

The tetralemma of the business family

A systemic approach to business-family dilemmas in research and practice

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Abstract

Purpose – This conceptual article aims to contribute to the design of a theory of family-influenced firms by a framework for the management of business-family dilemmas.

Design/methodology/approach – It combines systemic principles with the tetralemma, a tool from ancient Indian logic that families and businesses can use to manage and reframe dilemmas without dissolving the dilemmatic tensions or blurring their boundaries.

Findings – In applying the tetralemma, the article offers a range of suggestions, such as observing business and family as two discrete, yet codependent, social systems and envisioning conceptual and methodological imports from codependency research and therapy into family business research and practice.

Originality/value – The article proposes a framework for the selective and flexible navigation of family-business tensions without dissolving them or blurring their boundaries.

Keywords Business family, Family business, Dilemmas, Tetralemma, Niklas Luhmann, Systems theory

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

If a business family is a family (some of) whose members own one or more businesses, then one obvious challenge it faces is navigating the differences and tensions between familial and business-related expectations and logics (Parada *et al.*, 2019). Decades of family business research and centuries of family business experience notwithstanding, this challenge remains hard to tackle, in both theory and practice. Researchers continue to be confronted with definitional dilemmas (Klein *et al.*, 2005), while practical dilemmas regularly beset family firms' daily operations and may threaten their long-term survival. Family-business tensions are therefore serious problems that appear even more relevant in light of the economic significance of family businesses, which constitute the vast majority of businesses in most market economies.

A "Theory of the Family-Influenced Firm" (Rau *et al.*, 2018, p. 209) therefore appears to be a desirable objective. Its attainment, however, is complicated by the fact that business families need to build bridges between two very different worlds: the family (a pre-modern social system with generally inalterable kinship relations and strong emotional bonds) and the business (an organization whose basic rationale is the maximization of economic profit). Attempts to bridge the gap between a pre-modern multi-generational community and a modern exit-optional consociation necessarily complicate rather than clarify. This is the case



when organizations appropriate semantics of family, partnership, and intimacy; when they advocate authentic leadership that claims to *put people first* (Pfeffer, 1998; Gill *et al.*, 2018), cultivate a sense of *organizational belonging* (Belle *et al.*, 2015), or require *friendship* from their members (Ward, 2017); when staff are expected to be *passionate* about their work as if it was their lover (Andersen and Born, 2008) or are fired in the name of *love* (Andersen, 2015), and when “decisions begin to *desire* uncertainty” (Andersen and Pors, 2017, p. 119). Not surprisingly, these and similar semantics have been deemed forms of ideology and control (Ainsworth and Cox, 2003; Zellweger, 2014).

Similarly, organizational metaphors have been imported into the family realm. Family insiders are called members as if they had an exit-option. Modern families are “overmanaged and underled,” and their “members” therefore assumed to require coaching in effective leadership and (self-)management (Covey, 2014, p. 341). Partner selections are made on marriage markets (Zelizer, 2005), dating platforms, and other forms of organized public sphere. Different family governance practices are seen to pay different dividends (Michiels, 2015). Here, too, the importance of organizational semantics creates distorted images of an organization, which families, even modern ones, are not.

This article complements earlier applications of the tetralemma (Jayatilleke, 1967; Varga von Kibéd, 2006; Sparrer, 2007; Kleve, 2011; 2019, von Schlippe and Schweitzer, 2015; Roth, 2017a, b; Schweitzer and Drews, 2018)—a figure of thought of ancient Indian logic for solving dilemmas—to dilemmas in a broader organizational context, and thus aims to develop a conceptual framework that facilitates the selective and agile navigation of family-business tensions without dissolving them or blurring their boundaries. The article, therefore, combines the tetralemma approach with key elements of systems theory (Luhmann, 1995; 2012, 2018) to understand and show *how the fundamentally different logics and operational modes of families and businesses may co-exist and be managed such that they appear as functional for both systems*.

This article begins with a systemic framing of the business-family dilemma. It then shows how this dilemma, like any dilemma, can be translated into a tetralemma. For this purpose, it sketches the tetralemma’s basic design before showing how it may be used both as a systemic research tool and for the navigation of dilemmatic tensions in family businesses. Finally, this article discusses the contributions this systemic approach can make to theory design in family business research.

2. The dilemma of the business family

Family businesses and business families have been a focus of systemic theories and practices for over two decades. One major challenge has been to develop an interdisciplinary approach that combines conventional business literature with sociological, social-psychological, legal, and economic perspectives within the framework of system theory (Simon, 2005; von Schlippe and Frank, 2013; Weismeier-Sammer *et al.*, 2013; Grossmann and von Schlippe, 2015; Zwack *et al.*, 2016; Classen and Schulte, 2017).

Families and businesses are different types of social systems (Randerson *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, business families and family businesses are often regarded as hybrid social systems burdened with numerous paradoxes, ambivalences, and dilemmas (Classen and Schulte, 2017). For example, business families have been described as *paradoxical* because their identity as a specific type of family arises from a non-identity: family and business seem to merge in the business family and form an independent identity in spite of the fact that family and business may be considered fundamentally different communicative contexts. The concurrence of the two contexts often confuses both family and business members, confronting them with double-bind messages or mutually exclusive expectations (Engström and Sannino, 2011; Litz, 2012).

As institutionalized incarnations of the concurrence of distinct and often conflicting aspects of the social world, business families and family businesses often also appear as *ambivalent* systems in which incompatible family and business communications are vortexed, superimposed, or combined. Consequently, an action or statement can be understood simultaneously as both family- and business-related. The same communicative event might therefore trigger different and even contradictory reactions in the family and the business. This, in turn, may lead to *dilemmas* and hence unresolved situations in which participants oscillate between conflicting options without knowing how to make the right decision.

In business family interactions, paradox, ambivalence, and dilemmas therefore seem to be the rule rather than the exception (Brunson, 1989; Lewis, 2001). For example, business families regularly face dilemmatic choices between the pursuit of financial gains and the perseverance of socio-emotional wealth (Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2018). And even a simple question such as “How are you?” might be problematic when asked by an entrepreneur to his adult child. If it is understood as purely family-based communication—for example, as an expression of parental interest and concern—then there is hardly any reason for conflict (other than typical family conflicts). In this case, it may be considered unequivocal, and may therefore lead to an affectionate chat. But if the parent and child attribute the question to different communicative contexts, it will tend to trigger paradox, ambivalence, and dilemmas. For example, the child might interpret the question not as paternal interest but as an entrepreneur’s matriarchal (or patriarchal) concern about the child’s adherence to the family business succession plan. In fact, the child may interpret the question this way regardless of the original intention. The parent too might interpret the answer as that of a child or a potential family business successor. Thus, “people can take very different distinctions as the starting point of their communicative actions, so that one act of communication may connect to another in a skewed way” (von Schlippe and Frank, 2013, p. 389).

These chains of skewed communications are observed to regularly provoke paradoxes, ambivalence, and dilemmas in business families. While one person is speaking “as a parent” (using family language), the other attributes what is said to “an entrepreneur” (using business language). Thus, both are at cross purposes and upset each other because their implicit assumptions do not match. It is therefore not uncommon for participants in a skewed communication to become entangled in conflicts that degenerate into accusations of maliciousness, or even insanity (Kaye, 1996; Frank *et al.*, 2011; Grossmann and von Schlippe, 2015; Classen and Schulte, 2017; von Schlippe and Frank, 2017). Participants fail to realize that the communication navigates two different social-systemic patterns—family and business—and that the participants’ behavior reflects their (p)referred pattern. This often confronts them with irresolvable contradictions or alternatives between which they feel they can only vacillate.

Sometimes a third perspective—that of shareholders in the family business who may or may not be family members—is introduced to the family business and business family context. For example, Tagiuri and Davis (1996, p. 200) distinguish between family members, owners, and family business members such as managers and employees. They then proceed to identify possible intersections of family, ownership, and management groups. However, contradictions and overlaps between these three perspectives and logics also create paradox, ambivalence, and dilemmas. There is thus no fundamental difference between problematic family, ownership, and management triangles on the one hand, and typical family-business tensions on the other. The following sections use examples of typical tensions to demonstrate how the corresponding paradox, ambivalence, and dilemmas can be navigated using the tetralemma.

3. From dilemma to tetralemma

The tetralemma is a figure of thought from ancient Indian logic and jurisdiction (Jayatilleke, 1967; Varga von Kibéd, 2006; Sparrer, 2007; Kleve, 2011; Roth, 2017a, 2017b; Kleve and Köllner, 2019). Tetralemmas enable judges to identify and realize four options when confronted with a dilemmatic conflict between two parties (see Table I):

The first and second options are to rule in favor of *either* the one *or* the other party. Rulings pending or issued that adopt this either-or logic are often seen as dilemmatic. The tetralemma, however, neutralizes the dilemma by including the possibility that *both* or *neither* of the two parties may have the law on their side.

Buddhist logicians later extended this fourfold tetralemma—either this party, or that party, both parties, neither party—to include a *fifth position*. This fifth position, which can also be regarded as a non-position, negates all previous positions including even the negation itself. It is a constant reminder that even—and, in fact, especially—the most persistent dilemmas often result from ill-defined rather than irresolvable problems. It therefore makes the tetralemma into tool for thinking outside the box, one that enables users to identify, navigate, and challenge dysfunctional problem architecture and replace them with more functional ones.

The tetralemma’s five positions and the corresponding observational options may be summarized as follows (see Table II):

It is important to remember that dilemmas often result from false distinctions (Roth, 2019a). Whereas true distinctions such as inside/outside are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, false distinctions fail to meet one of these requirements. The distinction of family and business is clearly a false distinction because the two sides are not collectively exhaustive: not all non-families are businesses, and not all non-businesses are families. They are probably not mutually exclusive either. One way to resolve false distinctions is to turn the single false distinction into a tetralemma consisting of two true distinctions. Table III shows that the tetralemma’s basic architecture may itself be created by a transformation of the former dilemmatic choice between this/that into a cross-tabulation of this/not-this and that/not-that:

Table I.
The tetralemma (Roth, 2017a, p. 1475)

Neither	Either	Or
	Both	
The fifth position		

Table II.
Observational options corresponding to the tetralemma’s five positions

This (either)	Focus on <i>one side</i> of the problem or dilemma
That (or)	Focus on the <i>other side</i> of the problem or dilemma
Both	Focus on intermediation between <i>both sides</i> of the problem or dilemma
Neither	Focus on the <i>distinction(s)</i> that create(s) the two sides of the problem or dilemma
The fifth position	Focus on the option of <i>switching</i> from one problem or dilemma to another

Table III.
The tetralemma as result of the transformation of one false into two true distinctions

	This	Not-this
That	Both	That
Not-that	This	Neither

The same method can be used to transform the dilemmatic business-family distinction into a tetralemma (see [Table IV](#)):

As [Table IV](#) shows, business families can be observed as family or business, as business families (as much as their businesses as family businesses), and as neither families nor businesses. The latter observation is particularly promising because it could complement family business research with the option of defining family businesses negatively; that is, by what they are not or cannot do. In fact, this shift of perspective might ultimately result in an even more detailed view of the characteristics of business families and family businesses.

Applying the tetralemma approach to the potentially dilemmatic family-business interaction triggered by a parent asking an adult child “How are you?” makes it possible to distinguish the following options:

- (1) It is a straightforward parental question and thus a purely family-based communication. This is the *family* side of the business-family tetralemma (“this”).
- (2) It is a family business owner’s question to his or her potential successor. This is the *business* side of the tetralemma (“that”).
- (3) It is both a familial and business-related question. In this case, it would be up to the child to decide which message to hear (although the parent could deparadoxify the situation somewhat by first asking a familial and then a business-related question). The child could make an equally ambiguous response. This is the *both*-side.
- (4) It is neither a familial nor a business-related question. Perhaps it is phony solicitousness: regardless of how the child answers, the parent will steer the conversation to the real desired topic: the president of Russia’s latest tweet. This is the *neither* side. It is none of the above.

The fifth position ultimately represents the possibility to step outside the business-family box and reframe the conversation, for example, as one between two politically interested persons rather than two business-family members. This perspective has the potential to transform the nature of the relationship between parent and adult child (reach new levels of parent-child attachment, identify new family business opportunities, and so forth). Thus, the fifth position points to the option of change *per se*, thereby representing the contingency and transformational potential inherent in any dilemmatic situation.

Broadly speaking, the tetralemma helps transcend the architecture of false distinctions (see [Roth, 2019a, 2019b](#)) that often dominate and predefine the ways people think. It therefore enables people to make paradoxes, ambivalence, and dilemmas productive—in both theoretical and practical terms. The tetralemma could serve as an intuitive, robust, and effective basis for counseling, coaching, and mediation, particularly in a family-business context. Moreover, it could also be used to map fields of family business research, as is done in the following sections of this article.

4. The tetralemma as a framework for systemic family business research

This section of the article applies the tetralemma approach to business-family dilemmas to demonstrate how (definitional) dilemmas in family business research can be managed and to outline avenues for future research.

	Family	Non-family
Business	Business family	Business
Non-business	Family	Neither

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Table IV.
The business-family
tetralemma

4.1 *Either family or business*

There are numerous differences between family and business systems. Families are descent or kinship communities, whereas businesses are formal organizations based on membership. Unlike in organizations, membership in families is not a matter of decision and therefore should probably not be referred to as membership at all. In fact, families are defined by the absence of the exit option that is so critical to organizations: family “members” typically cannot be dismissed, parenthood typically not terminated. Divorce and adoption remain exceptions that confirm the rule because they typically raise questions about whether the newly sundered or enlarged institution remains, ever was, or actually is a “real” family. For example, divorced families often try, with different consequences and varying degrees of success, to remain a family despite the divorce and the corresponding changes in the formal-organizational context. Families are by far the older social system and seem to systematically block all attempts to be transformed into modern organizations in which membership is contractually regulated and can be terminated through resignation or dismissal. Moreover, businesses, like all organizations, are defined by the fact that they only include individuals partially, namely through their specific roles and functions (Luhmann, 2018; Roth *et al.*, 2018a). By contrast, families are based on the unrealistic ideal that their “members” have complete access to each other, that they share a unique oneness and that the whole person (including all its moods, behaviors, and thoughts) can be integrated (Luhmann, 1998). This person-centeredness also makes family communication prone to moral communication, which, however, “is out of synch with the systemic nature of the most modern social problems” (Iliopoulos and Valentinov, 2017, p. 1067) typically characterized by situations where one and the same issue may appear as good in one functional or role-context and bad in another (Roth *et al.*, 2018b), and where “(t)here is no more omnipresent observer, like religion (in medieval times) (. . .) which could control societal processes or order” (Wetzel and Van Gorp, 2014, p. 121).

Similarly, family communication is often associated with the symbolically generalized medium love (Luhmann, 1998), whereas the dominant medium in business communication is money. A benefit of symbolically generalized media is that they typically increase the likelihood that a communication is accepted (Luhmann, 2012, p. 120ff). Ambiguous use of the media of love and money, however, neutralizes or even inverts this effect. Code-mixing results in context-mixing, and thus in problems like those already described. As daunting as these problems may seem, they would be even worse if business families tried to solve them with one-sided coping strategies that more or less exclusively favor either the family- or business-oriented perspective.

This is why it makes sense to consider the third position of the tetralemma, which focuses on the connections between the two sides of the former dilemma.

4.2 *Both family and business*

If the aim is to understand how both family and business may coexist and be duly taken into consideration in business families, then the both perspective likely holds a number of keys for navigating typical business-family dilemmas. Probably the most basic similarity between families and organizations is that both are autonomous social systems (Belardinelli, 2002, p. 169f; Luhmann, 2012, p. 47). For Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory, this implies that both systems are operationally closed systems of communication (Simon, 2005; Luhmann, 2012; von Schlippe and Frank, 2013). The basic operation of communicative systems is to link communication to communication. They consist of communication and nothing but communication. Consequently, both families and organizations do *not* consist of their members if we understand members to refer to human beings. But because human beings constitute critical environmental aspects of both families and organizations, these systems

are characterized by the prevalence of specific ways to address aspects of the human condition and to provide contact points for individual human beings.

This leads to another striking commonality: both systems, unlike others, are contactable social systems. Letters sent to the legal system or the economy cannot be delivered, whereas those addressed to the Schwarz family or LIDL will very likely reach their recipient. This implies that both systems typically have names and social identities, reputations and public images (Beck and Prügl, 2018). This, in turn, implies that both systems may observe, address, and adjust the discrepancy between their internal and external (self-) images. Needless to say, both systems have neighbors, stakeholders, and probably even friends (Ward, 2017; Valentinov *et al.*, 2019).

From this it follows that all issues of family and organization, including those of business-family and family-business dilemmas, are ultimately communicative issues and therefore can only be adequately addressed through communication. This idea, which is probably as counterintuitive as it is trivial, is therefore all it takes to build both stable and flexible bridges across all well-established dilemmas.

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4.3 Neither family nor business

The unquestionable advantages of the both perspective on business-family dilemmas notwithstanding, simultaneously observing the same system as both a family and an organization is impossible. This observational paradox can be deparadoxified through temporalization (Luhmann, 1995; Andersen, 2003); that is, by observing the business-family system first as a business system and then as a family system. Or when differentiating short-term individual—often acquisitive—activities from the kinds of long-term activities that are perceived as legitimate and even laudable (Parry and Bloch, 1989). Yet the impossibility of simultaneously observing something as both this and that may also indicate that this something may actually be neither this nor that.

One particularly instructive neither-nor perspective on the business-family dilemma would be that the observation of business families does not refer to the observation of one system. This too may sound trivial. But it also implies that a business family actually is not a system but rather a structural coupling of at least two systems: the business and the family (von Schlippe and Frank, 2013; Suess-Reyes, 2017). According to Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, a system is structurally coupled when its autopoiesis (independent self-reproduction) is critically dependent on the autopoiesis of systems in its environment. In this sense, business-family problems would be neither family nor business problems but rather problems resulting from a critical codependency between business and family. Seeing a business family as a structural coupling rather than a system shifts attention away from the respective systems' performance. The main challenge then is no longer to integrate both the family and the business perspective into one of the two systems. The challenge now is not to observe or design the communication between individual family persons or business members but rather the communication between independent social systems and thus how these social systems deal with the fact that they link communication to communication differently and therefore have different forms of autopoietic reproduction.

4.4 The fifth position: neither nor "neither family nor business"

The fifth position of the extended tetralemma creates the possibility of movement, transformation, and transcendence of the original dilemma. In a sense, it is a logical extension of the fourth position. In fact, the establishment of the neither-nor perspective makes it possible to realize that the actual problem or solution might be not in the original

dilemma but in another dilemma currently hidden by it. Overcoming the fixation on the original dilemma makes it possible to explore what distinctions besides business/family might be operative and to redefine the (former) business-family dilemma. Looking for other, potentially more instructive dilemmas may, for example, result in wondering whether or why both business families and the family businesses should continue to focus on business issues. Although it may seem obvious that a business focuses principally on business issues, this is less obvious for the business-family side of the dilemma. In fact, as long as the accumulation of capital is not considered an end in itself, it could justly be asked why business families should remain focused on making money when, thanks to an often-multigenerational success story, they already have enough. A fifth-position perspective might recall that in ancient Greece, people who spent most of their time on pecuniary matters were considered poor, whereas rich people devoted their lives to more prestigious activities such as politics, philosophy, education, religion, sport, and art (Roth, 2017b). In this sense, why are successful business families of the twenty-first century not inspired by this ancient attitude and increasingly redirect their attention to non-business issues? Moving out of the business-family comfort zone would necessarily involve finding answers to the question of what other distinctions and dilemmas could replace or at least stand in for the business part in the familiar business-family dilemma. In other words, a fifth position approach to this dilemma would suggest that business families ought to imagine what other kind(s) of family they potentially could and actually would like to be, now or in the future.

Even today, there is some evidence that the pursuit of economic success in family firms often is combined with other goals. Within family business research, the concept of socio-emotional wealth (Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2007, 2011) highlights the importance of non-economic incentives for engaging in business and is vividly discussed even today. In particular, the socio-emotional wealth paradigm is said to “meet the family’s affective needs, such as identity, influence and perpetuation of the family dynasty” (Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2007, p. 106). In so doing, the affective needs of the family might be even detrimental to the economic success of the firm. This is the dark side of socio-emotional wealth (Kellermanns *et al.*, 2012; Samara *et al.*, 2018). Thus, the socio-emotional wealth is able to explain why the affective needs of the business family influence the decision-making in the family firm considerably (e.g., Block, 2011; Berrone *et al.*, 2012; Filser *et al.*, 2017; Gottardo and Moisello, 2015; Samara and Paul, 2019).

These findings are confirmed by other research in economic sociology and economic anthropology highlighting a constant tension between economic and non-economic incentives in all economic systems, including the most refined forms of capitalism (Gudeman, 2008). More often than not, we would like to acknowledge behavior in business is heavily influenced by non-economic goals and deeply embedded into cultural patterns and the social fabric (Beckert, 2003; Hann and Hart, 2009; Köllner, 2012; Mandel and Humphrey, 2002; Stewart, 2003).

At the same time, our systemic tetralemma approach to family-business dilemmas goes considerably beyond classical embeddedness approaches or three-circle models of family business systems (Tagiuri and Davis, 1996).

First, unlike the embeddedness approaches, our approach is not based on an assumed fundamental opposition between the worlds of economy or business on the one hand and society on the other, but rather considers economy as much an aspect of social life as are religion, politics, education, science, or law (see Roth *et al.*, 2018b). Our approach therefore both transcends the potentially dysfunctional economy–society dichotomy and allows for a more fine-grained understanding of what is otherwise often indiscriminately mixed into container concepts of culture or society. In this sense, our approach might also inspire future

research aimed at a better understanding of the *socio* in *socio*-emotional wealth (Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2018; Samara and Paul, 2019).

Second, the observational agility supported by our tetralemma approach in general and its fifth position in particular helps to systematically transcend the ultimately contingent focus on the three circles of the model of the same name. This is not to say that family business systems are not (also) defined by issues of family, business (economy), and ownership (legal system); however, our approach would suggest that issues of power, education, or religion might be equally or even more important than economic or legal issues in some cases. For example, we might assume that the classical three-circle model is more or less adequate to family businesses in the so-called Western world, whereas religion plays a much higher role in Islamic family businesses. Thus, our approach also provides checks and challenges to cultural biases in established models of family business systems.

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5. Conclusions: a business-family tetralemma management and research agenda

This article showed that a tetralemmatic approach to well-established and often-painful business-family dilemmas may provide business families with considerably greater observational flexibility and thus with an improved ability to navigate and manage them.

First, the evidence seems to indicate that an either-or perspective (either on the business or the family side of business families) yields a more detailed description of the dilemmas involved in the observation of this ambivalent and often paradoxical construct. Many schools of systems theory and family systems therapy agree that detailed knowledge of a problem is not necessarily required to design effective solutions for it (de Shazer, 1985; George *et al.*, 1999; Sparrer, 2007). Nevertheless, researchers still might welcome a good research problem. In this sense, a tetralemmatic view of the either-or perspective of the business-family dilemma supports a more systematic account of the dilemma's fundamental differences and incompatibilities between family and business as well as their contribution to the multitude of business-family tensions.

Second, it appeared that these tensions may be more manageable using a both-and perspective of business-family dilemmas. Temporal deparadoxification in particular may be a frequently used strategy for integrating business- and family-related expectations and logics in business-family contexts. It therefore seems worthwhile to systematically analyze how business families temporalize the paradoxes that result from the apparent need to reconcile business and family.

Third, adopting the neither-nor perspective of the business-family dilemma allows to ask whether business families can be regarded as discrete, "autopoietic" systems or are better understood as structural couplings (that is, forms of existential codependence between two systems). Because one or both of the systems involved may perceive this symbiosis to be more (or less) functional, the neither-nor perspective implies that business families and family business researchers may benefit from shifting the focus of their attention to the interaction between the two discrete, yet codependent, social systems. This may involve conceptual and methodological imports from therapeutic codependency research (e.g. Gemin, 1997a, 1997b; Cullen and Carr, 1999; Wells *et al.*, 1999).

Finally, the fifth position challenged the typically unquestioned assumption that business families are predominantly business-oriented. If money is not an end in itself for them, then a fifth perspective could be a promising focus of future research into whether and how business families (successfully) attempt to convert money into other symbolically generated communication media or non-economic forms of capital such as power, truth, fame, social capital, and academic titles. An equally fruitful area of research might focus on the non-business-oriented business family "members," their non-business-orientations, and their potential contribution not only to the corporate social responsibility (CSR) of the family

business, but also to a conversion of business families and family businesses into social entrepreneurship families and social family enterprises.

Last but not least, the tetralemma in general, and the neither-nor and the fifth position in particular, served as gentle reminders of the easy-to-understand yet hard-to-heed advice to entrepreneurs to not confuse themselves with their business. Apparently, the same advice holds for families. The neither-nor perspective that conceives of business families not as one system but rather as a structural coupling between two discrete yet profoundly codependent systems is therefore promising not only for business-family therapeutic interventions. Indeed, it also underscores that use of the tetralemma creates the distance to a problem that is necessary for solutions to appear. Here, this distance offers relief from the prevailing family or business performance gazes as well as the mission impossible of simultaneously integrating both perspectives into what is probably not a discrete system at all. By offering these and other systematic shifts of perspective, the business-family tetralemma created observational and behavioral opportunities for changing and managing what are now no longer hopeless, irresolvable dilemmas in business family research and practice.

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