

The anatomy of family business conflict

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Conflict

Model

Family Business

Relations

Evolution

Practice

ABSTRACT

Understanding conflict in family businesses is a complex but essential study area for practitioners and academics. To enhance theoretical precision and provide practical insights, this article presents a comprehensive framework of family business conflict that integrates perspectives from the family business, organizational, management, psychology, and political science literature, as well as practitioner expertise. Highlighting important and often overlooked aspects of family business conflict, this study examines the circumstances of conflict (the who, what, where, why, when, and how) and provides a robust conceptualization of conflict dynamics in the unique family business setting. Through three illustrative examples of prominent family firms that have experienced conflict, the study demonstrates the value of the framework as a tool for understanding, theorizing, and effectively managing conflict.

1. Introduction

While conflict is a daily reality in all businesses, family firms face unique challenges due to their complex and interwoven relationships (for reviews, see Bettinelli et al., 2022; Kubíček & Machek, 2020; Qiu & Freel, 2020). Practitioners and scholars agree that understanding the nuances of these relationships is critical to unraveling the intricacies of conflict in the family business context (Eddleston, 2022; Mayer, 2010). The complexity of conflict in family firms arises from a number of factors, including family involvement (Chrisman et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2003), non-economic motivations such as family power (Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2004) and family-centered goals (Chrisman et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2018), and the intertwined evolution of family, business, and ownership lifecycles (Gersick et al., 1997). For example, the intermingling of economic and personal relationships in family firms (Chrisman et al., 2012) can lead to preferential treatment based on family ties, which can cause conflict among family members and between family and non-family employees due to perceived unfairness (Jennings et al., 2018; Kidwell et al., 2012). This highlights the multifaceted and specific complexities arising from the involvement of

family members as key stakeholders, which distinguishes family firms from other business forms.

However, current family business research often oversimplifies conflict in this complex context, focusing on isolated aspects and/or neglecting a comprehensive examination of this multifaceted issue (Frank et al., 2011; Qiu & Freel, 2020). This has two main implications. First, while the broader conflict literature incorporates diverse perspectives and recognizes the “multiple faces of conflict” (Kolb & Putnam, 1992), the family business literature tends to engage minimally with these approaches, typically focusing on either the type or locus of conflict (Bettinelli et al., 2022). Second, conflict has traditionally been studied within the broader social sciences, including psychology, organizational studies, and management, which have provided valuable insights (Rahim, 2023; Sherif, 2015). Although conflict appears to be a prevalent and well-studied topic in family firms, as highlighted in recent literature reviews (e.g., Qiu & Freel, 2020), research in this area often fails to fully integrate insights from other disciplines. We argue that incorporating these perspectives is essential to addressing the unique characteristics of family firms. Without doing so, family business scholars risk falling behind in conflict debates, neglecting critical

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfbs.2025.100660>

factors, and failing to develop accurate theories with practical implications for family owners, managers, and advisors.

Therefore, to address this issue, we pose the following research question: *How can we better understand conflict in family businesses, given their unique characteristics and complexities, to inform research and practice?* We draw on the family business literature, interdisciplinary conflict research, insights from discussions with experts and practitioners, and our direct involvement in knowledge transfer, consulting, teaching, and other research projects related to conflict in the family business context. In doing so, we provide an overview of the possible dimensions of conflict (conflict circumstances), illustrate their characteristics and origins, and reflect on their implications for both family business research and practice.

Our contributions are threefold. First, our work synthesizes and integrates disparate strands of research into a cohesive, multidimensional framework that provides a comprehensive lens through which to view and analyze conflict in family firms. This approach goes beyond the traditional focus (conflict types or loci) to include a broader range of relevant factors, such as the actors involved, the underlying motives, and the temporal aspects of conflict. As such, our framework provides both a holistic (encompassing the diverse manifestations of conflict) and a nuanced understanding (accounting for the unique characteristics of family firms). Moreover, the application of our framework to illustrative examples offers a preliminary demonstration of its practical utility for both research and practice. Second, the proposed framework provides a practical tool for family firms and family business consultants and professionals to systematically analyze conflict. By mapping the various dimensions of conflict, the framework facilitates targeted intervention and informed decision-making to prevent conflict escalation and promote effective conflict management. Third, building on our work, researchers can use the framework as a tool to support research design and conduct more robust case analyses. We also identify research gaps and suggest future research directions to inspire and advance the study of family business conflict. Finally, while most frameworks focus primarily on either academic research or practical solutions, we bridge the gap between these perspectives, offering a unique tool that serves both.

Overall, we bring together the various pieces of the puzzle, emphasizing the unique characteristics of family businesses. We lay the groundwork for an understanding of conflict that will prove valuable for both theory and practice. In the following sections, we first describe the methodology used and then provide a detailed analysis of why it is critical to consider the *who, what, where, why, when, and how* of conflict through the family business lens. Our approach clarifies a structured topic, paving the way for better theory and more meaningful implications for practitioners (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). By identifying the interrelated dimensions for the study of conflict, we highlight what is unique to the family business context.

2. Methodological approach

This study draws on a variety of sources (De Massis et al., 2018). First, we conducted a detailed analysis of various literature reviews on this topic (Alderson, 2015; Bettinelli et al., 2022; Caputo et al., 2018; Kubíček & Machek, 2020; Qiu & Freel, 2020). We replicated the research protocols on family business and conflict outlined by Bettinelli et al. (2022) to identify new publications that have emerged since then and conducted a thorough review of all papers deemed relevant to our research objectives. While our goal was not to conduct a systematic literature review, this first step provided an up-to-date understanding of conflict in the family business literature and helped to identify and understand the different categorizations of conflict in the family business field. Second, we conducted an unsystematic search for seminal articles from literature streams that primarily focus on conflict and yield valuable insights, including organization, management, psychology, and political science (Rahim, 2023; Sherif, 2015). This step provided us with a more comprehensive view of conflict with deeper insights into the

foundational concepts, recent developments, and ongoing interdisciplinary debates on the topic. These insights helped us begin to shape and expand the framework of conflict circumstances. Third, we drew on insights from in-depth interviews with family business members, scholars, mediators, and consultants,¹ as well as an analysis of numerous secondary sources, including company websites, financial and annual reports, presentations, books, documentaries, press releases, and journal articles. In addition, the authors' direct involvement in knowledge transfer, consulting, teaching, and other research projects related to family business conflict further enriched our understanding. This process allowed us to strengthen the model, better define its theoretical underpinnings, refine elements within the conflict circumstances, and validate its applicability as a framework that accurately reflects the complexity of family business conflict in both research and real-world scenarios. Fourth, we present three vignettes that illustrate the application of theoretical concepts to real-world situations (De Massis et al., 2018). These examples aim to guide future research by promoting transparency and theoretical precision in the study of this important topic, while also demonstrating the practical application of the framework. To evaluate the data and findings, we used iterative data analysis, moving back and forth between data and theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We also triangulated multiple sources of information through a series of iterative online and face-to-face meetings, phone conversations, and email exchanges to resolve potential misunderstandings and divergent views. Thus, the framework developed draws on a wide range of sources and integrates both scholarly and practical insights.

3. Family firm conflict circumstances

3.1. Conflict configuration points: The who

This section focuses on the types of interactions involved in conflict. Drawing on team conflict research focused on organizational behavior (e.g., Humphrey et al., 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), psychology (e.g., Böhm et al., 2020; Fiske, 2002), and management (e.g., Korsgaard et al., 2008), we identify three distinct conflict configurations that are particularly relevant to the study of conflict in family firms. These configurations define the individuals or groups involved in specific conflict events and include dyadic, intragroup, and intergroup interactions.

Dyadic conflict refers to disputes that occur between two individuals, whether they belong to the same work group or different groups (Anicich et al., 2016; Humphrey et al., 2017). In the context of family businesses, such conflicts may occur between two family members, between a family member and a non-family member, or between two non-family members, such as directors, managers, or employees.

When conflicts involve more than two individuals, the distinction between intragroup and intergroup conflict becomes crucial, especially for advancing research in the family business field (e.g., Schjoedt et al., 2013). Intragroup conflict refers to disputes that occur within the same group or team (Korsgaard et al., 2008), such as within a particular department or among majority shareholders. In family firms, the owning family is a defining group that distinguishes these firms from others (Chua et al., 1999). Within the family, conflicts may arise between siblings, parents, heirs, cousins, or even extended non-blood family members.

Intergroup conflict refers to conflict between two different groups (Bornstein, 2003; Böhm et al., 2020). In family firms, this can occur between majority and minority shareholders. A common example is conflict between family managers and other organizational members,

¹ These discussions were formally held in special sessions at two practice-based family business conferences in the United States, two academic-based family business conferences in Europe, and in a number of different conversations with family members and practitioners over the past 5 years.

such as non-family managers or employees, often driven by different goals and interests (Sciascia & Mazzola, 2008). Another example is conflict between different family branches (Gersick et al., 1997). In particular, conflicts between the senior and junior generations have received considerable attention, especially during the succession process (Davis & Harveston, 1999). The basic principles of family business recognize these firms as a convergence of three key dimensions: family, ownership, and business (Gersick et al., 1997). Prior research emphasizes that family businesses consist of multiple interconnected systems (Pieper & Klein, 2007), with boundaries that are often permeable (Benson et al., 1990; Mismetti et al., 2023; Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008). Interpreting conflict solely in terms of whether it occurs within the family, ownership, or business system is inadequate in contexts where these systems overlap and boundaries are blurred. Instead, incorporating a classification based on the type of interaction involved (dyadic, intragroup, or intergroup) offers a practical solution. This approach not only clarifies the level of social interaction involved in conflict, but also facilitates a more objective reflection on other relevant aspects, such as the role played by each actor within the three systems.

3.2. Conflict types: The what

The study of conflict in family business research often involves a distinction by type (e.g., Calle et al., 2024; Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007; Kanadli et al., 2020; Mismetti et al., 2023). The most common conceptualizations of conflict types are derived from the management field (e.g., Rahim, 2023): relationship, task, and process conflicts (Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

Relationship conflict is generally defined as “an awareness of interpersonal incompatibilities [that] includes affective components such as feeling tension and friction” (Jehn & Mannix, 2001, p. 238; Rousseau et al., 2018). Therefore, the specific nature of this type of conflict arises from interpersonal incompatibilities (Jehn, 1997) and often leads to negative emotions and affective components, such as tension, suspicion, annoyance, worry, and anger toward others. It also fosters perceptions of interpersonal resentment, aversion, and hostility (Cater et al., 2016). For these reasons, relationship conflict is often referred to as “emotional conflict” (Sciascia et al., 2013b) or “affective conflict” (Ensley et al., 2007). There is broad consensus that this type of conflict is one of the most harmful (Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2004; Chirico et al., 2011). Common assumptions about relationship conflict include: 1) it generates a range of negative emotions that are typically absent in other types of conflict (Amason, 1996; Jehn et al., 1999; Kidwell et al., 2012); 2) it distracts members from organizational tasks, shifting the focus from work to conflict management (Jehn, 1997); 3) it tends to be prolonged and affects various aspects of family and business members’ lives (Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2004). In addition, it can damage relationships among family owners (Eddleston et al., 2008) and leave lingering negative feelings (Ensley & Pearson, 2005).

Task conflict refers to “disagreements about the content of the tasks being performed, including differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions” (Jehn, 1995, p. 258), and is often equated with cognitive conflict, which is task-oriented (Amason, 1996; Forbes & Milliken, 1999). In the family business literature, task conflict typically concerns the tasks and goals of the family business (Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2004), and often occurs within groups such as the top management team or the board of directors (Bettinelli et al., 2022; Zattoni et al., 2015). On the one hand, task conflict can be beneficial because it can improve decision-making by generating new insights and diverse perspectives (Ensley & Pearson, 2005). On the other hand, scholars acknowledge that it can prolong decision-making processes and reduce the ability to quickly adapt to and exploit new opportunities, which is a hallmark of many family firms (Spriggs et al., 2013).

Process conflict refers to disagreements about the logistics and responsibilities of task performance, specifically how the work should be done and by whom (Jehn, 1997; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Like task

conflict, process conflict can be either beneficial or detrimental to family firms, depending on its intensity (e.g., Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2007; Zattoni et al., 2015).

In terms of categorizing conflicts, the aforementioned classification based on the object of conflict is widely accepted in the family business literature (De Massis & Rondi, 2024), but it is not the only approach. Some scholars prefer to distinguish conflicts according to their relational versus cognitive nature, categorizing personal conflicts as relational, and task and process conflicts as cognitive (e.g., Caputo et al., 2018). While we adopt the previously discussed conflict types due to their prevalence, we emphasize the importance of flexibility without compromising rigor. The “what” of conflict is an essential element, and if specific circumstances warrant alternative categorizations, clear definitions and interpretations should be provided.

3.3. Conflict locus: The where

Another categorization of conflict derived from the family business literature is the locus of conflict, or where the conflict occurs. In their review of the family business literature, Bettinelli et al. (2022) identify four different loci of conflict: family, generational, board/top management team (TMT), and organizational. Family conflict refers to conflict among owning family members, regardless of generation (e.g., Sonfield & Lussier, 2009). Generational conflict can occur within a single generation (intragenerational conflict) or between different generations (intergenerational conflict) of the owning family (e.g., Haberman & Danes, 2007; Nazer & Llorca-Jaña, 2020). Board and TMT conflict refers to conflict among members of the board or TMT, which may include both family and non-family members, depending on the composition of the board (e.g., Zona, 2015). Organizational conflict, on the other hand, refers to conflict within the broader organization, including employees and other business stakeholders (Jehn, 1997). This distinction is particularly valuable because it helps identify where conflict occurs, while taking into account the unique context of conflict in family firms. For example, a task conflict between two family members may occur during a board meeting, while a conflict that originates in the family domain may manifest not only in the workplace but also in more personal settings, such as the home. Each situation has different implications for how the conflict is managed and resolved. In family firms, scholars have identified key contexts in which conflict is likely to occur, such as family meetings, board meetings, and organizational meetings. These settings provide opportunities for actors to communicate and interact, potentially triggering conflict. Understanding where conflict occurs allows for a deeper analysis of its underlying dynamics and causes. In addition, recognizing the different loci and their specific characteristics is critical for effective conflict management in family businesses. By fostering open communication and adopting tailored approaches based on the locus of conflict, family businesses can turn potential conflict into a catalyst for positive organizational outcomes.

3.4. Conflict motives: The why

Understanding the origins of conflict is critical to improving our ability to manage and prevent destructive conflict while fostering productive discussion. The “why” of a conflict delves into its nature and seeks to uncover its underlying causes. While identifying the roots of conflict is no easy task, it is essential to both theory and practice. As suggested by family business practitioners (Levinson, 1971) and explored in other fields such as political science (Van Evera, 1999; Waltz, 2018), understanding the motivations behind conflict is key to effectively addressing it. In particular, political science offers various frameworks for classifying conflict motives, which can serve as a valuable reference for better categorizing the causes of conflict in family businesses. Van Evera (1999) explains that certain political elements, such as overestimating the likely outcome of a war, perceiving a first-strike advantage, believing that conquest could lead to further

gains, or recognizing favorable conditions such as weak defenses, valuable resources, or advantageous terrain, can explain why conflict erupts between two states. These ideas can be adapted to the family business context, where family members may make assumptions about the outcomes and benefits of initiating conflict. For example, siblings who are overly optimistic about their chances of inheriting control of the family business may provoke conflict with other siblings, believing that they will ultimately prevail and gain full ownership. This could be driven by a perception of a “first strike” advantage, believing that taking preemptive action will give them the upper hand in securing their desired outcome.

Similarly, Waltz (2018) identifies several motivations for conflict in political science, such as human nature (e.g., selfishness, misperceptions), characteristics of states (e.g., ideology, economic structure), and the anarchic nature of the international system, where no overarching authority can enforce order or prevent conflict. These concepts can be applied to the family business context, where the human nature of family members, the characteristics of the family business itself, and the lack of an external authority to prevent conflict are key drivers of conflict. For example, an autarkic family member driven by self-interest and a desire for greater personal wealth may initiate conflict by demanding a greater share of the firm’s profits or ownership. This may stem from misperceptions about their contributions or the value they add to the business. In addition, if the family business lacks a clear leadership structure or established conflict resolution mechanisms, the lack of authoritative oversight can exacerbate the situation and make it more difficult to reach a peaceful resolution.

In family businesses, the roots of conflict are often deeply anchored in the past, stemming from early socialization experiences of family members or business decisions that have been tacitly accepted but not well received by certain family or non-family actors. These insights help identify the catalyst for conflict. A complex interplay of power dynamics, personal interests, and parental authority often shapes these conflicts. These factors can range from seemingly simple strategic decisions to more complicated processes such as leadership transitions or actual family disputes (Gordon & Nicholson, 2010). Such conflicts can even escalate into public scandals (Rondi et al., 2023), damage the family’s reputation (Mangiò et al., 2023), threaten the family legacy, and ultimately lead to business failure (Gordon & Nicholson, 2010). On the other hand, issues such as nepotism and perceived injustice are often prevalent, especially when family members are seen as undeserving of certain roles within the family business, as exemplified by the “Fredo effect” (Kidwell et al., 2012). At the same time, certain actions and miscommunications can cause significant damage to the business and escalate conflict (Mismetti et al., 2023). Understanding the root causes of conflict is essential, as it serves as a common thread for effective conflict resolution and management. This approach fosters a deeper understanding and provides a clearer picture of the situation and its broader implications.

Ultimately, identifying the true origins of a conflict is a complex challenge that requires a willingness to listen and a commitment to devote time to unbiased exploration and an objective assessment of the situation. While these aspects are often implicit in family business studies, they are critical to effectively unpacking the complexities of family business conflict.

3.5. Conflict evolution: The when and how

While the dynamic and temporal evolution of conflict is widely recognized in the organizational literature (e.g., Friedman & Currall, 2003; Shah et al., 2021) and alluded to in seminal studies (Gersick et al., 1997), family business studies have traditionally paid less attention to this aspect. However, recent research has begun to explore this dimension, particularly in the context of succession and the emotions it generates (e.g., Yezza et al., 2021), signaling a promising shift toward a more nuanced understanding of conflict in family firms. Conflict is not

static but evolves over time through processes that can lead to escalation (Friedman & Currall, 2003), spillover effects (Jehn et al., 2013), or eventual resolution (Rubin et al., 1994). Nicholson (2008) made a notable attempt in this direction, linking family business dynamics to principles of evolutionary psychology, explaining that family conflicts dissipate or intensify over time. This evolution is often triggered by significant events, such as children reaching adulthood or the complexity of the succession process. Indeed, conflict within a family firm is closely linked to the development of the business itself (Harvey & Evans, 1994) and evolves along with changes in the family structure (Gersick et al., 1997).

Furthermore, the way in which conflict unfolds and how individuals respond to and perceive it in family businesses is highly variable, involving both emotional and rational responses that influence the escalation or de-escalation of conflict (Davis et al., 2010; Shah et al., 2021). In the face of conflict, individuals may emotionally perceive it as a personal threat, resulting in feelings of frustration, anger, or even hurt – emotions that are often tied to personal and family relationships within the organization. At the same time, rational responses involve the consideration of facts, data, and pragmatic problem solving. These different responses and perceptions are often intertwined, reflecting the complex nature of conflict in family businesses, where personal and professional dynamics often intersect (Van der Heyden et al., 2005). In addition, conflict may shift from one situation to another. For example, conflict that initially arises at home may be brought into the business due to the communication dynamics among family members (Sciascia et al., 2013a). Conversely, conflicts that arise in the boardroom may reverberate at home or in other workplace settings. The family and business interconnectedness adds complexity to conflict and its management (Mismetti et al., 2023). Conflict does not follow a linear trajectory, but evolves in tandem with other circumstances, something that both researchers and practitioners need to be aware of. For example, conflict is not confined to a single locus or group (Van Bunderen et al., 2018). Rather, it has the potential to spill over into other contexts, involving a shifting array of conflict configurations, types, loci, and motives.

Table 1 provides an overview of the conflict circumstances, exemplary references, and their implications in the family business domain.

4. Toward a comprehensive framework of family firm conflict

We reflect on and critically examine existing conceptualizations of conflict and offer an interpretive key for studying conflict in family firms. Specifically, we present the framework outlined in Fig. 1.

The framework offers several important contributions and benefits. First, it integrates existing family business conflict categorizations based on conflict types with the actors involved, thus merging two distinct but related vocabularies (Bettinelli et al., 2022). In addition, it bridges the fields of family business, organizational, management, psychology, and political science to create a more comprehensive understanding of conflict. By linking conflict types (i.e., relationship, task, process) with conflict configurations (i.e., dyadic, intragroup, and intergroup), and by considering the loci, motives, and evolution of conflict, the framework captures the complexity of family business dynamics. Family business behavior is influenced by the socioemotional wealth of the actors (Morgan & Gomez-Mejia, 2014) and their different interests and goals (De Massis et al., 2013). The framework recognizes that the actors involved – whether family members, extended family, or non-family members – have unique characteristics and may have different perceptions of work processes, tasks, and social relationships (Haberman & Danes, 2007; Renwick, 1975). By explicitly clarifying the groups and individuals involved, the framework allows for a deeper understanding of the different elements at play. We argue that to produce trustworthy, reliable, and transparent research on family business conflict, all elements of the framework should be considered whenever possible. This approach will not only advance the academic field, but also provide

Table 1
A summary of conflict circumstances.

Conflict circumstances	Dimensions	Characteristics	Main references	Implications in the family business (FB) literature
The who	Conflict configuration points	Conflict configuration points identified from the social science literature on team conflict with particular emphasis on the organizational behavior, psychology, and management literature: dyadic, intragroup, and intergroup	Böhm et al., 2020; Fiske, 2002; Humphrey et al., 2017; Korsgaard et al., 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979	In FBs, the presence of family and non-family members can lead to specific types of dyadic, intragroup, and intergroup conflict
The what	Conflict type	Conflict type conceptualizations borrowed from the management literature: relationship conflict, task conflict, process conflict	Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001	The categorization is widely accepted in the FB literature, which would benefit from specifying and defining the type of conflict examined
The where	Conflict locus	Conflict loci identified in the family business literature: family, generational, board/TMT, organizational	Bettinelli et al., 2022	FBs are characterized by more conflict loci than other firms, including family and generational, as well as the involvement in governance and organizational roles that are unique to family firms
The why	Conflict motive	Conflict origins, roots, and causes borrowed from the political science literature and identified through dialogue with practitioners	Levinson, 1971; Van Evera, 1999; Waltz, 2018	In FBs, conflict motives and roots can be born within the family and can be traced back to the past. While the facets are many, this aspect is often implicit in FB studies
The when and how	Conflict evolution	Conflict evolution at different moments and stages of the business lifecycle, as suggested by organization studies and seminal family business literature	Friedman & Currall, 2003; Nicholson, 2008; Shah et al., 2021	The evolution of conflict has been largely overlooked in the FB literature. Conflict may shift as family structures change and businesses evolve

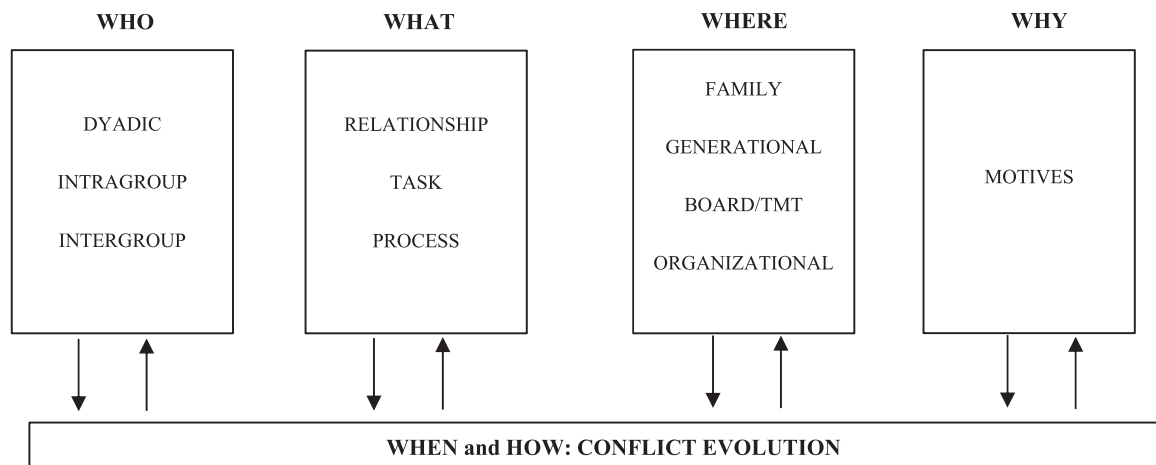


Fig. 1. A comprehensive framework of family business conflict.

valuable insights for family business owners, managers, and practitioners, and contribute to richer debates about conflict and conflict management.

Second, the framework highlights an often overlooked yet crucial element for family business scholars: the evolution of conflict. Conflict is dynamic and changes over time. For example, dyadic conflict can escalate and spread to an entire group or team (Humphrey et al., 2017), while disputes between heirs (junior generation) can spill over to parents (senior generation) or other family members. What starts in the home can reverberate in the business and vice versa, potentially contaminating other parts of the workplace. It is not enough to analyze the level of conflict within a particular locus, such as the board of directors or the TMT. This approach fails to consider who is involved, the origins of the conflict, and the nature of the conflict itself. For example, conflict within the board of directors does not automatically mean that all board members are equally affected. The dynamics and considerations are very different when only two individuals are in conflict versus ten. Understanding the actors involved, the roots of the conflict, and the specific object of the conflict is essential to fully grasp its complexity. The same can be said for the type of conflict, the actors involved, and the potential for contagion. For example, if a family CEO is involved in a

conflict with a non-family manager, other family members may support the CEO due to his/her power and status (Jennings et al., 2018). Therefore, we emphasize the importance of considering the evolution of conflict in family business research. Conflict is neither uniform nor static, it evolves over time. Thus, we argue that adopting a dynamic perspective on family business conflict would benefit both the theoretical understanding and practical application of conflict management in the field.

Overall, adopting our approach would allow for a more in-depth study of the complex and multilevel nature of conflict, particularly in understanding its nuances. It would also help to refine, adapt, or develop appropriate conflict theories and measurement tools for empirical analysis. In doing so, we aim to bridge and integrate the various approaches used in the family business conflict literature, while also incorporating concepts that have been overlooked in the field.

4.1. Illustrative examples of conflict in family firms

To highlight the usefulness and applicability of our framework, we complement the theoretical development with an analysis of three illustrative examples (Packalen, 2007; Vogel, 2017). These vignettes are

not intended to be exhaustive case studies, but rather real-world scenarios illustrating the key elements of our family business conflict framework. Through these examples, we clarify how our theoretical concepts apply to practical family business contexts (De Massis et al., 2016), bridging the gap between theory and practice, and providing valuable insights for both family business scholars and practitioners. Specifically, by integrating these concepts, family business scholars can conduct more comprehensive research on conflict in family firms, and practitioners can work with family business leaders to manage conflict more effectively and appropriately.

Natuzzi: Incompatibility between the family business founder and non-family CEOs. Natuzzi, a renowned Italian brand with a leading global presence in the furniture industry, was founded in 1959 by Pasquale Natuzzi. The company specializes in manufacturing and retailing high-quality, stylish furniture designs (Businesswire, 2022). In the early 2000s, Natuzzi faced significant challenges, including several management changes. During this period, Pasquale Natuzzi made the pivotal decision to step back from day-to-day operations, assuming the role of chairman and appointing a series of non-family CEOs. Seeking to take the company to a new level of success, Natuzzi hoped that bringing in qualified professional CEOs would bring fresh perspectives. This decision marked a substantial departure from the company's historical strategic practices, as it was the first time the founder had delegated significant responsibility and authority to individuals outside the family (Condosta, 2018). However, the attempt to separate ownership and management by appointing external professional CEOs did not produce the desired results. Ernesto Greco, who served as CEO of the Natuzzi Group from 2006 to 2007, found the position very challenging and eventually resigned for both personal and professional reasons (Furniture Today, 2007). Pasquale Natuzzi expressed that the external managers who resigned did not understand the unique relationship between the family business and the territories in which it operates. According to him, the company had a social responsibility as well as a financial mission, and moving production facilities abroad was not an option (Condosta, 2018). Consequently, in 2008, Aldo Uva was appointed CEO of the Natuzzi Group, with the full support of Pasquale. However, Uva's tenure was short, lasting only nine months (Doria, 2009), after which Pasquale Natuzzi, confident in his own expertise to lead the company, decided to reclaim the CEO position and temporarily stop hiring external CEOs (Condosta, 2018). This example reflects a common pattern found in many family businesses that seek to separate ownership from management. In such cases, the strong presence of the family owner – often the founder – continues to exert significant influence over management decisions, while external managers struggle to fully understand the values and culture of the family business (why). This results in conflicting perspectives in strategic management discussions and decisions (where). The conflicts typically arise from differing views of roles, power dynamics (process conflict – what), and operational approaches (task conflict – what), creating significant challenges for external managers in navigating these tensions. The situation represents a dyadic interaction between the family owner-founder and non-family CEO (who), with the potential for these conflicts to spill over and affect the broader management team over time (evolution).

IBM: A family affair between senior and junior generations. IBM is a US-based multinational technology company founded in 1911. The company quickly established itself as a leader in information technology and expanded globally under the leadership of the Watson family. However, the company's history has been marked by significant internal family conflicts (Weil, 1994). In particular, the generational conflicts between the father, Thomas J. Watson Sr., and his son, Thomas J. Watson Jr., became notorious. These conflicts were intense, personal, and sometimes escalated into physical confrontations, resulting in destructive behavior within the family (Davis, 1990). According to Thomas Watson Jr., the source of these conflicts lay in the contrasting personalities of the two men, each attempting to change the other according to his own vision. What began as a family dispute soon spilled

over into the company and affected the entire organization. As a result, executives and managers found themselves in difficult positions, often caught in the middle of father-son disagreements over strategic decisions. For example, Thomas Jr. became frustrated with the quality of operations and questioned the effectiveness of the company's research and development. In response, his father called the vice president of engineering and demanded the truth, placing him in the crossfire of the family conflict (Tedlow, 2003). In another case, Thomas Jr.'s brother was drawn into the ongoing power struggle when he was given more responsibility and put in charge of IBM World Trade. Thomas Jr. strongly objected to this decision. The conflict continued to escalate, culminating on the day Thomas Jr. was officially named president of IBM (Ziegler, 1990; Tedlow, 2003). This example illustrates the dynamics of a relationship conflict driven by personal animosities (what) and rooted in the emotional clash of personalities (why). The conflict arose between two family members (dyadic – who) within the family system, but soon spread to the business (where). The conflict between these family members had a significant impact on both the family and the business dynamics (evolution), affecting the organizational processes, work environment, strategic decision-making, and the evolution of IBM as a whole.

Aldi: A cultural clash. Aldi is a global retail chain with more than 2300 stores in the US and 12,000 stores worldwide (Smith, 2023). Aldi offers a select number of private label products and as a company has been defined as an “efficiency perfectionist” (Zellweger, 2017, p. 195). Aldi's owners, the Albrecht family, have long kept a low profile and lived modestly. Theo Albrecht, one of the founders, had two children, Berthold and Theo Jr., the heirs to Aldi Nord.² A family dispute over the control of Aldi Nord arose several years ago when Babette, Berthold's wife and their five children discovered that their influence within the family foundation that manages the family's assets had been limited. In 2010, Berthold approved a change in the foundation's charter that reduced the power of Babette and his heirs. This decision was later reaffirmed by Berthold's mother, Cilly, who stipulated in her will that Babette and her children would have no future role in the company (Connolly, 2019). While the Albrecht family generally refrained from making public statements, Theo Jr. broke a decade-long silence to publicly explain the disagreements between him and his sister-in-law Babette (Dawkins, 2020; ICMR, 2021). Babette was reportedly accused of breaking family rules by spending millions on vintage cars and art after Berthold's death. In 2020, a similar accusation was made against her by one of Berthold's sons (Dawkins, 2020). The dispute appears to have been resolved following significant changes in the governance of the family foundation (Cullen, 2023). The conflicts arose between Berthold's original family – including his mother Cilly and brother Theo Jr. – and Berthold's immediate family, consisting of his wife Babette and their children. These conflicts were both intergroup, involving Theo Jr.'s and Babette's families, and intragroup, as evidenced by one of Babette's son's recent accusations against her (who). The disputes can be classified as task and process conflicts because they revolved around different approaches to managing the family's wealth. Over time, these conflicts escalated into relational conflicts (what), such as when Babette's family was excluded from attending Cilly's funeral. The primary locus of these disputes was the family foundation that controls Aldi's and the family's wealth (where). The root of the conflict lies in different cultures and values surrounding wealth management, as well as different perceptions of tycoon status (why). The conflict began in 2010, when Berthold approved changes to the foundation's bylaws that reduced the power of his wife and children, continued in 2016, when Theo Jr. publicly opposed Babette, and evolved in 2018, after the death of Babette's mother-in-law (evolution).

² Aldi Nord and Aldi Süd operate as separate entities, both financially and legally.

5. Discussion and implications

The aim of this study is to advance the conceptualization of conflict by considering its multidimensional nature. Through an analysis of the literature and real-world cases, we have developed a framework that identifies key dimensions of conflict – the who, what, where, why, when, and how – that are relevant in the context of family firms.

This framework makes a significant contribution by integrating insights from different literature streams and providing a holistic perspective on family business conflict that accounts for its multidimensional nature. The framework was developed through an in-depth analysis of both the family business conflict literature and broader conflict studies, incorporating useful categorizations and dimensions of analysis. While some of these concepts have been previously adopted in family business research, others have been relatively overlooked. Specifically, the framework incorporates key dimensions that are widely recognized in the study of family business conflict. First, it incorporates the *where*, which is consistent with the categorization of conflict loci in family firms (Bettinelli et al., 2022). Second, it incorporates the *what*, which refers to conflict types, a conceptualization borrowed from the management field (Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001), but now widely used in family business research. Third, the framework integrates the *who*, which distinguishes between dyadic, intragroup, and intergroup conflict. This categorization originated in social science research (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Humphrey et al., 2017; Böhm et al., 2020) and is particularly useful for analyzing the unique dynamics of conflict in the family business context. The framework also includes dimensions that are recognized as important in the conflict literature but have been relatively underexplored in the study of family business conflict. First the *why*, which refers to the motives behind the conflict. This dimension has been emphasized in family business research (e.g., Gordon & Nicholson, 2010; Kidwell et al., 2012) as well as in studies of conflict in other complex contexts, such as political science (e.g., Van Evera, 1999). Second, the *when* and *how* address the temporal evolution and dynamics of conflict, aspects that warrant further investigation in the family business context, also drawing on other disciplines, such as psychology (Nicholson, 2008).

Our analysis of conflict circumstances has revealed specific characteristics of family firms that are particularly relevant to the emergence and development of conflict. First, family firms have more conflict loci than other firms because they experience unique sources of tension, such as family and inter- or intragenerational conflicts. In addition, the inherent nature of family firms adds a layer of complexity to conflict and its dynamics. This complexity stems from the multiple interrelated levels (ownership, business, and family) at which interpersonal relationships are formed and operate. This can lead to potential inter- and intragroup conflicts also in other loci, such as the board of directors or TMT, where the presence of both family and non-family members can create fault-lines, i.e., “hypothetical dividing lines that may split a group into subgroups based on one or more attributes” (Lau & Murnighan, 1998, p. 328; Bettinelli et al., 2023). In addition, family firms may encounter unique situations and actors that create or become involved in conflict. For example, conflicts may arise during family meetings or in domestic settings, potentially drawing family members outside the firm into the dynamic. Similarly, some conflict motivations may originate outside the business context, arising within the family but eventually spilling over into the business domain.

Another key contribution of this study is the development of a tool for understanding and analyzing the complexity and diversity of conflicts in family businesses. By applying the framework to real cases – such as the illustrative examples presented as vignettes in this paper – we have further refined the framework, identified all relevant dimensions of analysis, and clarified how theoretical concepts can be practically applied. This showcases how the conflict circumstances outlined in the framework can serve as a valuable resource for both scholars and practitioners in analyzing real-life situations (Van de Ven &

Johnson, 2006). In particular, the analysis of real cases underscores the dynamic nature of conflict and the importance of understanding its evolution. Conflict can escalate in different ways, increasing its impact and complicating its management. Examining how each conflict circumstance evolves over time provides deeper insights into its evolution. For example, the illustrative cases reveal different patterns of conflict escalation. At Aldi, the conflict escalated in terms of what was at stake, moving from task and process to relationship conflict. In contrast, the conflict at IBM was personal from the start, but evolved significantly in terms of who and where, starting as a dyadic conflict (between father and son) confined to the family, and eventually expanding to include the firm.

Overall, the framework and illustrative examples presented in this study contribute significantly to the conceptualization of conflict in family firms and highlight the family business field as a promising context for conflict research. Family business studies can reveal typical sources of conflict and their organizational consequences. Moreover, the unique importance of the family locus, combined with the distinctive dynamics of family firms, provides valuable insights into the complex, multidimensional nature of conflict and its evolution. The analysis of conflict circumstances highlights the nuanced nature of conflict and provides opportunities to explore its heterogeneity and evolution over time. Specifically, the framework advanced in this study demonstrates that family firms are a compelling context for examining how specific conflict circumstances influence the evolution of conflict. Furthermore, the framework provides a basis for understanding how contagion effects and conflict management efforts can affect different dimensions of conflict.

5.1. Implications for practice

This study has both theoretical and practical implications, as our framework provides a valuable tool for researchers and practitioners alike (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). From a practical standpoint, the framework can assist family firms and external consultants in analyzing existing conflicts to better understand their nature, scope, and evolution. Mapping the who, what, where, why, when, and how of conflict is essential for both those directly involved and those mediating the conflict. As such, the framework can help advisors and family business members define conflict in a systematic and pragmatic way, which is critical to building common ground and facilitating constructive dialogue aimed at finding potential solutions.

Analyzing the types of conflict (the what) using this approach is valuable for practitioners and family business members because it helps them distinguish between the different objects of conflict and to assess whether they are beneficial or detrimental. While conflict is often perceived negatively, certain types can have positive effects. For example, process conflict can promote the evaluation of different options (Morgan & Gomez-Mejia, 2014), and task conflict can improve the quality of decisions (Zattoni et al., 2015). These types of conflict should not be avoided altogether, but rather managed effectively. In contrast, more harmful forms of conflict, such as relationship conflict, should be carefully managed (Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2004; Ensley & Pearson, 2005; Chirico et al., 2011).

Identifying the motives (the why) and the scope of conflict in terms of the actors (the who) and loci (the where) is critical to determining areas of intervention and appropriate conflict management strategies. For example, conflicts that originate within the family and involve family members with and without a role in the business may eventually spill over into conflicts at the firm-level, affecting the board/TMT or organizational dynamics. Such conflicts cannot be effectively addressed by focusing solely on the firm; they require interventions that draw on different expertise, such as a coach or family mediator, and may need to include other family members involved in the dispute.

Finally, this framework allows for an analysis of both the past and potential future development of conflict (the when and how).

Table 2
Opportunities for future research on conflict in FBs and application of the framework.

Dimensions highlighted by the analysis	Research gaps	Future research directions	Examples of applications of the framework and research lines
Relevance of different circumstances in defining and analyzing conflict in FBs	1. Studies often do not explicitly define the nature of the conflict analyzed or classify it in relation to only one circumstance.	1. Adopt the conflict circumstances framework as a guiding tool	• Use the conflict circumstance of the framework to define the object of study and the boundaries of the research • Use the categorizations synthesized in the framework to explore the nuanced nature of each conflict circumstance • Analyze the different conflict circumstances in holistic studies of conflict
Conflict evolution	2. Several studies focus on the drivers and outcomes of conflict in FBs, but less attention is paid to the dynamics of conflict.	2. Conduct longitudinal studies on conflicts in FBs, using the framework to study the evolution of the various conflict circumstances over time	• Examine how each conflict circumstance evolves over time • Investigate whether and how the evolution of one conflict circumstance affects the evolution of other circumstances • Investigate which forms of escalation make it more difficult to manage the conflict
Multifaceted nature of conflict: each conflict circumstance corresponds to different possible conflict configurations	3. Studies on conflict in FBs have only partially drawn on other disciplines to study the heterogeneity of conflict.	3a. Apply theories from other disciplines 3b. Develop multidisciplinary studies	• Draw on micro-foundations to capture the impact of individual characteristics on conflict • Explore the possibility of borrowing from psychology, political science, sociology, education, and learning theories • Learn from dialogue with other disciplines
Complexity and multilevel dimension of conflict	4. Prevalence of quantitative studies focusing on one configuration of conflict.	4a. Use methodological approaches that allow considering different conflict circumstances 4b. Improve the measurement of conflict	• Adopt network configurations • Experimental design • Observation • Use historical research methods • Collaborate with advisors and mediators • Mixed methods and interdisciplinary approaches • Apply new approaches, such as the social network approach • Develop new measures of intergroup and intragroup conflict • Measure conflict from the perspective of different actors (e.g., family and non-family, different generations, or all the different individuals involved)

Consultants, family business members and professionals can use the framework to think about how the actors and groups involved in the conflict may change over time, as well as how the loci and situations may shift. For example, conflicts that begin within the family may evolve into board or organizational conflicts, and vice versa. Similarly, one type of conflict (e.g., task or process) may escalate into more damaging forms (e.g., relationship conflict). Understanding the evolution of a particular conflict helps identify its triggers and enhances the ability to develop solutions that manage the conflict and prevent it from escalating into a destructive dynamic.

5.2. Implications for theory and future research

The framework presented makes a valuable contribution to theory in the family business and conflict management domain. By identifying relevant conflict circumstances, it improves the conceptualization of conflict and provides a basis for future theoretical development and the design of empirical studies. As summarized in Table 2, the findings and framework provide insights and guidance for future research, highlighting promising directions that build on and extend previous studies (Bettinelli et al., 2022; Kubíček & Machek, 2020; Qiu & Freel, 2020).

5.2.1. Using the framework to guide research design

Our study highlights the importance of recognizing the multidimensional nature of conflict and ensuring that the specific conflict circumstances under investigation are clearly stated. In many cases, the literature on conflict in family firms does not explicitly consider the different aspects of conflict, often referring generally to conflicts between individuals. For example, due to the unique nature of family firms, scholars often analyze conflict in the context of succession

(Handler, 1994), without specifying whether the conflict is personal and emotional (i.e., relationship), or task and process-related (e.g., Fernández-Roca et al., 2014), and where it manifests or under what circumstances. The extent and object of the conflict are also often unclear.

The framework developed in this study provides a valuable tool for researchers studying conflict in family firms. It highlights the dimensions that are critical for defining the scope and focus of a particular study. In addition, by analyzing how each conflict circumstance may manifest in family firms, the framework provides guidance on how to explore specific types or loci of conflict in greater depth, taking into account the nuances of the actors, relationships, situations, and underlying motives. The identified circumstances also serve as a reference point for future research aimed at examining conflict in family firms from a holistic perspective, addressing multiple dimensions of conflict. This approach could be particularly useful, for example, in case studies that seek to explore in depth the dynamics of conflict in a family business context.

The framework serves as a tool that can be used throughout the research design process in any study that focuses on conflict in family firms. For studies that aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of conflict within a family business, the framework provides guidance on all the relevant circumstances that need to be examined, along with the categorizations developed in the literature to analyze each aspect. For more focused studies, the framework can help define the specific object of study and clarify which dimensions should be examined and which should be excluded. For example, if a study focuses on a particular conflict locus (the where), it is crucial to make this focus explicit and to define whether, with regard to that locus, the researchers will examine one or more of the other conflict circumstances, such as type of conflict (the what), the nature of interactions (dyadic, intragroup, or intergroup)

(the who), and the underlying motives of the conflict (the why).

Finally, the framework may be valuable for future research design because it emphasizes the importance of certain circumstances (e.g., the why) that have been overlooked in the family business conflict literature. By highlighting these gaps, the framework suggests areas of conflict research that remain underexplored and warrant further investigation.

5.2.2. Using the framework to study the evolution of conflict circumstances

The framework developed in this study may also be valuable to scholars interested in studying conflict from a longitudinal perspective as a tool for mapping how conflict evolves in each of the identified conflict circumstances. Research has often focused on the drivers and outcomes of conflict in specific contexts (Bettinelli et al., 2022; Kubíček & Machek, 2020), with less attention paid to the evolution of conflict over time and the effects of contagion and escalation that can increase the severity of conflict (i.e., when and how). However, understanding how conflict dynamics unfold is critical to improving the ability to manage conflicts in family firms. As the illustrative examples in this study demonstrate, the framework provides a lens for conducting in-depth and detailed analyses of conflicts and their evolution. As each conflict circumstance may change over time, this approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the potential escalation and contagion processes.

To better understand the complexity surrounding the emergence and development of conflict in family firms, future research could examine the interrelationships among the conflict circumstances identified by the framework and whether and how the development of one conflict circumstance affects the development of others. In addition, examining how each conflict circumstance evolves over time could also help investigate which forms of escalation are more harmful or difficult to manage.

5.2.3. Research applying theories from other disciplines and multidisciplinary studies

The proposed framework, highlighting the nuanced and complex dynamics of conflict in family firms, suggests that a multidisciplinary approach could significantly enhance our understanding of this phenomenon. Drawing on theories from other disciplines would yield valuable insights and help advance research on conflict in family firms.

Psychological approaches could provide insights into the dynamics of conflict in family businesses by examining the nature and behavior of family members and key individuals (Pieper, 2010). Drawing on psychological theories, such as those on individual attitudes and behaviors (Garcia et al., 2019; Mismetti et al., 2024), can shed light on how these factors change depending on the locus of conflict. For example, family CEOs may exhibit different levels of openness to discussing ideas with board members depending on the composition of the board, particularly when both family and non-family members are present (Ensley & Pearson, 2005). Incorporating microfoundations into the study of family business conflict would allow for a deeper understanding of how the individual characteristics of family owners, CEOs, and successors influence conflict processes (De Massis & Foss, 2018). In addition, drawing on the psychology literature could help explore whether the personality traits, cognitive biases, and heuristics of key individuals in family businesses play a role in the emergence and evolution of conflict, as well as their ability to confront and manage it (Kelleci et al., 2019; Rovelli et al., 2023).

Political science studies can also provide insights into the complexity of conflict in family firms, as politics involves the management of conflict between multiple parties and systems, and the forms of negotiation and mediation needed to manage such conflicts (Zartman, 2007).

In addition, sociology of the family can provide valuable insights into the complexity and diversity of family firms, highlighting the potential conflicts and their dynamics (Kushins & Behounek, 2020). Studying the mutual influence between families and organizations can enrich both

family science and management research (e.g., Jaskiewicz et al., 2017; Mismetti et al., 2023). Finally, an education and learning perspective can enhance our understanding of how different conflict resolution approaches (e.g., Rahim, 1983) can be effectively applied in family firms (Zellweger, 2017), as well as the contingencies that facilitate or hinder conflict-driven learning (Dijkstra et al., 2012).

5.2.4. Methodological and measurement challenges for research

Our framework emphasizes the need to analyze conflict at multiple levels, take into account all relevant conflict circumstances, and study its evolution. This approach may require going beyond methodological approaches and research designs typically used in the field. For example, adopting network configurations could help researchers better explore the complexity of conflict dynamics, where individuals may perceive different types and levels of conflict (Park et al., 2020). Experimental designs also offer a promising avenue for studying conflict in family firms (Lude & Prügl, 2021), as well as in the fields of entrepreneurship (Hsu et al., 2017), management and leadership (Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2019). Such approaches allow for the investigation of causal relationships and offer flexibility in design choices based on the nature of participants. Given the complexity and significance of conflict dynamics, historical research methods could also be effectively applied to explore the roots, contextual conditions, causal relationships, and processes that shape conflict in family firms (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Vaara & Lamberg, 2016). From this perspective, it would also be valuable to examine how individuals, groups, and family firms draw on past experiences with conflict and conflict management to interpret and manage current conflict situations (Argyres et al., 2020).

Last but not least, through observation and interdisciplinary approaches, researchers can access rich and insightful data on various interpersonal and organizational aspects (Myers, 2013; Nordqvist & Gartner, 2020). This approach can provide access to critical data and events that often occur behind closed doors, such as conflicts, and shed light on their processes. In future studies, scholars could also collaborate with consultants and mediators who have unique access to the family business dynamics and the trust of family owners.

The complexity of conflict also has implications for how it is measured. Conflict can be perceived differently by different individuals (Jehn et al., 2010). Consequently, the level of conflict in a team can vary depending on the individual surveyed and can be measured in multiple ways (Shah et al., 2021). New methodologies, such as social network approaches (Park et al., 2020), and a reconceptualization of how intra- and intergroup conflict are measured would allow scholars to better capture and understand the phenomenon of conflict and its evolution, not only in family firms, but in a broader range of organizational contexts. In the case of teams, scholars could consider the perspectives of different individuals involved in conflict situations. The field of family business provides an opportunity to empirically examine different perspectives on conflict, from older and younger generations, from blood and non-blood family members, from non-family managers and employees, and from all the unique actors involved in family business contexts (Daspit et al., 2021).

6. Conclusions

This article has highlighted the need to understand the complex nature of conflict in family businesses. The presence of family dynamics in these organizations adds layers of complexity to conflict, making it a topic of both practical and academic importance.

Through the proposed framework, we aim to foster a deeper understanding of family business conflict, promote theoretical precision, and stimulate meaningful debate and research. By integrating insights from the family business, organizational, management, psychology, political science, and conflict literatures, as well as from practitioners, our framework provides a holistic perspective on the conflict circumstances unique to the family business context. This integrative approach

not only bridges disciplinary divides, but also highlights often overlooked aspects of conflict, such as its evolution within and between family business systems. We analyze and discuss three illustrative examples of prominent family firms experiencing conflict to illustrate the theoretical value and practical application of the framework. In doing so, we aim to advance current conceptualizations of conflict in the family business literature and encourage more robust, transparent, and trustworthy contributions by considering the full range of conflict circumstances. Indeed, our goal is to guide scholars in considering the full range of implications from different disciplines, theories, and methodological approaches when studying conflict in family firms. At the same time, we aim to provide practitioners with both a practical tool and theoretical insights that will enable them to effectively analyze and manage conflict in family firms.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Marco Mismetti: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Project administration. **Barbara Del Bosco:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Cristina Bettinelli:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Alfredo De Massis:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Validation, Supervision.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge that part of this research was funded by the European Union through the Project PRIN 2022 "Tradition-driven Innovation: Historical and Cultural Heritage as a Source of Innovation for Italian firms" (2022HZBCEM- CUP I53D23002720008 - PNRR M4.C2.1.1).

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