon, 2002, S. 203)

Diese Aussagen werden aufgrund ihrer Widersprüchlichkeit in der Literatur mit den Begriffen „Freiwilligkeitsmythos“ (Stamm, 2013, S. 225) und „Metapher der freien Wahl“ (ebd.; vgl. Stamm und Marchese, 2011) bezeichnet. Hieraus lässt sich ableiten, dass das betroffene Kind in der Nachfolgefrage mit einer inneren Zerreißeprüfung konfrontiert ist. Auf der einen Seite besteht der Wunsch nach individueller Selbstverwirklichung und einer unabhängigen Berufsentscheidung und auf der anderen Seite steht der Erwartungsdruck der Eltern das Familienunternehmen und damit das „Lebenswerk der Eltern“ (Simon, 2012, S. 108) weiterzuführen. Dies löst in den Kindern eine psychologische Dilemma-Situation aus, insbesondere in Gesellschaften, in denen die Individualisierungstendenzen einen großen Einfluss auf die Heranwachsenden haben. Fritz B. Simon beschreibt, dass der Nachfolger dieser „Doppelbindung“ (ebd.: S. 108) entkommen kann, falls es ihm gelingt, „in der Unternehmensnachfolge seine Selbstverwirklichung zu finden“ (ebd.).

Es kann zusammengefasst werden, dass der Unternehmenshintergrund einen signifikanten Einfluss auf die Lebenswelt und Identitätsentwicklung der Nachkommen in Unternehmerfamilien ausübt. Schlussendlich liegt es in der Hand der Eltern zu bestimmen, wie viel Raum den unternehmerischen Belangen im familiären Alltag zugestanden wird und damit über das Ausmaß der Paradoxien, die ihre Kinder bewältigen müssen, zu entscheiden (vgl. Stamm, 2013, S. 10).

4.1.2. Faktoren der Sozialisation

Die Intensität der Verbindung von „Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7), d.h. der Grad der enterprisenness, ist in jeder Unternehmerfamilie hochspezifisch. Die Faktoren, welche bei der Bestimmung des unternehmerischen Einflusses auf die Lebenswelt der Heranwachsenden eine Rolle spielen, sollen im Folgenden erläutert werden.

Ein wichtiger Einflussfaktor ist die familiäre Generation und die Phase, in welcher sich das Unternehmen befindet. So fällt es der Gründerfamilie der ersten Generation meist sehr schwer die Kontexte zwischen Unternehmen und Familie zu trennen, sodass das Aufwachsen der Kinder von Unternehmensgründern sehr stark von der Dominanz des „Geschäft[s]“ (ebd.) geprägt ist (vgl. Simon, 2012, S. 63ff.). Fritz B. Simon beschreibt, dass in einem solchen Fall sowohl das Unternehmen als „Kind“ (ebd.: S. 66) als auch die leiblichen Kinder um die Aufmerksamkeit der Eltern konkurrieren. In Gründerfamilien sitzt die Firma „immer mit am Tisch“ (ebd.). Das Unternehmen, das die Eltern eigenständig gegründet haben, stiftet ihnen Identität, was dazu führt, dass die Kinder in eine Rolle geraten, „[in der] sie es durch ihre Bereitschaft oder Ablehnung der Nachfolge in der Hand haben, über Sinn und Sinnlosigkeit des Lebens der Eltern zu entscheiden“ (ebd.: S. 68). In einer Unternehmerfamilie der zweiten Generation hingegen, haben die Eltern die Nachfolgefrage ‚am eigenen Leib‘ erfahren und gestehen ihren Kindern mehr Selbstbestimmung in der Beantwortung der Nachfolgefrage zu (vgl. ebd.: S. 69).

Außerdem bestimmt die Branche des Familienunternehmens, ob es ausbildungsbezogene Erwartungen an die Nachkommen gibt oder ob eine „geschlechtsbedingte Selektion“ (Caspary, 2018, S. 164) über die Eignung der Nachkommen für die Nachfolge entscheidet. Von den Eltern wird häufig erwartet, dass die Studienwahl der Kinder mit den Anforderungen des Unternehmens kompatibel ist (vgl. ebd.: S. 132). Folglich stellt der von den Kindern eingeschlagene Berufsweg eine „Entscheidung für oder gegen die Wünsche und Traditionen der Familie“ (Felden, 2012, S. 160) dar.

Zusätzlich spielen die „Entfernung des Wohnbereichs zum Unternehmen“ (Caspary, 2018, S. 234), die finanzielle Abhängigkeit vom Familienunternehmen und der Grad der „Verflechtung von Privat- und Arbeitsleben“ (ebd.) eine Rolle (vgl. Froschauer und Lueger, 2012, S. 102ff.). Die Kinder und Jugendlichen werden zudem durch die Art der Verbindung ihrer Eltern und nahen Verwandten mit dem Unternehmen geprägt: Verfolgen diese eine operative Tätigkeit, halten sie lediglich Anteile oder besteht keine Gebundenheit an das Unternehmen? Zudem ist die Haltung des in die Unternehmerfamilie eingetragenen Elternteils gegenüber dem Familienunternehmen sehr prägend für die Sozialisation der Nachkommen (Caspary, 2018, S. 277f.).

Je stärker die genannten Faktoren erfüllt sind, desto enger ist die Kopplung zwischen Familie und Unternehmen, was sich folglich auf die Nachfolgemotivation der Nachkommen auswirkt. Hierbei nimmt die Wertevermittlung einen relevanten Stellenwert ein, weswegen im folgenden Kapitel auf die zu beobachtenden Werte „zwischen Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7) und die Art ihrer Vermittlung eingegangen wird.

4.2. Wertevermittlung in der Sozialisation in Unternehmerfamilien

Werte können nicht nur als „Säule der Identität“ (von Schlippe, 2021, Folie 9) eines einzelnen Individuums ange-

sehen werden, sondern als ein verbindendes und identitätsstiftendes Element einer gesamten Familie über mehrere Generationen hinweg. Auch Organisationen als Sozialsysteme sind in ihrer Art Entscheidungen zu treffen von bestimmten Werten beeinflusst (vgl. Janke, 2015). In Unternehmerfamilien fallen diese beiden Wertesysteme der Familie und des Unternehmens zusammen und beeinflussen sich wechselseitig (vgl. Kleve, 2020b). Die Werte, gegenüber denen sich eine Unternehmerfamilie verpflichtet fühlt, dienen als „Leitplanken“ für die Ausrichtung der Strategie des Unternehmens (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 243). Infolgedessen kann die familiness als familiärer Werteeinfluss auf den Familienbetrieb angesehen werden (vgl. Kleve, 2020b, Folie 17; Frank et al., 2010). Die dadurch eingebrachten familiären und sozioemotionalen Werte können als Wettbewerbsvorteil von Familienunternehmen angesehen werden, da sie in Krisenzeiten eine stabilisierende Wirkung entfalten und Zusammenhalt stiften können (vgl. Kleve, 2020b). Andererseits können familiäre Konflikte, die meist unlösbare Wertedifferenzen als Auslöser haben, als „größte Wertvernichter“ (Hennerkes & Hund, 2008, S. 264) zum Risikofaktor für den Bestand des familiären Betriebs werden. Außerdem sehen sich stark wachsende „dynastische Familie[n]“ (Rüsen et al., 2019, S. 227) aus mehrgenerationalen Familienunternehmen mit der Herausforderung konfrontiert, den familiären Zusammenhalt trotz zunehmender räumlicher Distanzierung der Mitglieder und Zersplitterung der Anteile zu erhalten. In diesem Prozess der Professionalisierung der Unternehmerfamilie spielt die Wertevermittlung eine besondere Rolle (vgl. ebd.).

Die vorliegende Arbeit legt den Fokus jedoch nicht auf das Phänomen der familiness, sondern auf jenes der enterpriseness, welches ein Integrieren der organisationalen Belange in das familiäre Wertesystem einschließt (vgl. Hasenzagl, 2018; Frank et al., 2019).

Dementsprechend erlernen und verinnerlichen Kinder und Jugendliche, die in Unternehmerfamilien aufwachsen, Werte in Bezug sowohl auf die Familie als auch auf das Unternehmen (vgl. Dreher und Dreher, 1985). Wie stark die Kinder und Jugendlichen von den unternehmerischen Werten beeinflusst werden, hängt von den Faktoren ab, die in Kapitel 4.1.2 beschrieben wurden. In der Sozialisation der Nachkommen werden die widersprüchlichen Wertesysteme von bindungsorientierter Familie und sachorientiertem Unternehmen zusammengeführt und treffen die Beteiligten mit einer „phänomenalen Wucht“ (Stamm, 2013, S. 191). Gemäß Schröder (2011, S. 13) ist häufig zu beobachten, dass sich die familiären Werte und die Werte der Unternehmenskultur entweder voneinander klar abgrenzen oder sich überschneiden. Die Unternehmerfamilie und ihre Mitglieder stehen folglich in einem ständigen Wertekonflikt „zwischen Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7) und sie müssen lernen sich in diesem Spannungsfeld zu positionieren und ein eigenes identitätsstiftendes Werteverständnis auszubilden.

Die in Kapitel 2.2 erläuterten Wertedimensionen und -kategorien nach Schwartz (1992, 1994) dienen für das folgende Unterkapitel als theoretische Grundlage. Die der wissenschaftlichen Literatur zu entnehmenden Erkenntnisse zur

Wertevermittlung in Unternehmerfamilien sollen im Folgenden dem Werteschema nach Schwartz und damit den Dimensionen der *Selbstüberwindung*, der *Bewahrung*, der *Offenheit für Wandel* und der *Selbsterhöhung* zugeordnet werden (Schwartz, 1994, S. 24).

4.2.1. Wertedimensionen und -kategorien

Elke Schröder (2011) hat eine Studie durchgeführt, in der sie Mitglieder aus Unternehmerfamilien, sowohl Kinder als auch Eltern, befragt hat, welche Werte in ihren Familien vermittelt werden bzw. welche sie als besonders wichtig erachten. Diese Studie dient als Grundlage für die Argumentationen in diesem Kapitel.

Es konnte beobachtet werden, dass insbesondere Werte, die der Dimension der *Selbstüberwindung* bzw. der Unterkategorie der „Benevolenz“ (Schwartz, 1992, S. 7) zuzuordnen sind, vermehrt genannt wurden. Darunter fallen Ehrlichkeit, Zuverlässigkeit, Loyalität, Treue, Vertrauen, Zusammenhalt, Authentizität, „Verantwortung für das eigene Tun“ (Schröder, 2011, S. 30) und ein fairer und respektvoller Umgang mit den Mitarbeitern. Diese Werte, die sich auf das Wohlergehen anderer Menschen beziehen, bezeichnen Wimmer et al. mit dem Begriff der „Basiswerte“ (Wimmer et al., 2018a, S. 201) einer Unternehmerfamilie und erwähnen „Zusammengehörigkeit, Loyalität, wechselseitige Unterstützung und Verlässlichkeit“. Darüber hinaus erkennen Arist von Schlippe et al. die Werte der „Hilfsbereitschaft und Solidarität, Vertrauen und Fairness“ (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 243) als „Wertefundament“ (ebd.) einer an ein Unternehmen gebundenen Familie an. Außerdem zählt Elke Schröder (2019, S. 205) die soziale Verantwortung gegenüber der Gesellschaft zu den Werten der Benevolenz, die sich vor allem durch die regionale Verankerung des Familienunternehmens ergibt. Zur Wertekategorie des Universalismus werden von den in Schröders Studie befragten Familienmitgliedern Toleranz und Gleichheit benannt (ebd.: S. 28ff.).

Neben den Werten der *Selbstüberwindung*, werden von den Familienmitgliedern zudem Werte der Tradition genannt, die die Bewahrung des Bestehenden fokussieren (vgl. Schwartz, 1994, S. 24). Dies äußert sich in Unternehmerfamilien durch den Wunsch nach transgenerationaler Weiterführung des familiären Betriebs. Schröder erwähnt diesbezüglich die Relevanz der „Zukunftsfähigkeit“ (Schröder, 2011, S. 35), da das Familienunternehmen als „Organismus [angesehen wird], der Input von allen braucht und weiterentwickelt, lebendig flexibel bleiben muss“ (ebd.). Zusammenhängend mit diesen die Langfristigkeit anvisierenden Werten, besteht eine Verantwortung gegenüber den eigenen „Wurzeln“ (ebd.: S. 31) und einem daraus resultierenden verantwortungsvollen Umgang mit dem familiären Vermögen. Das Vorhandensein von Letzterem stellt einen besonderen Sozialisationskontext für Kinder und Jugendliche dar. Gemäß dem Prinzip der „transgenerationale[n] Treuhänderschaft“ (Kleve, 2020a, S. 83) ist der Wert der Bescheidenheit und Sparsamkeit in Unternehmerfamilien stark ausgeprägt. Durch die Vermittlung des Wertes der Bodenständigkeit intendieren Eltern zu verhindern, dass ihre Kinder aufgrund

des Reichtums eine unangebrachte finanzielle Anspruchshaltung entwickeln (vgl. ebd.; Stamm, 2013, S. 270).

Zudem finden Prinzipien der Konformität Eingang in das Wertesystem von Nachkommen in Unternehmerfamilien. Hierzu zählt Schröder „Respekt und Dankbarkeit gegenüber [den] Vorfahren“ (Schröder, 2011, S. 31), Demut, Höflichkeit, Pünktlichkeit sowie „Anstand und gutes Benehmen“ (ebd.). Außerdem hat die Wissenschaftlerin herausgefunden, dass der Wert der Sicherheit in Unternehmerfamilien eine signifikante Rolle spielt, da die Familienmitglieder durch das unternehmerische Vermögen ein Gefühl der finanziellen Absicherung erleben (vgl. ebd.: S. 19).

Des Weiteren gehört zu den Werten der *Bewahrung* die Erwartung an die junge Generation in die Nachfolge im Unternehmen einzutreten. Dieser traditionelle Wert steht im Konflikt mit dem Wert der Unabhängigkeit und Selbstbestimmung, dessen Schauplatz die Nachfolfrage ist (siehe Kapitel 4.1.1). Folgendes Zitat weist auf diese Wertedifferenzen zwischen der *Bewahrung* und *Offenheit für Wandel* hin:

Aufgrund der Bedeutung des Unternehmens für die Familie und speziell für die Eltern können innerhalb der Familie daher bestimmte Werte vertreten bzw. vermittelt werden, die gerade die Individualisierungstendenzen der Nachkommen begrenzen und ihren Wunsch nach einer Nachfolge bzw. Fortführung der Tradition bestärken. (Caspary, 2018, S. 274)

In den von Elke Schröder geführten Interviews werden vermehrt die Werte der Freiheit, „des Respekts, ... dass man auch seinen eigenen Lebenslauf hat“ (Schröder, 2011, S. 28) und dass man sich zu einem Beruf nicht verpflichtet, sondern „befähigt“ (ebd.: S. 35) fühlt, genannt. Diese Werte lassen sich zur Dimension *Offenheit für Wandel* und der Unterkategorie der „Selbstbestimmung“ (Schwartz, 1992, S. 6) zuordnen. Arist von Schlippe et al. (2017, S. 243) drücken dies mit dem Wunsch nach individueller Gestaltungsfreiheit des Lebens und der eigenen Berufsbiografie aus. Diese Werte implizieren, dass den Kindern und Jugendlichen gemäß der gesellschaftlichen Individualisierungstendenzen eine berufliche und damit finanzielle Unabhängigkeit abseits des Familienunternehmens ermöglicht werden soll (vgl. Schröder, 2011). Das Vermitteln und Fördern dieser freiheitlichen Werte ist von hoher Relevanz, da laut Caspary (2018, S. 99) eine solche berufliche Entscheidungs- und Handlungsfreiheit die Nachfolgemotivation steigern kann. Auch García-Álvarez et al. (2002, S. 202) haben herausgefunden, dass Familien den jungen Generationen erlauben sollten, eigene Ressourcen außerhalb des familiären Unternehmenskontextes aufzubauen.

Die vierte Wertedimension der *Selbsterhöhung* schließt nach Stamm (2013, S. 270) die Bereitschaft Leistung zu erbringen und Risiken einzugehen, ein. Auch von Schlippe et al. (2017, S. 243) betonen, dass der erwartete generationenübergreifende Erhalt des Vermögens hohe Anforderungen an den Wert der Zielstrebigkeit und den Stellenwert der Bildung mit sich zieht. Interessant zu beobachten ist jedoch, dass Werte, die mit Macht, Autorität und Hedonismus verbunden sind,

von den Interviewteilnehmenden von Elke Schröder (2011) nicht erwähnt wurden. In *Tabelle 3* sind die genannten Werte zusammen mit den dazugehörigen Wertedimensionen, die die Nachkommen in Unternehmerfamilien in Bezug auf ihre Sozialisation beeinflussen, abgebildet.

4.2.2. Werte zwischen „Gefühl und Geschäft“

In Bezug auf die im Zentrum der vorliegenden Arbeit stehende Verbindung von Familie, sprich dem „Gefühl“, und Unternehmen, sprich dem „Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7) erscheint es sinnvoll eine Kategorisierung der Werte nach ihrem Ursprung aus der familiären oder unternehmerischen Sphäre vorzunehmen. Dementsprechend formuliert Schröder (2011, S. 35) eine familien- und kinderbezogene sowie eine mitarbeiter- und unternehmensbezogene Dimension der Werte. In *Kapitel 3.3* wurden die widersprüchlichen Systemlogiken von Familie und Unternehmen erläutert, die im Kern auf ein Aufeinandertreffen von personen- und bindungsorientierten Werten der Familie und funktions- und sachorientierten Werten des Unternehmens zurückzuführen sind. Die im vorangegangenen *Kapitel 4.2.1* erläuterten Werte sollen im Folgenden den Kontexten des „Gefühls“ und des „Geschäfts“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7) zugeordnet werden, um das Spannungsfeld zu verdeutlichen, das die Sozialisation von Nachkommen in Unternehmerfamilien charakterisiert.

Der Sphäre der Familie, in der jedes Familienmitglied mit seiner gesamten Persönlichkeit integriert ist und eine lebenslängliche, unkündbare Mitgliedschaft hält, lassen sich im Besonderen die Werte der *Selbst-Überwindung* (Benevolenz und Universalismus) und der *Offenheit für Neues* (Selbstbestimmung) zuordnen. Diese Werte, die das Wohlergehen anderer Menschen anstreben, lassen sich auf die in *Kapitel 3.3* erläuterte Systemlogik der Familie zurückführen. Die Priorisierung des Gemeinwohls, der Fokus auf ideelle Ziele und die emotionale Verbundenheit durch das Medium der Liebe rahmen die familiären Werte ein (*siehe Tabelle 2*), die eine Verantwortung für das „Gefühl“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7) implizieren.

Im Kontrast hierzu stehen Werte, die ein Verantwortungsbewusstsein für das „Geschäft“ (ebd.) fordern. Diese ergeben sich aus dem Kontext des Familienunternehmens, welches als sachorientiertes Sozialsystem überwiegend materielle Ziele priorisiert und die austauschbaren Mitarbeitenden auf ihre Funktion bzw. Leistung im Unternehmen reduziert. Das Medium des Geldes regelt die monetäre Entlohnung für vertraglich festgelegte Arbeitsleistungen (*siehe Tabelle 2*). Dementsprechend resultieren aus diesem betrieblichen Kontext überwiegend Werte der *Selbsterhöhung* (Leistung). Neben der geforderten Leistungs- und Risikobereitschaft sind zudem Werte der *Bewahrung* (Tradition, Konformität, Sicherheit) hochrelevant für das ökonomische Überleben des Unternehmens. Die damit verbundene Aufforderung an die Familienmitglieder den Wert der Sparsamkeit zu leben, ist an den Wunsch des transgenerationalen Erhalts und der Weitergabe des Familienbetriebs gekoppelt.

Aus der „koevolutionäre[n] Einheit“ (Simon, 2012, S. 119) des bindungsorientierten Wertesystems der Familie und des funktionsorientierten Wertesystems des Unter-

nehmens resultieren die Werte der Unternehmerfamilie. Es ergibt sich eine Doppelverantwortung für sowohl die Werte des „Gefühl[s]“ als auch jene des „Geschäft[s]“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7). Folglich argumentiert Schröder (2011, S. 13), dass es Werte gibt, die sich überschneiden und ohne Konflikte Eingang in das andere Wertesystem finden. Als Beispiel lässt sich hier das faire, loyale und respektvolle Verhalten nicht nur gegenüber Familienmitgliedern, sondern auch gegenüber Mitarbeitern und Gesellschaftern erwähnen, das charakteristisch für die Unternehmenskultur in Familienunternehmen und Ausdruck der *familiness* ist (vgl. Frank et al., 2010). Schröder (2011, S. 13) legt jedoch auch dar, dass es Werte gibt, die miteinander im Konflikt stehen. Schauplatz dieser Wertekonflikte ist oftmals die Nachfolgefrage (*siehe Kapitel 4.1.1*). So stehen beispielsweise die Werte der *Bewahrung* und damit der Nachfolgeerwartung der jungen Generation den Werten der *Offenheit für Wandel* und damit dem Wunsch nach selbstbestimmter, freier Berufswahl gegenüber. Zudem stehen sich die Werte der *Selbstüberwindung* und der *Selbsterhöhung* in der Frage der Priorisierung von Leistung und Geld oder Verbundenheit und Liebe gegenüber.

Die erwähnten Wertesysteme der Familie und des Unternehmens und ihre Vereinigung in den Werten der Unternehmerfamilie implizieren aufgrund der Gleichzeitigkeit beider Kontexte ein Verantwortungsgefühl für „Gefühl und Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7). Dies kann wie in *Abbildung 2* grafisch dargestellt werden.

4.2.3. Vermittlung von Werten

Werte werden von den familiären „Sozialisationsagenten“ (Schneewind & Lukesch, 1978, S. 11) primär durch das kindliche Beobachten der elterlichen Verhaltensweisen vermittelt (*siehe Kapitel 2.2*). Dies betrifft, wie folgt beschrieben, auch den Wertevermittlungsprozess in Unternehmerfamilien:

Beobachten Kinder aus Unternehmerfamilien beispielsweise, wie ihre Eltern im Gespräch nach einer Entlastungsmöglichkeit eines erkrankten Mitarbeiters des Familienunternehmens suchen, wird Kindern soziale Verantwortung über Sozialisationsprozesse deutlich. (Schröder, 2019, S. 206)

Schröder (2011, S. 22) versteht dieses Vorleben der Werte durch die Haltung und das Verhalten der Eltern als angemessene Art den Kindern im Sozialisationsprozess die gewünschten Werte implizit weiterzugeben und sie zu deren Imitation anzuregen.

Neben dieser Beobachtung der gelebten Werte können insbesondere Geschichten und Narrative als wichtige Wertetransporteure in der Unternehmerfamilie angesehen werden. Entsprechend hierzu definiert Stamm die Unternehmerfamilie als „generationsübergreifende ... Erzähl- und Erinnerungsgemeinschaft“ (Stamm, 2013, S. 326). Den Kindern wird die Einstellung ihrer Eltern zum Unternehmen insbesondere durch die am Abendbrottisch erzählten Geschichten über die unternehmerischen Geschehnisse vermittelt,

Tabelle 3: Vermittelte Werte in Unternehmerfamilien. Eigene Darstellung in Anlehnung an Stamm (2013), von Schlippe et al. (2017), Caspary (2018), Kormann (2018) und Schröder (2011, 2019), Wimmer et al. (2018a) und Schwartz (1992, 1994).

Selbst-Erhöhung	<i>Macht</i>	-
	<i>Leistung</i>	Leistungs- und Risikobereitschaft, Zielstrebigkeit, Bildung
Selbst-Überwindung	<i>Universalismus</i>	Toleranz, Gleichheit
	<i>Benevolenz</i>	Zusammenhalt, Loyalität und Treue, Ehrlichkeit, Zuverlässigkeit, Vertrauen, Fairness und Respekt, Solidarität, soziale Verantwortung
Bewahrung	<i>Tradition</i>	Langfristigkeit/Nachhaltigkeit, Sparsamkeit und Bodenständigkeit
	<i>Konformität</i>	Respekt, Dankbarkeit, Demut, Höflichkeit, Pünktlichkeit, Transparenz
	<i>Sicherheit</i>	Finanzielle Absicherung
Offenheit für Wandel	<i>Hedonismus</i>	-
	<i>Stimulation</i>	Offenheit für Neues
	<i>Selbstbestimmung</i>	Freiheit und Unabhängigkeit in der Lebensgestaltung und Berufswahl



Abbildung 2: Vereinigung der Werte der Familie und des Unternehmens in den Werten der Unternehmerfamilie. Eigene Darstellung in Anlehnung an Tabelle 3.

was nach Kormann (2018, S. 200) eine identitätsstiftende Wirkung entfaltet. Dies ist darauf zurückzuführen, dass in Unternehmerfamilien die Unternehmensgeschichten eng mit den Familiengeschichten verbunden sind. Folglich sind Erzählungen über die Unternehmensgründer und überstandene Krisenzeiten Bestandteil des „Familiengedächtnisses“ (Stamm, 2013, S. 323) und hilfreich zur Beantwortung der Frage „Wie kam es dazu, dass wir heute sind, was wir sind?“ (Kormann, 2018, S. 290). Die familiären Werte sollen als generationsübergreifende Leitlinien für das Handeln in Unternehmen und Familie aufrechterhalten werden (vgl. ebd.: S. 296).

Schröder unterstreicht, dass ein „frühzeitiges Heranführen, Zusammenführen und Informieren“ (Schröder, 2011, S. 21) über das Familienunternehmen zu einer aufgeschlossenen Haltung gegenüber der Präsenz des Unternehmens

führen kann. Hierzu eignen sich Praktika, Familien- und Netzwerktreffen oder das Teilnehmen an Seminaren (vgl. ebd.). Zudem betonen von Schlippe et al., dass die Familienmitglieder in Form einer Familienverfassung gemeinsam Antworten auf die Frage „Wie leben wir unsere Werte?“ (von Schlippe et al., 2017, S. 243) ausarbeiten sollten, um die mit den einzelnen Werten verbundenen Handlungserwartungen explizit zu formulieren.

Nachdem nun ein theoretischer Überblick über die aktuellen wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnisse zu den Werten und ihrer Vermittlung in Unternehmerfamilien gegeben wurde, wird diese Theorie im folgenden Kapitel durch das Hinzuziehen von Interviewmaterial empirisch angereichert und durch direkte Aussagen von Mitgliedern aus Unternehmerfamilien erweitert.

Im Zentrum der folgenden Auswertung steht die Bearbei-

tung der dieser Arbeit zu Grunde liegenden Forschungsfrage:

„Wie beeinflusst die Verbindung von Familie und Unternehmen die Wertevermittlung in der Sozialisation von Kindern und Jugendlichen in Unternehmerfamilien?“

5. Empirie: Wertevermittlung in der Sozialisation von Kindern und Jugendlichen in Unternehmerfamilien

5.1. Methode und Material

Für die empirische Anreicherung der theoretischen Darstellung der Wertevermittlung in Unternehmerfamilien (siehe Kapitel 4.2) wird die qualitative Literaturanalyse des Psychologen Phillip Mayring (1991) hinzugezogen. Dieses strukturierende Auswertungsverfahren sieht ein Ableiten von Kategorien aus der Literatur vor, die anschließend als Grundlage für die Auswertung des Interviewmaterials dienen (vgl. ebd.: S. 210). Zunächst soll das verwendete Material vorgestellt und die Interviewteilnehmer eingeordnet werden, bevor die Anwendung der in Anlehnung an Schwartz (1992, 1994) entwickelten Wertedimensionen erfolgt.

Im Rahmen eines Lehrforschungsprojekts an der Universität Witten/Herdecke wurden am Lehrstuhl für Organisation und Entwicklung von Unternehmerfamilien des Witterner Instituts für Familienunternehmen (WIFU) im Jahr 2020 neun narrative Interviews mit elf Mitgliedern aus acht Unternehmerfamilien geführt. Unter ihnen sind fünf Frauen und sechs Männer. Bezüglich der Rolle der Befragten im Familienbetrieb kann Folgendes festgehalten werden: Unter den Befragten sind vier Geschäftsführer, die Ehepartnerin eines Geschäftsführers, drei aktive Gesellschafter und drei zukünftige Nachfolger. Die im Hintergrund stehenden Familienunternehmen variieren bezogen auf ihre Größe stark. Das kleinste von ihnen ist eine familieninterne Vermögensverwaltung (siehe I.2)² und umfasst lediglich die Kernfamilienmitglieder, wohingegen das größte Familienunternehmen (siehe I.1) bis zu 50.000 Mitarbeitende anstellt. Vier Unternehmen sind der Maschinenbau-Branche zuzuordnen, während die anderen in der Logistik, der Elektroinstallation, dem Sozialwesen und der Vermögensverwaltung angesiedelt sind. Zudem weisen die jeweiligen Gründungszeitpunkte eine große Spanne auf, da die acht Familienbetriebe zwischen den 1740er und 2010er Jahren gegründet wurden. Der im Anhang befindlichen Tabelle können diese charakteristischen Merkmale in aufgelisteter Form entnommen werden (siehe Anhang 1).³

In den circa 1,5 Stunden dauernden Interviews wurden den Teilnehmern Fragen gestellt, die sich auf den Einfluss des Familienunternehmens auf die Sozialisation, Wertebildung und Lebensführung der Mitglieder fokussieren. Die Fragen können dem im Anhang beigefügten Interviewleitfaden entnommen werden (siehe Anhang 2).

5.2. Kernwerte und ihre Vermittlung

Gemäß der vorgesehenen Kategorienbildung der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse nach Mayring (1991) werden die von den interviewten Familienmitgliedern genannten Werte den Wertedimensionen nach Schwartz (1992, 1994) zugeordnet. Folgenden Auflistungen können diese Werte mit ihrer Zuordnung zur Dimension der *Offenheit für Wandel*, der *Selbstüberwindung*, der *Bewahrung* und der *Selbsterhöhung* entnommen werden. Die Reihenfolge der Nennung der Werte orientiert sich an der Häufigkeit ihrer Erwähnung.

Die Befragten nennen folgende Werte der *Offenheit für Wandel*:

- **selbstbestimmte, unabhängige Lebensgestaltung und freie Berufswahl** (I.1, I.2, I.4, I.5, I.6, I.7, I.8, I.9),
- Freiheit (I.1, I.6, I.7, I.9),
- eigenverantwortliches Handeln (I.2, I.5, I.8) und
- finanzielle Unabhängigkeit (I.1, I.9).

Zudem wird den Werten der *Selbstüberwindung* eine große Bedeutung zugesprochen:

- **Zusammenhalt und emotionale Zugehörigkeit** (I.1, I.2, I.3, I.4, I.7, I.9),
- Toleranz und Respekt (I.1, I.2, I.8),
- Hilfsbereitschaft, Unterstützung und Solidarität (I.1, I.2, I.4),
- Ehrlichkeit, Vertrauen und Loyalität (I.2, I.4, I.5),
- soziale Gerechtigkeit und gesellschaftliche Verantwortung (I.1, I.7).

Außerdem werden Werte der *Bewahrung* genannt, welche im Folgenden aufgelistet sind:

- **Bescheidenheit, Bodenständigkeit und Sparsamkeit** (I.1, I.2, I.5, I.6, I.7, I.8),
- Verantwortung (für die Mitarbeiter) (I.3, I.4, I.5, I.6, I.7, I.8),
- Kontinuität und Langfristigkeit (I.3, I.5, I.7) und
- finanzielle Absicherung (I.1, I.6, I.7).

Auch Werte der *Selbsterhöhung* werden vereinzelt genannt:

- Leistungs- und Risikobereitschaft (I.3, I.9),
- Fleiß (I.8),
- Disziplin (I.9), Kontrolle und Macht (I.6).

² Hinweis: Die Angaben in den Klammern beziehen sich auf die Zuordnung zu den jeweiligen Interviews (siehe Anhang 1).

³ Hinweis: Die Interviews wurden aufgrund von Gründen der Vertraulichkeit und Privatsphäre der Befragten anonymisiert.

Die Häufigkeit der Nennung der Werte beachtend, kann abgeleitet werden, dass die (fettgedruckten) Werte der freien Lebensgestaltung und Berufswahl (*Offenheit für Wandel*), des Zusammenhalts (*Selbstüberwindung*) und der Bescheidenheit und Sparsamkeit (*Bewahrung*) einen dominanten Platz in der *Sozialisation eigener Art* der interviewten Personen einnehmen. Diese drei Werte werden von mindestens sechs der neun Befragten mehrfach genannt und können folglich als *Kernwerte* der an den Interviews teilnehmenden Unternehmerfamilien bezeichnet werden. Das detaillierte Verständnis dieser drei Werte, mögliche Arten ihrer Vermittlung und ihr Entstehen aus der Verbindung von Familie und Unternehmen sollen in den folgenden Unterkapiteln exemplarisch anhand von direkten Aussagen der Befragten und mit Rückbezug auf die erwähnte Literatur erläutert werden.

5.2.1. Freie Lebensgestaltung und Berufswahl

Wie bereits in *Kapitel 4.1.1* thematisiert, stellt die Nachfrage einen für das Familienunternehmen überlebenswichtigen Aspekt dar, welcher die Lebensgestaltung der Kinder und Jugendlichen in Unternehmerfamilien signifikant beeinflusst. Überraschend zu beobachten ist, dass die Mehrzahl der interviewten Personen von einer Sozialisation abseits eines familiären Erwartungsdrucks berichten und vielmehr von einer selbstbestimmten Nachfolgeentscheidung erzählen. Diese „freie Lebensgestaltung, die nicht unter dem Diktat der Firma steht“ (I.7: 157f.)⁴ zieht sich als Kernwert durch viele der geführten Interviews. So beschreibt der Gesellschafter aus Interview sieben, wie er „ohne den Blick auf die Firma“ (I.7: 42) aufgewachsen ist und zudem die eher geringe Beeinflussung seiner Kindheit durch das Unternehmen auf die große Entfernung zwischen seinem Wohnort und dem Standort des Unternehmens zurückführt (*siehe Faktoren der Sozialisation in Kapitel 4.1.2*).

Als Ursprung für die in seiner Familie spürbare Möglichkeit der unabhängigen Lebensgestaltung sieht der Befragte das durch das Familienunternehmen zur Verfügung stehende Vermögen an. Letzteres beschreibt er als „Sicherheitspuffer“ (I.7: 638), das „einen höheren Grad an beruflicher Freiheit“ (I.7: 648) ermöglicht. Dies wirkt sich nach seinen Schilderungen beispielsweise auf die Finanzierbarkeit überdurchschnittlicher Bildungschancen für seine Kinder aus.

Auch das befragte Familienmitglied aus dem vierten Interview hat in ihrer Kindheit einen hohen Grad an Selbstbestimmung erfahren, den sie als „total angenehm“ (I.4: 1211) erlebt hat. Die Einstellung, dass „jeder so das machen konnte, was er erstmal wollte“ (I.4: 1211f.) prägt zudem die Wertevermittlung gegenüber ihren eigenen Kindern, denen sie diese selbstbestimmte Lebensgestaltung weitergeben möchte. An dieser Stelle wird die transgenerationale Dimension der Wertevermittlung deutlich. Das Beobachten der gelebten Werte der Eltern veranlasst die Nachkommen entweder zu

einer Imitation und Weitergabe an die eigenen Kinder oder zu einer Abgrenzung (Schröder, 2011, S. 22).

Von letzterem Fall berichten die ehemaligen Geschäftsführer zweier Familienbetriebe der Maschinenbau Branche. Der Befragte aus Interview drei erwähnt die eher einschränkende Einstellung seines Vaters, die vorsah, dass „das Überleben des Unternehmens Vorrang hat vor den persönlichen Belangen ... oder [den] persönlichen Wünsche[n]“ (I.3: 737f.). Diese starke Dominanz des Unternehmens, die auch der Befragte aus Interview sechs mit der Aussage „[I]ch hatte manchmal auch keinen Raum“ (I.6: 201f.) beschreibt, verdeutlicht, dass eine fehlende Trennung von familiärer und unternehmerischer Sphäre die Entwicklung von freiheitlichen Werten stark beschränken kann. Im Fall der beiden angesprochenen Personen gab es eine solche Trennung nicht, was sich beispielsweise dadurch ausgedrückt hat, dass die „Laune [des Vaters] direkt mit den Geschichten des Unternehmens dann verknüpft [war]“ (I.3: 860f.) und dass die familiäre Kommunikation am Mittagstisch durch das Besprechen von „Streitereien, ... Konflikte[n] und Rivalitäten“ (I.6: 41-45) „infiziert“ (I.9: 234) war. Diese von permanenter Abhängigkeit und Unfreiheit beeinflussten Werte der Eltern haben die Nachfolger dazu incentiviert den hiervon sich abgrenzenden Wert der Selbstbestimmung an ihre eigenen Kinder zu vermitteln.

Als Beispiel für eine solche gelingende Entkopplung der „Zahnräder“ (I.2: 480) von Familie und Unternehmen mit dem Resultat eines hohen Maßes an Freiheit für die Nachkommen können an dieser Stelle die Erzählungen der Geschwister aus dem fünften Interview genannt werden. Sie sind beide in der Nähe des Familienbetriebs aufgewachsen und haben in ihrem Sozialisationsprozess eine Nachfolgemotivation entwickelt, welche sie dazu veranlasst das Familienunternehmen als Doppelspitze zu übernehmen. Diese freiwillige Bereitschaft zur Nachfolge führen die Befragten auf die Verhaltensweise der Eltern zurück, welche strikt auf die Trennung von Berufs- und Privatleben geachtet haben, damit die Familie noch „Luft ... zum Atmen“ hat (I.5: 94ff.). Sowohl letzteres Zitat als auch die Aussage „Ich möchte, dass mein Zuhause mein ZUHAUSE [Hervorhebung im Original] ist“ (I.5: 91), stammen von dem geschäftsführenden Familienvater, welcher stetig versucht hat, dass die „unternehmerischen Tätigkeiten nicht das Familienleben erdrücken“ (I.2: 324) und diesen Wunsch nach Trennung des Berufs- und Privatlebens auch explizit thematisiert hat. Folgendes Zitat beschreibt, dass die Anwesenheit des Unternehmens von den Kindern nicht als ein Konkurrent im Gewinnen der elterlichen Aufmerksamkeit angesehen wurde, sondern den Sozialisationsprozess vielmehr bereichert zu haben scheint: „Es war nie diese unglaublich hohe Präsenz, dass man sagt ‚Hallo, wir sind auch noch da‘ ... und das verbinde ich bis heute immer noch [mit] etwas sehr sehr Schöne[m]“ (I.5: 76 ff.).

Die Mutter führt diese wohlwollende Einstellung der Kinder gegenüber der unternehmerischen Tätigkeit des geschäftsführenden Vaters zudem auf ein zeitliches Zusammenfallen ihrer Kindheit mit einer wirtschaftlich erfolgreichen Phase des Familienbetriebs zurück:

⁴ Die Hinweise in den Klammern nach direkten Zitaten beziehen sich auf die Interview Nummer und die Zeilenangabe(n), wie folgt: (Interview-Nummer : Zeilenangabe).

Aber die Kinder haben eine Phase [erlebt], ... wo es eigentlich mit der Firma irgendwie immer positiv lief ‚Papa sitzt wieder im Flieger, ... fliegt nach Singapur, ich möchte auch mal nach Singapur fliegen‘. Also die haben dann so ... positive Sachen mitgekriegt. Also nicht so die Belastung, die dann dahintersteckt. Dadurch waren die glaube ich positiv zur Firma eingestellt. (I.8: 640-648)

Somit kann festgehalten werden, dass die Präsenz des Unternehmens die interviewten Geschwister nicht negativ in der Gestaltung ihres eigenen Lebensweges beeinflusst hat, sondern vielmehr zu einer autonomen Konstruktion der eigenen Berufsbiografie angeregt hat. Die junge Nachfolgerin erläutert die Vermittlung dieses Wertes wie folgt:

Das haben uns unsere Eltern auch gesagt ‚nur weil hier ein schönes Nest ist oder du aus dem Nest bist, musst du trotzdem fliegen können. Das musst du alleine können, weil am Ende des Tages, wenn du dann fertig bist, was bringt dir das dann? Also, das bringt ja nichts, und so kannst du ja nie gucken, wo du selbst hinkommst‘. Mir war das immer super super wichtig. Ich guck erstmal, wie weit ich selbst komme, ... um sich auch intern dann den gewissen Respekt hereinzuholen. (I.5: 931-1041)

Ergänzend hierzu berichten die Ehepartner aus dem zweiten Interview, dass sie in der Sozialisation ihrer Kinder eine Vermittlung von „Zwang“ (I.2: 367) vermeiden möchten, sondern nach dem Prinzip leben, dass „jeder sich frei entwickeln und entfalten kann“ (I.2: 368). Dies heißt nach ihrem Verständnis jedoch nicht, dass die Kinder vollständig von der Präsenz des Familienunternehmens ferngehalten werden sollen. In der betroffenen Unternehmerfamilie haben vielmehr die Kinder eine direkte Involvierung in die unternehmerischen Entscheidungen eingefordert, sodass die gesamte Familie beim Erarbeiten und dem schriftlichen Festhalten der Familienwerte in Form einer Familienverfassung zusammengearbeitet hat. Letztere umfasst meist Antworten auf Fragen wie folgende: „Wie gehen wir mit Familienmitgliedern um, die im Unternehmen mitwirken wollen? Welche Voraussetzungen müssen diese erfüllen?“ (I.3. 398ff.). Folglich können in der Familienverfassung Nachfolgeregelungen festgehalten werden. Dieses gemeinsame Formulieren von Leistungsanforderungen kann Nachkommen von einer freiheitseinschränkenden Nachfolgererwartung befreien, da sie nicht aufgrund ihrer Abstammung als potenzielle Nachfolger betrachtet werden, sondern erst dann, wenn sie entsprechende Kompetenzen erworben haben, die sie für eine Position im Familienunternehmen qualifizieren würden. Folglich wird durch das gemeinsame Erstellen der Familienverfassung eine vom Familienbetrieb entkoppelte Berufsentwicklung gefördert, wobei die Qualifikation und Kompetenz vor der familiären Zugehörigkeit als Auswahlkriterium der Nachfolger steht.

Auch die Geschwister aus dem fünften Interview wurden aktiv in den Gestaltungsprozess der Familienverfassung einbezogen. Gleichzeitig zur Vermittlung der Werte der Selbstbestimmtheit und der unabhängigen Lebensgestaltung, wurden sie altersgemäß an das Familienunternehmen herangeführt. Sie haben beispielsweise in den Schulferien im Unternehmen gejobbt und an Unternehmensfeiern teilgenommen. Im Fokus bei diesen in der Kindheit stattgefundenen Berührungspunkten mit dem Unternehmen stand das „spielerische Interesse“ (Stamm, 2013, S. 193) und das Erkunden des Betriebs. Diesbezüglich erwähnt auch der Befragte aus dem sechsten Interview folgende prägende Erinnerungen an Erlebnisse auf dem Firmengelände während seiner Kindheit:

Ich konnte die Werkstatt benutzen. Wir konnten in der Lackiererei der Werkstatt, wo wir die Antriebe lackierten, konnten wir irgendwie alte Mopeds lackieren. Ich konnte ohne Führerschein auf dem Hofgelände Auto fahren lernen. Ja, das ist alles ungewöhnlich. Und ich konnte mein eigenes Auto zerlegen und holraumversiegeln und wieder zusammenbauen. (I.6: 93-97)

Aus diesen Aussagen wird deutlich, dass sich eine Wertevermittlung einer selbstbestimmten Lebensweise und eine Heranführung an die unternehmerischen Aktivitäten wie beispielsweise das spielerische Erleben des Firmengeländes, das Sammeln erster Berufserfahrungen im Familienbetrieb oder das Mitwirken an der Familienverfassung nicht ausschließen müssen, sondern vielmehr hin zu einer selbstbestimmten Nachfolgemotivation ergänzen können.

Außerdem spricht die Ehepartnerin aus dem achten Interview den bereits von Stamm thematisierten „Freiwilligkeitsmythos“ (Stamm, 2013, S. 225) der Nachfolgefrage an:

[W]ir haben eigentlich schon versucht da den Kindern freie Wahl zu lassen ... mein Mann hat immer gesagt ‚ihr könnt werden was ihr wollt‘. Natürlich hast du im tiefsten Inneren den Wunsch, ‚aber das wäre trotzdem schön, wenn ihr für die Firma da wärt‘. (I.8: 604-608)

Wie in *Kapitel 4.1.1.* erläutert, können die Nachfolger dieser Zerreißprobe zwischen autonomer Lebensgestaltung und familiärer Erwartungshaltung lediglich entkommen, wenn sie „in der Unternehmensnachfolge ihre Selbstverwirklichung finden“ (Simon, 2012, S. 108). Diese produktive „Doppelbindung“ (ebd.) scheint in dem Falle der nachfolgenden Geschwister aus Interview fünf durch eine freiheitliche Wertevermittlung in der Sozialisation und ein „frühzeitiges Heranführen, Zusammenführen und Informieren“ (Schröder, 2011, S. 21) gelungen zu sein.

5.2.2. Zusammenhalt

Neben dem Wert der Selbstbestimmung wird außerdem der Wert des Zusammenhalts und der emotionalen Zugehörigkeit, welcher der Dimension der *Selbstüberwindung* zuzuordnen ist, von sechs Interviewteilnehmenden als essenziell

für die Sozialisation in der jeweiligen Unternehmerfamilie erachtet. Beispielsweise berichten die befragten Eltern im zweiten Interview von folgendem Verständnis dieses Wertes:

Wir sind als Familie immer viel stärker als jeder einzelne für sich genommen. Wir sind sicher geschützt. Wir haben einen vertrauten Raum, wo der offene Dialog das ist, was trägt. (I.2: 382-384)

Diese auf Gemeinschaftlichkeit und offener Kommunikation basierenden Werte führen im Familienalltag dazu, dass beispielsweise Entscheidungen über die Berufstätigkeit der Mutter gemeinschaftlich besprochen und getroffen werden: „Und somit ist es bei vielen Entscheidungen, erst ist es ein Wunsch. Aus diesem Wunsch kommt dann eine Entscheidung und somit tragen wir das alles zusammen“ (I.2: 297-299). Von diesem unmittelbaren Miteinbeziehen der Kinder in Entscheidungen, die den Grad der beruflichen Aktivität der Eltern betreffen, kann abgeleitet werden, dass die Kinder die Möglichkeit erhalten die Einflussstärke der *enterpriseness* auf ihre eigene Lebenswelt in gewisser Weise selbst zu beeinflussen. Die Familie beschreibt darüber hinaus ein empathisches Miteinander und ein gegenseitiges Unterstützen, was auf dem „Rezept“ (I.2: 316) des Dialogs basiert, als relevante und den Zusammenhalt stärkende Werte.

Zudem sieht der befragte Gesellschafter aus Interview sieben eine emotionale Zugehörigkeit innerhalb der Familie als hochrelevant für die Entwicklung einer freiwilligen Nachfolgemotivation an: „[D]ie Beziehung zu den Kindern ist der Schlüssel, ... und ich glaube dann sind sie auch bereit herein zu gucken. Und mitzumachen“ (I.7: 983ff.). Im sechsten Interview werden diese Werte mit einem „Miteinander“ (I.6: 189) beschrieben, aus denen gemeinsame „Visionen, ... Konzepte, ... und Ziele“ (I.6: 188f.) über Generationen hinweg entstehen können, woraus sich auch ein Gestaltungswille für den familiären Betrieb entwickeln kann.

Ähnliches berichtet zudem die zukünftige Nachfolgerin aus dem vierten Interview, welche einen gewissen „Teamgeist und Zusammenhalt“ (I.4: 760f.) als essenziell für ihre Familie erachtet. Diese emotionale Verbundenheit wird über ein jährlich stattfindendes „Familienwochenende“ (I.4: 764) und über das Ausüben gemeinsamer Hobbys hergestellt. So verbinden die Familie die jährlichen Urlaube mit „gemeinsame[n] [Triathlon]-Läufe[n] oder gemeinsame[n] Fahrradrennen“ (I.4: 808f.).

Die Relevanz des familiären Zusammenhalts scheint sich jedoch nicht nur aus der emotionalen Verbundenheit der Familienmitglieder zu ergeben, sondern hat laut den folgenden Schilderungen des ehemaligen Geschäftsführers aus dem dritten Interview zudem seine Ursprünge in der dominanten Präsenz des Familienunternehmens:

[I]ch bin der absoluten Überzeugung, ... wenn die Familie nicht mehr hinter dem Unternehmen steht, dann haben wir ein richtiges Problem. Und die muss auch geeint hinter dem Unternehmen stehen. Und es muss auch so geschehen, dass

Mitarbeiter merken, dass die Familie hinter dem Unternehmen steht. Und deswegen ist eine meiner Hauptaufgaben, neben dem Beiratsvorsitzenden auch in der Familie zu sehen, dass wir als Familie zusammenhalten. (I.3: 702-707)

Aus dieser Aussage lässt sich ableiten, dass die Verantwortung für das „Geschäft“ (Simon, 2002, S. 7), d.h. für den Fortbestand des Familienunternehmens und die Zukunft der Mitarbeitenden, eine Auswirkung auf die Verantwortung für das „Gefühl“ (ebd.), d.h. für den Zusammenhalt der Familie, hat. Für den früheren Geschäftsführer ist die Identität der Familie und ihre „emotionale Verbundenheit“ (I.9: 184) stark mit dem Unternehmen verkoppelt. Dieses Verständnis der Verbindung von Familie und Unternehmen vertritt auch die Gesellschafterin aus dem ersten Interview, die das „Zusammenarbeiten“ (I.1: 957-960) und den „Zusammenhalt“ (I.1: 1063) als „Ethos“ (ebd.) der Unternehmerfamilie begreift, welcher dem Unternehmen als wichtiger Resilienz-Faktor aus Krisen geholfen hat.

Wie in Kapitel 3.2 erwähnt, ist die Unternehmerfamilie mit wachsender Mitgliederzahl mit der Herausforderung konfrontiert, den Zusammenhalt der weit verstreut wohnenden Verwandten aufrechtzuerhalten (vgl. Rösen et al., 2019, S. 227). Die Herausforderung eine emotionale Verbundenheit in einer dynastischen Unternehmerfamilie herzustellen, beschreibt die Gesellschafterin aus dem ersten Interview, die einem Familienunternehmen mit circa 50.000 Mitarbeitern und einer über 170 Jahre alten Firmenhistorie angehört. Sie hat die Schwierigkeit Beziehungen zwischen den Familienmitgliedern herzustellen selbst in ihrer eigenen Kindheit erfahren: „Manchmal trifft man [auf den Gesellschafterversammlungen] Leute, die man sein ganzes Leben lang nicht gesehen hat und die soll man plötzlich duzen“ (I.1: 203f.). Dieses Gefühl der Fremdheit, was jenem der emotionalen Verbundenheit konträr gegenübersteht, ist vermutlich auch auf die Tatsache zurückzuführen, dass sie bis zu ihrem 14. Lebensjahr „nicht damit aufgewachsen [ist], dass es diese Firma gibt“ (I.1: 162). Das jährliche Ereignis der „Gesellschafterversammlungen ... mit dem guten Essen und dem Treffen von entferntesten Cousins und Cousinen, auch aus Amerika“ (I.1: 179-183) stellt für die Befragte eine Möglichkeit dar, den Wert des Zusammenhalts auch in einer sehr stark wachsenden Familie zu (er)leben. Sie bemängelt ihre erst spät stattgefundene Heranführung an den familiären Betrieb und begrüßt dementsprechend die Möglichkeiten, die inzwischen für die Vernetzung der jungen Generationen geschaffen wurden. Sie erzählt von einem „Kinderprogramm“ (I.1: 404), welches Zusammenhalt und familiäre Identität stiften soll:

Über zwei Nächte hinweg werden [die Kinder] von einem Pfadfinderstamm betreut. An wechselnden Orten. ... Und dieses Kinderprogramm ist sehr, sehr wichtig für alle Kinder. Weil die dadurch nämlich nicht das erleben, was ich damals erlebt habe. Die kennen einander dann schon. Also zumindest die, ... deren Eltern kommen. Die

kennen sich dann quer, aber quer durch die Familienzweige. Ganz anders als bei mir. Und es ist sehr schön zu beobachten, dass meine beiden großen Töchter jetzt schon Kontakte haben in die Familien hinein, von denen ich nur träumen kann. (I.1: 740-748)

Eine weitere Möglichkeit der Vermittlung eines familiären Miteinanders an die Kinder beschreiben die Ehepartner aus Interview zwei mit dem Einbezug der Nachkommen in die Gestaltung der Familienverfassung. Für sie ist es essenziell wichtig, dass ihre Nachkommen verstehen, „dass man sich auf die Werte einigt und danach lebt“ (I.2: 163). In der Familienverfassung kann der Wert des Zusammenhalts und in welcher Art dieser Wert gelebt werden soll (z.B. in Form von jährlichen Familientreffen, Familienurlauben, Aktivitäten für die junge Generation etc.) explizit formuliert werden. Diese Bedeutsamkeit von Familientreffen und dem damit verbundenen kommunikativem Austausch zwischen den Familienmitgliedern für die Herstellung von Zusammenhalt, beschreibt abschließend der Gesellschafter aus dem dritten Interview wie folgt:

Dass man den Zusammenhalt dadurch auch erreicht, dass man Familientreffen macht, dass man sich miteinander austauscht ... das Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl, das man in der Familie hat und [die] gemeinsame Aufgabe. Dass man das dadurch fördert, dass man eben darüber immer wieder spricht und die anderen davon überzeugt. (I.3: 957-962)

5.2.3. Bescheidenheit und Sparsamkeit

Wimmer et al. beschreiben die besondere Eigenschaft der Eigentumsweitergabe als „Bindungseffekt“ (Wimmer et al., 2018a, S. 183) und damit als einen der wichtigsten Einflussfaktoren der Unternehmenspräsenz auf die Lebenswelt der Nachkommen. Den verantwortungsvollen Umgang mit dem Familienvermögen und dessen Vermittlung erwähnen sechs der befragten Interviewteilnehmer als einen wichtigen Bestandteil in der eigenen Sozialisation oder jener ihrer Kinder. Hieraus leiten sich die Werte der Bescheidenheit, Bodenständigkeit und Sparsamkeit ab, welche eng mit einem Verantwortungsbewusstsein gegenüber der *Bewahrung* des familiären Eigentums verbunden sind. Im ersten Interview formuliert die Befragte die Relevanz dieser Werte in ihrer Familie folgendermaßen:

[E]s gibt erst recht wenige, die da jetzt irgendwie eine Yacht irgendwo in der Karibik und ein Blockhaus in Florida haben. Also und selbst wenn sie es hätten, würden sie es nicht sagen, weil das gilt bei uns nicht als fein. Das gehört sich nicht und es gibt sehr, sehr viele Gesellschafter, die haben da so einen kleinen Zusatzbonus und mehr nicht. (I.1:225-229)

Die Beobachtung, dass die Entwicklung des Wertes der Bescheidenheit auch mit der Phase, Generation und Größe des Unternehmens zusammenhängt (siehe Kapitel 4.1.2), bestätigt zudem der ehemalige Geschäftsführer aus dem sechsten Interview:

Bei mir in der zweiten Generation. ... Wir haben sicherlich in meiner Generation eine stärkere unternehmerische Außenwirkung gehabt ... Die Autos waren ein bisschen größer. Wir haben sehr schön gewohnt. Die Ferien waren eine Nummer anders. (I.6: 394-397)

Diesen Zusammenhang der Entwicklung von Bodenständigkeit mit einem generationenübergreifenden Wertewandel beobachtet auch die eingehiratete Ehepartnerin aus dem achten Interview. Sie bezeichnet die Denkweise und den „Habitus“ (I.8: 110f.) der Generation, die mit dem Aufbau des Betriebes beschäftigt war mit folgenden Worten: „Ich bin die Firma, die Firma bin ich“ (I.8: 116). Die Verwandtschaft ihrer Schwiegereltern verhalte sich dementsprechend wenig bodenständig, sondern nach dem Prinzip: „Die meinen alle sie sind was Besseres“ (I.8: 103). Die Interviewte selbst ist in sehr bodenständigen Verhältnissen aufgewachsen und wurde von der Einstellung ihrer Mutter geprägt: „Ball flachhalten, jeder hat seinen Beitrag zu leisten, sich nicht ausruhen auf irgendwas“ (I.8: 25f.). Diese Werte möchte sie auch an ihre eigenen Kinder vermitteln, was Letztere mit folgenden Worten bestätigen:

[D]ass man beispielsweise in ... einen tollen Urlaub fährt oder dass man ein echt schönes Essen hat oder sonst etwas oder dass man mal teurere Kleidung hat ... bis heute sind solche Sachen nicht selbstverständlich. (I.5: 574-580)

Was für uns ganz, ganz wichtig ist ..., sind einfach diese Werte. Werte von Bodenständigkeit oder sonst was. Keiner hier von uns fühlt sich irgendwie besser oder sonst was, weil er irgendwie Unternehmer ist. ...sondern unsere Eltern haben uns immer geprägt ... mit ‚du machst dann Sachen alleine, und es ist egal, was da für ein Name steht. DU [Hervorhebung im Original] bist am Ende, der der dafür Verantwortung trägt und der dich auch selber weiterbringen muss‘. (I.5: 512-519)

Diese Vermittlung der Werte der Sparsamkeit in Kombination mit einer selbstbestimmten Entwicklung (siehe Kapitel 5.2.1) impliziert, dass sich die Nachkommen als „Namens-träger“ (I.5: 459) nicht aufgrund des Vermögens profilieren, sondern „Bodenhaftung“ (I.7: 307) behalten und Verantwortung für die Gestaltung des eigenen Lebenswegs übernehmen möchten. Von ähnlichen Werten berichten auch die Eltern aus dem zweiten Interview, welche ihren Kindern die Frage stellen „Wir können im Luxus leben, aber was bringt uns das?“ (I.2: 547f.) und ihren Kindern somit zeigen möchten, dass

man auch trotz eines „tolle[n] Polster[s]“ (I.2: 447f.) bodenständig und sparsam leben kann.

Den Ursprung des Wertes der Bescheidenheit, der in der Verbindung von Familie und Unternehmen liegt, beschreibt der Befragte aus dem sechsten Interview wie folgt:

Es gibt keine Trennung zwischen Geld für das Unternehmen und Geld für [das] Leben. ... man muss sich das wie einen Topf vorstellen. Je sparsamer man in seinem persönlichen Leben ist, desto früher ist man aus den betrieblich veranlassenen Schulden raus. (I.6: 125ff.)

Diese Verkopplung von unternehmerischer und familiärer Sphäre resultiert im Phänomen der enterpriseness. Die Präsenz des Familienbetriebs, welcher „Kontinuität“ (I.3: 994) und eine „langfristige Ausrichtung“ (I.2: 45) anstrebt, führt die Familienmitglieder als „Teil einer langen Generationskette“ (I.2: 225) in die „Verantwortung, dieses Vermögen langfristig zu erhalten“ (I.2: 219). Die Geschwister aus dem fünften Interview formulieren, dass für sie sowohl Demut, Respekt als auch Stolz für das, „was [die] Vorfahren geschaffen haben“ (I.5: 574ff.) zu einem sparsamen Verhalten führt.

Als „oberstes Gebot“ (I.3: 846) bezeichnet der dritte Befragte zudem die mit der Nachhaltigkeit des Unternehmens zusammenhängende „Verantwortung für die Mitarbeiter“ (I.3: 1380). Die Nachfolgerin aus Interview vier drückt dies folgendermaßen aus: „Also das Hauptziel ist, dass es dem Unternehmen gut geht und den ganzen Mitarbeitern und Familien, die da dranhängen“ (I.4: 1220ff.). An dieser Stelle lässt sich auf Heiko Kleves Formulierung der „transgenerationale[n] Treuhänderschaft“ (Kleve, 2020a, S. 83) zurückgreifen, die eine Verantwortung für den Erhalt des an das Familienunternehmen gebundenen Vermögens impliziert.

Bezüglich der Vermittlung dieses Verantwortungsgefühls kann erneut Elke Schröders (2011, S. 22) Feststellung angeführt werden, dass insbesondere das Vorleben bestimmter Werte durch die Eltern die Kinder zu deren Imitation anregt. Ergänzend hierzu berichten die beiden interviewten Geschwister, dass „dieses Bodenständige“ (I.5: 568f) von ihren Eltern „implizit vorgelebt worden ist“ (I.5: 696). Beide Elternteile werden als verantwortungsvolle Persönlichkeiten und somit Vorbilder der Kinder beschrieben. Ihre Mutter scheint „eine gewisse Selbstverständlichkeit ... in Verantwortung“ (I.5: 568ff.) zu leben und ihr Vater hat durch sein über 25-jähriges Engagement im Unternehmen demonstriert, „dass wir für das, was wir haben wollen, auch selbst arbeiten“ (ebd.). Dieses Beobachten und Nachahmen der elterlichen Haltung beschreibt zudem der Befragte aus dem Familienunternehmen des Sozialwesens mit den Worten: „[A]ber die Leute [und die eigenen Kinder] gucken halt genau ... wie beweg[e] ich mich, versprech[e] ich [oder] verlang[e] ich von denen halt Dinge, die ich selbst nicht erfülle“ (I.9: 773f.). Prägend kann jedoch nicht nur die Einstellung der Eltern sein, sondern auch die konkrete Verhaltensweise bzw. erzieherische Steuerungsversuche den Kindern gegenüber. Beispielsweise haben die Eltern den beiden die Nachfolge anstreben-

den Geschwistern beim Thema des Taschengeldes oder den Konsumausgaben klare Grenzen gesetzt:

[U]nsere Kinder sind auch nicht in Geld geschwommen. Wir hätten unseren Kindern wesentlich mehr bieten können, wir haben aber gesagt: ‚[B]is hierhin und nicht weiter und dann musst du halt jobben gehen‘. ... Sie haben ihr Auto gekriegt als sie 18 wurden, aber sie haben jetzt halt nicht einen 1er BMW hingestellt bekommen, sondern das war ein gebrauchter Opel Corsa. ... [W]ir haben so versucht das Mittelmaß zu machen. (I.8: 403-407)

Neben dem angesprochenen Vermitteln der Werte der Bodenständigkeit über das Beobachten des Verhaltens und der Haltung der Eltern, spielt auch das explizite, kommunikative Thematisieren der Werte eine wichtige Rolle. Das Unternehmerehepaar aus dem zweiten Interview berichtet beispielsweise, dass ihre Kinder ein entsprechendes „Mindset“ (I.2: 304) und ein Bewusstsein „wie man die Werte in [die] Zukunft trägt“ (I.2: 221) durch Gespräche mit ihrem Großvater ausgebildet haben:

Also bei meinem Vater war das so, dass unsere Kinder den Großvater sehr geliebt haben. Und er hat immer irgendwelche Sprüche gebracht, ... wie: ‚Du kannst nur das ausgeben, was Du selbst verdient hast‘ ... und [er] hat auch gesagt: ‚[D]as ist doch kein schlechter Mensch, nur weil er jeden Samstag hier am Markt steht und somit verdient er sein Geld letztendlich. Andere wiederum die brauchen das nicht‘, und er hat eben viele Seiten den Kindern gezeigt. Und wenn wir jetzt manchmal noch durch diese Stadt gehen, kommt dann bei unseren Kindern: ‚Mensch der Großpapa der hat gesagt...‘ Und das trägt. (I.2: 880-888)

Dieser transgenerationale Austausch zwischen den Enkeln und ihrem Großvater scheint eine besonders emotionale und nachhaltig prägende Wertevermittlung zu ermöglichen, die dem Verständnis der Unternehmerfamilie als „generationsübergreifende ... Erzähl- und Erinnerungsgemeinschaft“ (Stamm, 2013, S. 326) entspricht. Darunter fällt außerdem das Erzählen von Geschichten über die Unternehmenshistorie:

[M]an muss die Historie des Unternehmens nochmal unterstreichen und den Leuten immer wieder erzählen ‚wo kommen wir eigentlich her. Und wieso sind wir in der Situation, in der wir jetzt sind. Wir haben ja diese Anteile des Unternehmens auch mal übertragen bekommen und das war aber eine Verantwortung, die wir übernommen haben, dass wir das wiederum in die nächste Generation übertragen‘. (I.3: 795-799)

Neben diesem Vermitteln auf kommunikativer Ebene, lassen sich insbesondere in wachsenden, „dynastische[n]“ (Rüsen et al., 2019, S. 227) Unternehmerfamilien formelle Strukturen schaffen, die ein „frühzeitiges Heranführen, Zusammenführen und Informieren“ (Schröder, 2011, S. 21) der Kinder an einen verantwortungsvollen und sparsamen Umgang mit dem Vermögen ermöglichen. Dementsprechend beschreiben die beiden Geschwister, dass sie bereits als Jugendliche durch das Teilnehmen an Gesellschafterversammlungen ein Bewusstsein für die „hohe Verantwortung [durch die] Anteile eines Unternehmens“ (I.5: 1176-1182) entwickelt haben. Der ehemalige Geschäftsführer aus dem siebten Interview beschreibt die in der Rolle des Gesellschafters zu erlernende Aufgabe als das Finden einer „Balance zwischen ‚hier ist ein Vermögen was verantwortet werden muss‘ und ‚hier ist eine Verantwortung für eine Firma als Gesellschafter““ (I.7: 153f.).

Außerdem berichten die beiden Eltern aus dem zweiten Interview, dass sie ihren Kindern eine direkte Involvierung in die unternehmerischen Aktivitäten der familiären Vermögensverwaltung angeboten haben. Gemäß der Aussage der Mutter „Das ist ja am Ende auch später euer Geld“ (I.2: 200f.) haben sie die Nachkommen zu Besichtigungen potenzieller Immobilien mitgenommen. Zudem hat die Familie etabliert, dass die Eltern die Übersicht über das Budget am Ende eines jeden Jahres gemeinsam mit den Kindern besprechen. Letztere sollen dadurch eine finanzielle „Sensibilität“ (I.2: 454) und ein Verantwortungsgefühl für das familiäre Vermögen entwickeln.

Die Herausforderung für Kinder eine solche verantwortungsvolle Haltung auch gegenüber den Gleichaltrigen in anderen nicht-familiären Sozialisationsumfeldern zu vertreten, ist im Sozialisationskontext der Unternehmerfamilie besonders präsent. Beispielsweise erwähnen die interviewten Geschwister zu Schulzeiten negative Aufmerksamkeit und „jede Menge Neid“ (I.7: 785) entgegengebracht bekommen zu haben. Mit Sprüchen wie „du Bonze“ (I.8: 412) wurden sowohl der Sohn als auch die Tochter konfrontiert. Interessant zu beobachten ist ihr Umgang mit diesen Beleidigungen. Gemäß dem Rat ihrer Mutter „[I]hr müsst euch dessen nicht schämen[,] aber ihr dürft euch da drauf auch nicht ausruhen“ (I.8: 466f.) haben die beiden Nachkommen in ihren sozialen Umfeldern offen die Schattenseiten angesprochen, die ein Aufwachsen in einer Unternehmerfamilie mit sich bringen kann. Auf den Kommentar „ja du hast ja sowieso die Kohle und dein Vater ist reich und ihr könnt euch alles erlauben“ (I.8: 385) haben die Kinder selbstbewusst geantwortet: „[W]eißte aber dein Vater ist um fünf Uhr Zuhause - meiner nicht“ (I.8: 386) oder darauf verwiesen, dass ihr Vater aufgrund eines wichtigen Geschäftstermins nicht an der Taufe des jüngsten Sohnes teilnehmen konnte. Ein weiteres Beispiel für einen offenen und kreativen Umgang mit den Ausgrenzungserfahrungen ist die Organisation der Geburtstagsfeier des nachfolgenden Sohnes auf dem Firmengelände mit einer Führung durch die Produktionshallen oder das Einladen seiner Fußballmannschaft zu einer Werksbesichtigung. Die Mutter erzählt, dass er nach diesen Ereignissen „ein ganz anderes Verhältnis noch einmal mit seinen Freunden [hatte].

... [D]er hat gesagt, die sollen das mal sehen, ... dass das nicht so alles von selbst passiert“ (I.8: 446-452). Auch die Tochter hat als Jugendliche ein Waffelbacken gemeinsam mit ihren Freundinnen am Tag der offenen Tür des Unternehmens organisiert und „dann auch voller Stolz die Firma gezeigt“ (I.8: 455).

Der Literatur ist zu entnehmen, dass ein bescheidener Vermögensumgang die Kinder nach Außen vor Anfeindungen schützen und damit auf ihr Sicherheitsbedürfnis eingehen soll (vgl. Kleve, 2020a). Diese kommunikative Vorsicht wurde den Kindern von ihrer Mutter mit folgenden Worten vermittelt:

„Achtet einfach ein bisschen darauf, wie ihr das erzählt. Und manche sind dann vielleicht ein bisschen traurig, weil sie das nicht machen können‘. Meine Eltern haben da immer versucht, ein Verständnis zu erzeugen. Und eben diese Bodenständigkeit. Das man da dankbar ist und dass das auch nicht selbstverständlich ist. Und dass man auch nicht ... dazu sagen muss ‚Och ja und du machst das ja nicht. Und ich bin ja etwas Besseres. Weil ich mache es ja und ich kriege ja das und sonst was‘ ... Ja lieber ein bisschen im Stillen und nicht so rumposaunen. Wir posaunen halt nicht. Gar nicht. Bodenständig. (I.5: 646-656)

Trotz dieses vorsichtigen Umgangs empfinden die interviewten Geschwister keine Scham in Bezug auf den vermögenden Hintergrund, sondern treten mit den Gleichaltrigen darüber in angebrachter Weise in den Dialog und in Interaktion. Die Tatsache, dass beide Nachkommen aus dem fünften Interview eine gemeinsame Übernahme des Familienunternehmens anstreben, impliziert den Erfolg des von den Eltern und insbesondere der Mutter gerahmten Sozialisations- und Erziehungsprozesses.

6. Fazit

6.1. Beantwortung der Forschungsfrage

Basierend auf den theoretischen sowie empirischen Erkenntnissen dieser Arbeit kann geschlussfolgert werden, dass im Besonderen das an das Familienunternehmen gebundene Vermögen den Faktor darstellt, der die *Sozialisation eigener Art* von Kindern und Jugendlichen in Unternehmerfamilien kennzeichnet. Dieses Vermögen und die daran gekoppelte Verantwortung für dessen transgenerationalen Erhalt kann als *Bindeglied zwischen Familie und Unternehmen* hervorgehoben werden. Aus dieser Verkopplung ergibt sich eine Verpflichtung sowohl gegenüber dem *Geschäft* als auch gegenüber dem *Gefühl*, welche den drei analysierten Kernwerten wie folgt zu Grunde liegt.

Der Wunsch nach Existenzsicherung des Unternehmens, sprich des *Geschäfts*, und nach Weiterführung der familiären Generationenfolge, sprich des *Gefühls*, führt in der Mehrzahl der interviewten Unternehmerfamilien zu einer Vermittlung

der sachorientierten Werte der *Bescheidenheit und Sparsamkeit*. Die Vermittlung dieser Werte geschieht primär durch das elterliche Vorleben eines sparsamen Umgangs mit Vermögen, einer Wertschätzung der daraus resultierenden Privilegien (Bildungschancen, Urlaub etc.), einer Budgetierung des Taschengeldes, einer Wahrung der Verhältnismäßigkeit in Bezug auf Vermögensgegenstände (z.B. das erste eigene Auto) und einem kommunikativen Thematisieren der mit dem Wert verbundenen transgenerationalen Treuhänderschaft (z.B. Geschichten der Firmenhistorie). Ein Verständnis Letzterer kann zudem in Form eines altersgerechten Einbindens der Nachkommen in die unternehmerischen Belange vermittelt werden (z.B. Mitwirken an der Familienverfassung, Integration in unternehmerische Entscheidungsprozesse, Durchführen von Praktika und Ferienjobs, Teilnahme an Gesellschafterversammlungen etc.).

Außerdem haben die Bemühungen das betriebliche Vermögen und die Mitarbeiter nachhaltig zusammenzuhalten eine Verstärkung des bindungsorientierten Wertes des *Zusammenhalts* zur Folge. Nur dann, wenn die Familie mit ihren *Gefühlen* vereint hinter dem Unternehmen und seinen *Geschäften* steht, ist es dem Familienbetrieb möglich langfristig zu überleben. Der Wert des Zusammenhalts kann durch regelmäßig stattfindende Familienurlaube, das Ausüben gemeinsamer Hobbys, die Teilnahme an Familien- oder Unternehmensfeiern, eine Stärkung des innerfamiliären Dialogs und das Formulieren von Zusammenhalt stiftenden Maßnahmen in der Familienverfassung vermittelt werden.

Zudem hat sich die Transmission der bindungsorientierten Werte der *freien Lebensgestaltung und Berufswahl* als dritter Kernwert aus den Untersuchungen dieser Arbeit ergeben. Hierbei steht der Wunsch nach Selbstbestimmung bzw. einer Verantwortung für das eigene *Gefühl* der familiären Erwartung einer Unternehmensnachfolge bzw. einer Verantwortung für das *Geschäft* gegenüber. Die Vermittlung von freiheitlichen Werten kann über das Einführen von Kontextmarkierungen, d.h. dem Versuch der Trennung der unternehmerischen und familiären Sphäre, vermittelt werden, sodass die Kinder die Unternehmenspräsenz nicht als beschränkende Belastung, sondern als chancenreiches Privileg erleben. Zudem können Nachfolgeregelungen in der Familienverfassung festgelegt werden, Abgrenzungsmöglichkeiten durch Auslandsaufenthalte ermöglicht oder das Fördern der autonomen Gestaltung der Berufsbiografie durch die Eltern unterstützt werden.

Es kann festgehalten werden, dass sich diese drei Kernwerte in den Wertedimensionen der Bewahrung, Selbstüberwindung und Offenheit für Wandel wiederfinden. Die Dimension der Selbsterhöhung hat in den durchgeführten Interviews nur eine untergeordnete Rolle gespielt.

In Bezug auf die dieser Arbeit zu Grunde liegende Forschungsfrage kann folglich resümiert werden, dass sich die widersprüchlichen Kontexte der bindungsorientierten Familie und des sachorientierten Unternehmens im Phänomen der Unternehmerfamilie verbinden. Die Verantwortung für das *Geschäft* scheint die Verantwortung für das *Gefühl* zu verstärken und bestehende Paradoxien *zwischen Gefühl und Geschäft*

teilweise aufzulösen. Dieser Fall kann beispielsweise eintreten, wenn die Nachkommen ihre Selbstverwirklichung in der Unternehmensnachfolge finden. So scheinen sich die Werte der Familie und die des Unternehmens in Anwesenheit der drei Kernwerte weg von einer widersprüchlichen und hin zu einer sich ergänzenden und wechselseitig verstärkenden Einheit zu entwickeln. Dies gelingt insbesondere dann, wenn der Einfluss der Unternehmenspräsenz auf die Familiendynamik, d.h. die *enterpriseness*, in das Bewusstsein der Betroffenen gerückt wird und Ausgangspunkt für einen innerfamiliären Reflexionsprozess ist.

Dementsprechend kann der Appell an die familiären Sozialisationsagenten abgeleitet werden, dass diese über die Wertevermittlung eine angemessene Balance zwischen einem Heranführen ihrer Kinder an unternehmerische Belange und einem Fördern ihrer autonomen Entwicklung finden sollten. Das Auflösen der Paradoxien dient hierbei dazu die widersprüchlichen Entwicklungsaufgaben der Heranwachsenden und damit die Belastungsfaktoren ihrer mentalen Gesundheit zu reduzieren.

6.2. Ausblick

Schlussendlich soll darauf hingewiesen werden, dass die aus der theoretischen Literaturanalyse und qualitativen Interviewauswertung abgeleiteten Erkenntnisse aufgrund des begrenzten Umfangs der vorliegenden Arbeit lediglich eine exemplarische Annäherung an die hoch komplexen Dynamiken einer jeden Unternehmerfamilie bieten.

Neben einer Erweiterung der Stichprobe kann die vorliegende Arbeit somit als Ausgangspunkt für weiterführende wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen dienen. Diese könnten die Relevanz von Family-Governance Maßnahmen, geschlechterspezifische Sozialisationsfaktoren und die Rolle der Ehepartner der Geschäftsführer in der Wertevermittlung der Nachkommen analysieren. Außerdem kann eine kulturvergleichende Perspektive die unterschiedlichen Sozialisationsbedingungen und Werte in Unternehmerfamilien diverser Kulturkreise beleuchten.

Fest steht, dass das Forschungsfeld der Unternehmerfamilie zahlreiche Forschungslücken bietet, deren Schließung nicht nur weitere soziologische Erkenntnisse liefern würde, sondern wertvolle Handlungsempfehlungen für einen angemessenen Umgang mit den zukünftigen Verantwortungsträgern in den zahlreichen Familienunternehmen und damit für einen transgenerationalen Erhalt der deutschen Wirtschaftskraft bieten kann.

Abschließend soll folgendes Zitat die Relevanz für weiterführende Betrachtungen der Sozialisationsbedingungen von Nachkommen in Unternehmerfamilien unterstreichen:

Raise responsible children. This point may appear obvious. I mention it only because most discussions of preparing children to succeed in the family business begin with their entry into the business instead of with their entry into society. (Kay, 1992, S. 247)

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