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Human resources and mutual gains in family firms: New developments and possibilities on the horizon

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ABSTRACT

Human resources are paramount to family firms and to families in business because they are essential for achieving human flourishing and building family businesses that last for generations. Despite the increasing focus on HR in recent years, our understanding of the drivers, processes, and outcomes of family firm HR practices is still in its infancy. As a result, the development of useful theory has opportunity to grow. The aim of our Special Issue is to demonstrate the power of the mutual gains perspective to advance actionable insights around HR issues in family business scholarship and practice. Toward this aim, this Special Issue presents five research articles that have taken the mutual gains perspective to heart in their own ways, making significant contributions not only to the family business field but also to the HRM domain and beyond. Inspired by, but also going beyond the articles in this Special Issue, we develop concrete ideas and questions that flesh out new developments and possibilities on the horizon, using the following question as a leitmotiv: "How can family business research and practice help create healthy, flourishing family firms for flourishing people (family and nonfamily), taking into account the heterogeneity of family firms and families in business?"

1. Introduction

"A tree falls the way it leans. Be careful which way you lean." (Dr. Seuss, from *The Lorax*)

Human resources (HR) —"the knowledge, skills, networks and energies of people and, underpinning them, their physical and emotional health, intellectual capabilities, personalities and motivations" (Boxall, 2013, p. 13)— and human resources management (HRM) are critically important for family business research and practice. Since Astrachan and Kolenko (1994) argued that HR practices were an ignored factor in explaining family businesses' competitive advantage and longevity across multiple generations, HR research has steadily grown in the family business domain, most expeditiously in recent years. Several Special Issues on HR in family firms (e.g., Combs, Jaskiewicz, Shanine, & Balkin, 2018; Hoon, Hack, & Kellermans, 2019; Neubaum, 2018) attest to this growth.

However, despite increasing attention, the family business domain still has some way to go, both in exploring and deepening a wider variety of HR topics and in generating actionable theory. Especially in times of increasing uncertainty and disruption, as the recent COVID-19 pandemic continues to demonstrate, the importance of understanding, maintaining, and enhancing human potential and flourishing cannot be overstated. This also immediately highlights and underlines the practical relevance of HR for family firms: How, when, and why can family influence help (or hamper) to attract, retain and develop talent; what family business characteristics are conducive toward developing and nurturing long-term and mutually beneficial relationships with (both family and nonfamily) employees; how can family businesses help their associates live more fulfilling lives, both at work and in their own families, are some of the questions that occupy many family business decision-makers and researchers alike.

The main goal of our call for papers for this Special Issue was to explore and highlight the importance of the mutual gains perspective on HRM in family firms (Gnan & Lambrechts, 2018). The mutual gains perspective originates from the HRM field where it is witnessing a significant revival (Beer, Boselie, & Brewster, 2015; Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills, & Walton, 1984; Guest, 2017). At the heart of the perspective is the concept of positive reciprocity, "such that if the employer prioritizes HR practices that promote well-being [the overall quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work, Warr (1987)], employees in return will respond positively, reflected in

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various indicators of [individual and organizational] performance" (Guest, 2017, p. 28). The idea of mutual gains "reflects the type of opportunities available for two or more interdependent parties to establish jointly shared benefits despite having potentially divergent interests" (Valizade, Ogbonnaya, Tregaskis, & Forde, 2016, p. 354).

The mutual gains perspective is once again at the core of contemporary strategic HRM research. Within the latter, the following question is key: How can HRM achieve (a process of) reciprocity and mutual gains for *all* key stakeholders, including employees, as opposed to HRM that is solely focused on improving returns for employer-owners? (Beer et al., 2015; Boxall, 2013; Edgar, Geare, Zhang, & McAndrew, 2015; Guest, 2017; Valizade et al., 2016). Based on an integration of insights from a diversity of literatures (strategic management, HRM, organizational behavior, employment relations), Boxall (2013), for example, in an influential study, proposed three conditions for achieving mutual gains through quality employer-employee relationships: (a) a capability match —the fit between the employer's need for competent employees and the employees' need for a stimulating work environment that promotes the use and development of their competencies, (b) a commitment match —the fit between the employer's need for committed and flexible employees and the employees' need for security, fair treatment and community, and (c) a contribution match —the degree to which the employer and employees feel that their respective needs are being met, or in other words, feel that their return on investment is rewarding.

There were several reasons for prioritizing the mutual gains perspective in our call for papers. First, HR practices —i.e., "organizational actions or processes and job characteristics that focus on attracting, developing and motivating employees" (Boon, Den Hartog, & Lepak, 2019, p. 2518)— or HR systems as configurations of HR practices (Boon et al., 2019; Lepak, Liao, Chung, & Harden, 2006) that promote well-being and human flourishing are just "the right thing[*s*] to do on ethical grounds" (Guest, 2017, p. 34) because the needs of employees are still too often neglected; they are much more than a resource or a capital form instrumental for efficient economic production. Second, there is increasing evidence from research and practice that organizations that succeed in creating mutual gains or reciprocal advantages in employment relationships, or in other relationships with other stakeholders, outperform those that do not in terms of individual performance (Guest, 2017) and innovation, sustainability, and financial performance (Laszlo, Cooperrider, & Fry, 2020). Indeed, "Because our places of work play such an important role in all our lives, for the good of the firm and the good of the person, business organizations that serve the whole human being and not just the economic part of each person will outperform those that do not take such a view" (Laszlo et al., 2020, p. 7). Serving the whole human being means caring for and helping to develop their human potential and well-being and full repertoires of passion, knowledge, creativity, and talent (Laszlo et al., 2020); not as a means to an end prioritizing owner-shareholder interests but as an end in itself (Guest, 2017). The third reason we advanced the mutual gains perspective is that it can help deepen our theoretical understanding of when, why, and how family businesses may be bad (e.g., Neckebrouck, Schulze, & Zellweger, 2018), good, great (e.g., Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005; Miller, Lee, Chang, & Breton-Miller, 2009), or better places to work than nonfamily firms (e.g., Christensen-Salem, Mesquita, Hashimoto, Hom, & Gómez-Mejía, 2021), taking into consideration that there is much heterogeneity across family businesses (Daspit, Chrisman, Ashton, & Evangelopoulos, 2021; Daspit, Chrisman, Sharma, Pearson, & Mahto, 2018; Neubaum, Kammerlander, & Brigham, 2019) and among owning families (Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017; Jaskiewicz et al., 2017; Kleve, Köllner, von Schlippe, & Rüsen, 2020; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2018). Fourth, despite notable progress made (e.g., Combs et al., 2018; Hoon et al., 2019; Neubaum, 2018), HRM knowledge in the family business domain is still limited and remains under-theorized (Cruz, Firfiray, & Gómez-Mejía, 2011). The mutual gains perspective holds the promise of providing more coherence and direction in the theorizing of HRM issues in family firms going forward.

Another, yet unanticipated, reason why the mutual gains perspective is an essential perspective in studying family businesses became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting Great Resignation —a phenomenon in which employees have voluntarily quit their jobs en masse as of early 2021, initially primarily in the United States (Hall, 2022; Sull, Sull, & Zweig, 2022). Indeed, the pandemic has caused many workers to reconsider their careers and life goals (Hall, 2022) and to become aware of their well-being at work and how their employers have or have not promoted their well-being. Research by Sull et al. (2022), in fact, identified a toxic (vs. healthy) organization culture as the most powerful predictor of resigning employees during the Great Resignation. We see this increasing awareness around well-being in many countries around the world (Pass & Ridgway, 2022). The magnitude and severity of COVID-19 will most likely leave a lasting feeling that business organizations cannot take employees' health and well-being for granted. Promoting employee health and well-being, or even more strongly, "flourishing," is a strategic priority and will increasingly become so for every business organization to attract and retain (the most) talented and vital employees (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Kowalski & Loretto, 2017; Laszlo et al., 2020; Seligman, 2011).

As guest editors, we are proud and honored to present five research articles by many talented authors that have taken the mutual gains perspective to heart in their own ways. All papers reflect excellent work that makes significant contributions to not only the family business field but also to the HRM domain and beyond.

2. Contributions in this Special Issue

The article by Rondi, Überbacher, von Schlenk-Barnsdorf, De Massis, and Hülsbeck (2021) begins by pointing out that many long-term oriented, multigenerational family firms are known for being excellent employers and excellent innovators at the same time, despite two potentially competing goals. On the one hand, for family businesses to thrive in the long run, they must nurture loyal, long-term employees because they help to sustain a stable and trustworthy business core. On the other hand, stability and high retention rates can hinder innovation if the status quo remains unchallenged, and innovation is critical to survive and thrive across generations. Therefore, the authors pose the following research question: "How can a long-term oriented family firm simultaneously nurture its employees (family and nonfamily) while pursuing innovation?".

To provide answers to this question, the authors develop a history-informed process model based on an in-depth longitudinal case study of Carl Schlenk AG, a fourth-generation German family business known as both a best place to work and an outstanding innovator. The process model identifies distinct family firm characteristics that shape a trust-based environment of solidarity, loyalty, and credibility, which generates a virtuous cycle in which wellbeing-enhancing HRM practices strengthen innovation practices and vice versa, leading to mutual gains for the family firm and its employees that can sustain across multiple generations. The authors show that the key engine that keeps the vehicle going is the owning family, which has consistently applied this way of thinking and acting for generations and has learned to always adapt flexibly to the social needs of the moment.

These insights are consistent with research that argues that the history and traditions of business families need not be a chokehold, but in some cases can be a formidable source of strength for sustained innovation (De Massis, Frattini, Kotlar, Petruzzelli, & Wright, 2016; Erdogan, Rondi, & De Massis, 2020; Jaskiewicz, Combs, Ketchen, & Ireland, 2016; Suddaby & Jaskiewicz, 2020). The study of Rondi et al. (2021) is also an excellent example of how powerful qualitative, history-informed family business research (Suddaby, Silverman, De Massis, Jaskiewicz, & Micelotta, 2020) can be for gaining greater insight into how a variety of practices and processes are created and connected over time.

The article by Flamini, Pittino, and Visintin (2021) draws on stewardship theory (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997) and starts from two divergent views of HRM in family businesses. One perspective emphasizes the owning family's stewardship attitude towards the entire firm, which is reflected in their long-term orientation, willingness to cultivate people (family and nonfamily) development, and propensity to adopt HRM practices that nurture a mutually beneficial exchange. In contrast, the other perspective suggests that the owning family's stewardship often primarily supports family gains that may come at the expense of employees' gains. These conflicting perspectives exist in part because the heterogeneity of family firms has been largely ignored when examining HRM practices. The authors offer a more fine-grained analysis to provide a more contextualized picture of the quality of family firms as employers by considering the degree and form of family involvement and the size of the organization, taking seriously family firms' heterogeneity.

Specifically, the authors find that in Italian family SMEs, family leadership, indicated by the presence of a family CEO (vs. a nonfamily CEO), increases the family's involvement in HRM (i.e., more family members hold HRM positions) which fosters greater adoption and use of mutuality-enhancing HR practices that focus on well-being, leading to increased reciprocity on the part of the employees and higher labor productivity. The authors interpret the adoption and use of mutuality-enhancing practices as strong expressions of family stewardship towards the whole organization. Interestingly, the authors suggest that nonfamily CEOs may also be capable of exhibiting a similar family stewardship attitude if they manage to develop family awareness (Hall & Nordqvist, 2008) that aligns them closely with the owning family. These insights resonate with the work by Sieger, Zellweger, and Aquino (2013) who demonstrate that high levels of psychological ownership can effectively align the interests of non-owning managers with those of family owners. Continuing this train of thought, and connecting it to the findings by Flamini et al. (2021), it appears that mutuality and stewardship orientation may have a moderating or mediating impact on the effectiveness of this alignment.

The article of Querbach, Waldkirch, and Kammerlander (2020) begins with a little-known observation about how job benefits impact employee satisfaction differently in family and nonfamily firms. Building on social exchange theory (Daspit, Holt, Chrisman, & Long, 2016; Emerson, 1976), the authors argue that family and nonfamily firms differ in their social exchange systems and that the fit between the prevailing social exchange system and three types of employee job benefits —benefits of care, status, and life quality, which contribute to physical, psychological, and social well-being, respectively— influences the extent to which job benefits affect employee satisfaction. The authors, when comparing German family firms and nonfamily firms, find that job benefits of care and job benefits of status align better with the generalized social exchange system that typically characterizes family firms, resulting in greater employee satisfaction compared to nonfamily firms. In contrast, job benefits of life quality are more in line with the restricted social exchange system typical of nonfamily firms, leading to higher levels of employee satisfaction in comparison to family firms.

According to the authors, the greater impact of job benefits of status in family firms compared to nonfamily firms might be explained by the less formalized career paths that are typically offered in family firms. Interestingly, granting status could provide an alternative informal career path, signaling to employees that they are moving closer to the owning family, psychologically becoming "quasi-family" (Karra, Tracey, & Phillips, 2006), which employees may find rewarding. However, based on research by Hayward, Hunt, and Miller (2022), we would like to add that employees (and other stakeholders) may only be able to move closer to the family and build supportive relationships when the family enacts "family vulnerability," which can promote mutual goodwill and trust-building between social exchange actors. While it is well known that job benefits can increase employee satisfaction and contribute to the overall success of a company (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007), the present article emphasizes that the magnitude of the positive direct effect of job benefits on employee satisfaction varies significantly across prevailing social exchange systems: not all firms benefit in the same way from providing employee job benefits.

Fabel, Mináriková, and Hopp (2022) also use social exchange theory as their theoretical underpinning and focus on differences in hiring preferences of external managers between family and nonfamily firms. The authors' starting point is the observation that realizing the benefits of hiring external managers (in terms of bringing in critical skills and capabilities) is primarily a function of person-organization fit. The authors' core argument concerning this idea of "fit" is that because family and nonfamily firms accommodate different social exchange systems, generalized social exchange and restricted social exchange, respectively, they are more likely to weigh and prioritize the specific skills of potential external hiring candidates differently, as some skills fit one exchange system better than the other. Analysis of data from a Western-European executive search agency shows that both types of firms are looking for managers with a strong customer and results orientation (performance focus), but family firms have a stronger preference for managers with strong functional competence and leadership skills, whereas nonfamily firms have a greater preference for managers with more pronounced market knowledge.

We wonder if one possible explanation could be that family firms often have deep industry ties and long-term knowledge of the markets that come from family involvement. The market knowledge "sticks around longer" because it is contained in family relationships and can be transferred across generations (Herrero, Hughes, & Larrañeta, 2021). Therefore, family firms are less in need of managers with market knowledge and prefer managers who can be molded into leadership positions (for firm and family). In nonfamily firms, on the other hand, the market knowledge often disappears when leading managers leave the firm. Therefore, they have a greater need to hire managers who bring that market expertise to the firm. In this study, family firms clearly choose distinct paths when hiring external managers, facing a delicate balancing act between the needs of the owning family, the family firm, the external managers, and the requirements of the market.

At first glance, the article by Cirillo, Muñoz-Bullón, Sánchez-Bueno, and Sciascia (2020) on employee downsizing in family firms stands in stark contrast to this Special Issue's focus on human resources and mutual gains. However, a deeper reading suggests otherwise. The authors' starting point is that family businesses are often portrayed as better employers who are less likely to downsize because they want to avoid negative reputation effects, be seen as socially responsible employers in the local community who care about employee well-being, uphold a family stewardship attitude towards the entire organization, and maintain their socioemotional wealth (SEW) (Gómez-Mejía, Haynes, Núñez-Nickel, Jacobson, & Moyano-Fuentes, 2007). Indeed, family firms' SEW focus reduces the tendency to lay off workers as an effort to reduce costs, as the long-term social costs would outweigh the financial benefits. However, the authors point out that such a narrow SEW focus can be mitigated by other strategies and strategic choices, thereby reducing the social costs of downsizing. Using the extended SEW perspective (Miller & Le Bretton-Miller, 2014), they theorize that sales internationalization strategic choices, i.e., export intensity, global focus, and export mode, affect family firms' downsizing strategies.

Based on an analysis of Spanish firms, the authors find that family firms with an advanced sales internationalization strategy (i.e., higher export intensity, higher global focus, and direct export mode) exhibit a less negative probability of downsizing, as an advanced internationalization strategy can lessen the socioemotional costs of downsizing by making local stakeholders less relevant than global ones. The study emphasizes that to make progress on how SEW relates to HRM and other strategic issues, it is vital to move beyond a focus on narrow family-centered goals (i.e., restricted SEW) to a more inclusive conceptualization that considers the priorities of and benefits for a broader range of stakeholders (i.e., extended SEW) (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2014). The insights of Cirillo et al. (2020) resonate with the work by Craig and Newbert (2020) who add more clarity to the heterogeneity discussion of why some business families "'do good' for some [stakeholders] but not [for all] others" (Shepherd, 2016, p. 155). Craig and Newbert (2020) argue that business families characterized by moderate levels of cognitive moral development, a long-term orientation, and hope for the future are likely to survive in the long run because they are better able to manage the delicate balancing act between self-regarding and other-regarding interests when making (difficult) decisions. Continuing this line of reasoning, and connecting it to the insights of Cirillo et al. (2020), fruitful future research would further deepen and better understand this particular family business heterogeneity debate.

3. Outlook: possibilities on the horizon

Looking at the various contributions in this Special Issue, it is clear that nurturing human potential and well-being are central elements of organizational behavior and decision-making. Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being was included as one of the 17 United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 (United Nations, 2022). How can family business research and practice help create healthy, flourishing family firms for flourishing people (family and nonfamily alike), taking into account the heterogeneity of family firms and families in business? We use this question to guide our exploration of what possibilities lie on the horizon, inspired by but also going beyond the contents in this Special Issue.

3.1. Developing human potential and well-being: nurturing multiple needs simultaneously

More research is needed to better understand the social conditions that support or undermine positive human potential and well-being, including mental well-being (Arijs & Michiels, 2021), in family firms and owning families. According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) —a widely researched and empirically validated metatheory of person-context interaction— people's natural tendencies toward growth, optimal functioning, constructive (social) development, psychological health, and well-being are universally and in all stages of life (Lataster et al., 2022) dependent on the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs (i.e., energizing states) of autonomy (i.e., self-control while interacting), competence (i.e., being able to use and further develop competencies), and relatedness (i.e., feeling connected to others, feeling belongingness, and reciprocally contributing to each other's thriving). Therefore, ongoing need satisfaction requires ongoing supporting social conditions, for example, by persistently nurturing evolving mutuality-promoting HR practices with care and love for developing human potential and well-being at their core. All three needs are essential which means that if any one of them is not met, there will be negative impacts on people's flourishing and well-being.

How is the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness within *family and nonfamily* members related to the satisfaction of the *family*'s social and affective needs through particular non-financial aspects of the family firm (e.g., the ability to exercise family influence and control, the desire for a sense of belonging and identity, the desire to perpetuate the family dynasty), or the family's socioemotional wealth, which is used by the owning family as the primary reference point for making (strategic) decisions (Berrone, Cruz, & Gómez-Mejía, 2012; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007; Murphy, Huybrechts, & Lambrechts, 2019)? Murphy et al. (2019), for example, find that a sense of belonging and identity lies at the heart of the origin and development of next-generation family members' socioemotional wealth in all their life stages. These authors suggest an important link with the basic psychological need for relatedness and speculate that this allows the next generation to internalize the great value the family attaches to the family firm and its nonfinancial aspects. But how and when will the family's satisfaction of its social and affective needs facilitate or thwart the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs within *family and nonfamily* members, thereby impacting their positive human potential and well-being? As we focus on people (family and nonfamily) practices, reciprocity, and mutual gains in this Special Issue, this is a critical question that cries out for answers (for a similar call, see Elsbach & Pieper, 2019).

3.2. Mutuality-promoting psychological contracts and high-quality relating

There is a great need for more dynamic, context-specific (e.g., Krueger, Bogers, Labaki, & Basco, 2021), and temporal ways of thinking about the relationship between the environment, the family business, the family in business, and employees (family and nonfamily). The tension between person and organization has always been challenging (Argyris, 1964) and will probably never disappear. The rapidly changing, turbulent, and complex environment in which organizations operate and the evolving expectations of diverse employees require much more research attention to advance our understanding of how the psychological contract (Rousseau, Hansen, & Tomprou, 2018, p. 1081) —"a cognitive schema, or system of beliefs, representing an individual's perceptions of his or her own and another's obligations, defined as the duties or responsibilities one feels bound to perform"— between the family firm and its members originates and alters over time. The psychological contract concept has proven to be helpful in understanding and managing exchange relationships in their context (Rousseau et al., 2018). The above definition of the psychological contract, for that matter, can also be applied to the owning family and its members.

Assuming that family businesses will continue to operate in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2021; Leppäaho & Ritala, 2022), where well-being and the development of human potential along with continuous innovation become ever more critical, what will psychological contract processes (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006; Rousseau, 2004; Rousseau at al., 2018) look like? We suspect that the family firm's or the owning family's capacity to create psychological contracts that persistently promote mutual gains in employment relationships (Guest, 2017), or in other relationships with other stakeholders (Laszlo et al., 2020), even under adverse circumstances, and (configurations of) HR practices that are in line with this, will be vital for flourishing people in flourishing family firms. In line with this reasoning, Rousseau et al. (2018) predict the increasing emergence of psychological contracts that promote mutual adaptation and resilience.

But what determines this capacity to create mutuality-enhancing psychological contracts and HR practices? Why is it that one family business or family in business succeeds in this more effectively than another? We wonder if it could be that those who succeed more easily in creating these types of psychological contracts and practices have invested, and still do today, years in building high-quality relationships organization-wide that allow for mutual trust-building, joint learning, and a shared feeling of joint psychological ownership (Lambrechts, Grieten, Bouwen, & Corthouts, 2009; Schein, 2009)? Indeed, high-quality relationships (Lambrechts et al., 2009) are characterized by reciprocity between the actors' contributions (vs. one-sidedness), open and illustrated mutual questioning and contradicting (vs. closed and vague communication), being responsive and appreciative to others and otherness (Hosking, 2011), and each actor supporting the other's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2014). Building on this line of thought, we suggest that it is precisely these high-quality relationships that are strongly associated with a business family that has the courage to show its vulnerability (Hayward et al., 2022), employees who feel cared for (Christensen-Salem et al., 2021), and effectively aligning gains of family and nonfamily actors through psychological ownership (Feldermann & Hiebl, 2022; Pierce & Jussila, 2010; Sieger et al., 2013). In this way, the often-used expression "our employees are our most important asset" takes on a more significant and deeper meaning.

3.3. Sustainability and reciprocity

Sustainability is of great importance for mutual gains. It is becoming increasingly clear that businesses that do good for society and nature —those that have sustainability as their greater purpose— can not only perform better financially than those that do not but also bring out the best in people. Indeed, in these types of purpose-driven organizations, people are more likely to bring their "whole selves" and full potential to work, creating more meaningful and quality connections to peers, the organization and its stakeholders, more engagement with their work, leading to more creativity and more ideas for innovation, ultimately leading to higher performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Cooperrider & Fry, 2012; Glavas & Kelley, 2014; Laszlo et al., 2020). These purpose-driven organizations (Alexander & Douthit, 2016; Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, George, & Nichols, 2014) as a cause are also better positioned to hire and retain employees (Laszlo et al., 2020). Although we need more research, family businesses tend to be more driven by doing good for society than others. For example, Lumpkin and Bacq (2021, p. 1) suggest that because family businesses typically demonstrate greater commitment and involvement in their local communities, they possess a greater ability to generate civic wealth, the "social, economic and communal endowments that benefit local communities." In contrast to socioemotional wealth that primarily benefits owning families (i.e., restricted SEW; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2014), civic wealth points to positive changes that benefit the well-being and strengths of entire communities (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2021). Indeed, we witness many family businesses and business families creating socio-economic wealth for multiple stakeholders and sharing generously (e.g., Sharma & Sharma, 2021). Craig and Newbert (2020) argue that precisely these families in business are likely to survive and thrive across generations. There are also family businesses that create SEW for themselves (i.e., reaping all the benefits of SEW) without creating SEW for their stakeholders and the broader community (i.e., extended SEW; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2014). However, this "way of being" will likely be short-lived (Craig & Newbert, 2020) because no human system can sustain these types of large imbalances over long periods of time (Houchin & MacLean, 2005; Schein, 2010). To further explore heterogeneities among family businesses around this sustainability issue, it might be fruitful to study different ways in which business families influence the strategic direction of the firm. One way to do this, for example, is shown in a study by Block (2010), which investigated the effects of family ownership and family management and found that family ownership is a sufficient condition to decrease the likelihood of downsizing. Another way is to build on the work of Craig and Newbert (2020) and include "cognitive moral development, bounded morality, bounded self-interest, temporal discounting, or institutional quality" (p. 11) or other constructs from psychology, ethics, and economics in future theorizing as contingencies that affect decision-making heterogeneity in family businesses and business families.

Given these insights and the growing awareness and impetus that there is an urgent need to ensure social and environmental sustainability, sustainability must be high on the strategic HR agenda of any type of organization. Laszlo and Brown (2014) advocate individual, team, organizational, and systems-level reflective practices built around personal and relational well-being through which people can learn to deepen their sense of connection to self, to each other, to their community, and to the natural world, cultivating a deep sense of caring. We need to understand more about what is happening within family businesses and owning families around this important topic and its implications. Indeed, today's business environment is increasingly characterized by rapidly declining natural resources (e.g., topsoil, fresh water, clean air, biodiversity, minerals and metals, food, forest), radical transparency (e.g., media, information technology), and rising societal expectations toward businesses to do good (e.g., employees, customers, regulators, investors, neighbors, collaboration partners, NGOs, activists) (Laszlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011; Laszlo et al., 2020). These interrelated trends are transforming how businesses (can) create value (Laszlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011). Those that regenerate or strengthen social and ecological systems while generating profits are winning the hearts of various stakeholders, outcompete, and are likely to flourish in the long run (Laszlo et al., 2020). We suspect that family businesses that miss this sustainability train, which is very necessary and desirable for humankind and Mother Earth, will find it difficult to survive in the marketplace due to increasing stakeholder deselection (e.g., employees, customers) and reputational damage. How are business families responding to this altered business environment? How do family businesses create value for shareholders *and* stakeholders, and generate what Laszlo (2008) and Porter and Kramer (2011) have called, respectively, "sustainable value" and "shared value"? What change strategies and approaches do family businesses and families in business use and what outcomes are obtained? How do owning families build a sense of greater purpose and how do they ensure that this purpose is supported organization-wide? What is the role of the founder and the next generation in this? How are family firms adapting their organization culture, HR practices, and governance mechanisms to incorporate sustainability as a strategic priority?

3.4. Actionable theorizing about practices as deeply relational

This brings us to our final point. As researchers we need to pay more attention to the relational and processual nature of HR practices as social practices, defined as "recurrent … and situated social actions engaged in by members of a community" (Orlikowski, 2002, p. 256) —in this case, a distinct family firm, owned and shaped by a distinct owning family. Practices are constituted by relating actors "as part of the ongoing structuring processes through which institutions and organizations are produced and reproduced … and they shape and are shaped by organizational norms and structures" (Orlikowski, 2002, p. 256). They cannot be seen separately from each other but are interdependent; they interact, simultaneously and over time, through the actions individuals engage in (Orlikowski, 2002). Indeed, a broad consensus is also emerging within strategic HRM research that the focus should be more on the configurations or bundles of HR practices (the HR system), and how they are related to yet other practices, rather than on individual HR practices, and how they help to achieve the organization's strategic goals (Boon et al., 2019, pp. 2501–2502): "When practices fit into a coherent system (internal/horizontal fit), they reinforce one another and create synergies. When practices do not fit, they may detract from each other's effects."

HR practices (e.g., training and development, participation, incentive compensation, performance evaluation, selection, job design; see Boon et al., 2019) and bundles of HR practices connect actors with each other, with the family business, with the owning family, and with multiple stakeholders in the environment. To study these practices in-depth and develop new rigorous, actionable knowledge (Astrachan, Astrachan, Kotlar, & Michiels, 2021; Lambrechts, Bouwen, Grieten, Huybrechts, & Schein, 2011) about why and how they work and how well they fit together within a particular HR system in a specific family firm context and how they affect family business continuity and longevity, we suggest looking at the following interrelated micro-aspects: goals, roles, procedures, and interpersonal relationships (Bouwen & Fry, 1996). *Goals* refer to what different actors shaping a practice want to achieve. Why does a practice exist in the first place? According to Schein (1987), the most observable facet of goal content is the actual subject matter the actors talk about or work on. From a mutual gains perspective, the key challenge is to accommodate both the (financial and non-financial) goals of the owning family and the individual goals of family and nonfamily employees while developing a shared purpose so that mutual gains can be attained, even under adverse conditions. *Roles* point to who, or which human resources are needed to achieve goals. "Who does what to whom," "who plays what roles". In this way, it is possible to obtain a better picture of the actors (family and nonfamily) and their relationships to each other and the goals (e.g., Schein, 1987). From a mutual gains standpoint, the main challenge lies in negotiating sufficient interpersonal goal clarity and alignment. Who within the owning family or family firm performs what role to create and sustain mutuality-promoting HR practices that focus on well-being and human flourishing, and how is sufficient alignment achieved between those roles? *Procedures* refer to how actors (family and nonfamily) work together in fulfilling their roles. Over time, the ways in which actors typically structure their work ("standard operating procedures") will become salient. How are family firms adapting the ways "goals are done together" to meet the ongoing challenge of mutuality over time? In other words, how does a family business adapt its structure and culture to continuously incorporate mutuality organization-wide? *Interpersonal relationships* point to how actors (family members amongst themselves, nonfamily members amongst themselves, family and nonfamily members together, family/nonfamily members and external actors) relate or communicate to each other, with what quality of relating, ranging from low to high quality (Lambrechts et al., 2009; see above), while constituting the practice. Over time, an interpersonal structure (recurrent interpersonal relating) will become apparent (Schein, 1987). How are high-quality relationships (Lambrechts et al., 2009; Schein, 2009) conducive to mutual gains built and nurtured within the owning family, within the family business (family and nonfamily), and between the two?

4. Concluding thoughts

The (evolving) HR practices and their coherence cannot be studied in depth if the (evolving) influence of the (evolving) family as the most influential group, the (evolving) entire family business as the larger organizational system, and the (evolving) broader environment in which the family and business function are not included. Indeed, the family in business can cast a facilitating or an undermining shadow (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2021) on creating and maintaining (bundles of) mutuality-promoting HR practices. We are just at the beginning of understanding the antecedents and outcomes of such practices, as well as the intervening factors connecting the two. It is our sincere hope that through our continued joint efforts, we will be able to accelerate the development of useful theory and actionable insights that will help family business owners and managers to make their applications successful.

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