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7. Process Thinking and the Family Business

Emanuela Rondi

1. Introduction

Family businesses are characterised by the entanglement of the family and the business; this entanglement creates a unique connection between the heritage of the past, the present identity and future development. Despite the critical role of time, some claim it has suffered a “quiet perseverance” since being planted in the very first issue of the Family Business Review, and it is still commonly overlooked (Sharma, Salvato, & Reay, 2014). Numerous articles in the family business literature assume a long-term perspective across different areas of research, such as succession (e.g., Sharma, Chrisman, & Chua (2003), strategic goals (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006), patient capital (Zellweger, 2007), the role of CEOs and decision-making (Lumpkin, Brigham, & Moss, 2010), inherited culture and identity (Salvato, Chirico, & Sharma, 2010), R&D investment (Chrisman & Patel, 2012), etc. Although these studies address a long-term horizon, many of them include time as a control variable without implying process ontologically. The family business field has a strong focus on variance-based theory (Sharma, 2004; Chrisman, Kellermanns, Chan, & Liano, 2010; Reay & Whetten, 2011), and it has primarily focused on the antecedents and consequences of phenomena analysed through dependent and outcome variables (Chrisman et al., 2010; Sharma, 2004). Unfortunately, according to Bergson (1946, cited in Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 571), this type of analysis is a fictional representation of change where processes are studied through static events, subordinated to speculation about the facts and logic-mechanisms depicted to understand causation. Change is often described by being broken down into stages through developing process models that convert the temporal progression of activities into a series of static positions (e.g., Craig & Moores (2010). However, as stated by Tsoukas and Chia

(2002), decomposing a process into steps as static snapshots reduces it to a series of immobilities, which are antithetical to the concept of flux. Dawson and Hjorth (2012) directly address this issue by claiming that family business research has not been very receptive to processual theorising, thereby losing the opportunity to analyse phenomena under a process perspective.

Thus, despite the claimed relevance of analysing the temporal pattern of phenomena, process theory has been scantily applied in organisational studies in general (Langley, 2007) and in family business research in particular. Currently, as shown by Bartunek, Rynes, and Ireland (2006), there is an increasing interest in process thinking. In a survey, these authors asked the editorial board of the *Academy of Management Journal* to assess the most interesting articles in management, and among the 17 most frequently mentioned, 10 were clearly process studies (the data and theorisation developed were temporally embedded). A process perspective calls for the analysis of events and a deep understanding of how actors interact in shaping the family enterprise. The family business field emerges as a unique ground on which to implement process thinking to develop a deeper understanding of the process of change, enabling us to answer the 'how' and 'why' questions about flux and the movement of evolving phenomena (Langley, 2007; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995).

My purpose is to show the potential of process thinking as a unique vessel for improving the understanding of processes in family businesses. Furthermore, studying family firms through a process perspective may offer a contribution to the knowledge of sister disciplines and of process theory itself. This chapter is structured in the following way: the first section addresses process theory's key elements, investigating the primary ontological and epistemological assumptions. Section two provides an analysis of how this perspective has been used in previous family business research to show the topics, methods and techniques that have been examined. In the third section, I examine how process theory and the family

business field may mutually benefit and suggest directions for future research. Finally, the chapter concludes by providing some implications for process thinking and family business research.

2. Process theory

In the last two decades in organisational studies, aside from the still dominant *being* ontology, the increasing need for a holistic perspective capable of envisioning the ambiguous nature of organisational life has led a *becoming* ontology to emerge (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 194). The boundaries of causation have been crossed and questions about the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of phenomena are now being addressed, with a focus on continuous ‘in the making’ relationships, rather than on individuals or organisations as separate entities (Chia & MacKay, 2007; Hernes & Weick, 2007). Hence, as claimed by Weick (1969), it is necessary to transform nouns into verbs by studying ‘organising’ and not just ‘organisations’ or ‘strategising’ and not just ‘strategy’ because verbs ‘keep things moving’.

The becoming ontology in literature is oftentimes depicted through a contrast with the being ontology, and through their clash, different assumptions emerge that open up new ways of thinking (Alvesson, Hardy, & Harley, 2008). According to this approach in this chapter, I frequently contrast the two ontologies to exact the primary differences. Despite their heterogeneous roots, these two perspectives must not be considered as a dichotomy; on the contrary, the interconnected relationship between being and becoming supplement each other (Chia, 1995). Therefore, three dualities are seen as the underlying current development in process research: variance vs. process theorising, substance vs. process metaphysics and narrative vs. logic-scientific thinking (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010, p. 2). Below a brief description of each is provided.

2.1. Variance vs. process theorising

According to Elsbach, Sutton, and Whetten (1999), organisational theorists have been fascinated for many years by the difference between variance-based theory and process-based theory, reflecting the ontological being and becoming perspectives. As noted by Langley and Tsoukas (2010, p. 6), a process model first addresses events rather than variables, and second focusses on the final cause and not an efficient cause. In this framework, process conceptualisations offer an essential contribution to organisational and managerial knowledge that is not available from most variance-based generalisations (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013). According to Van de Ven (2007, p. 145), ‘how’ and ‘what’ questions are complementary: while ‘what’ questions are incomplete without an analysis of how events have unfolded to achieve that effect, ‘how’ questions about phenomena tend to be meaningless without an explanation of what induced them or what they will cause.

2.1. Substance vs. process metaphysics

The second duality lies in the concept of process. The ontological interpretation provided by scholars about process is twofold: process as a change in things in a world made of things (grounded in substantive meta-physics) and things as “reifications of processes” (grounded in process meta-physics) (Langley et al., 2013). Rescher (1996, p. 7) links the two perspectives back in antiquity to, respectively, Democritus and Heraclitus. These two schools of thought have led to the development of weak- and strong-process orientations. The former considers processes taking place within existing entities, the latter conceives an evolving becoming of events (Hernes, 2008). As noted by Langley (2007), researchers tend to mix and blend the weak and strong process orientation, resulting in a blurred distinction.

2.2. Narrative vs. logic-scientific thinking

As Bruner (1986, p. 11) notes, process meta-physics distinguishes between “logic-scientific” (or paradigmatic) and “narrative” forms of knowing; the author underscores the difference in

the types of causality implied in the two modes. “The term then functions differently in the logical proposition ‘If X, *then* Y’ and in the narrative récit ‘The king died, and *then* the queen died’. One leads to a search for universal truth conditions, the other for likely particular connections between two events –mortal grief, suicide, foul play” (Bruner, 1986, p. 11). Thus, narrative knowing places elements in a plot considering a temporal form and providing a concrete idea of causality, while paradigmatic knowing connects actors and situations through an abstraction process, closer to scientific and logical reasoning.

Addressing phenomena that consider the crucial role of time, change and flux are identified in process meta-physics, process theorising and narrative forms of understanding. Although process scholars also imply substantive meta-physics to conceptualise the change in things, process meta-physics provides a deeper understanding of the micro-processes that contribute to constituting and reproducing forms of organising over time (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). The becoming ontology conceives individuals, organisations and society as the outcome of evolving actions, interactions and relationships (Chia, 1995).

Process studies address evolving phenomena by taking into account the temporality of activities as a key element of understanding (Langley et al., 2013), aiming at ‘catching reality in flight’ (Pettigrew, 1992). Numerous studies have investigated the meaning of time, alternating objective and subjective perceptions. Whereas the former, according to Newton, envisages time as an absolute and independent measure of events taking place in the external world, the latter considers Kant’s vision that time is meaningless outside of human consciousness (Chia, 2002). In process studies, clock-based time (characterised as a-contextual, linear, objective and invariable (Wiebe, 2010, p. 214)) is substituted with *kairological* time. An event’s significance is assigned by actors; hence, cognition of the event arises when it is experienced together with the understanding of what is going on (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). By contemplating the primary role of temporal ordering and probabilistic

interaction between entities, it follows that understanding patterns in events over time is the key to developing process theory (Langley, 1999). Whitehead (1929, p. 69) uses the term *prehension* to describe the incorporation of a momentary experience with its predecessors, considering that “what it is now included what was then”. In accordance with this view, Maclean, Harvey, and Chia (2012) envision three senses of present: present of past things (memory), present of present things (perception), and present of future things (expectation). In this framework, “knowledge” emerges as the creative and reweaving experience of comprehension and absorption to develop a coherent and temporal embedded understanding (Chia, 2002). Chia (2002) shows that the subjective conception of time generates three primary epistemological consequences. Firstly, change is indivisible; hence, the past is immanent in the present, and it influences our perception. Second, reality is becoming and what we perceive as things are just temporarily stabilised events. Finally, organisations are “islands of fabricated coherence” that emerge by institutionalising social habits and behaviour from chaos and change; therefore, they must be investigated. Likewise, Langley and Tsoukas (2010, p. 4) define the organisation as an abstraction, an outcome of a *sensemaking* process implemented to remove equivocality through interlocking patterns of communication.

As Hernes and Maitlis (2010b, p.27) argue, while process thinking in philosophy has now been widely investigated by numerous authors, such as those mentioned in this chapter, sensemaking is a newcomer in organisational studies. The sensemaking literature emphasises the role of experience; according to constructivism, when people *enact*, they start from undefined space, time and action, and design their own categories and new labels to develop new features of the environment (Weick, 1995, p. 31). Numerous studies in the process literature have investigated sensemaking in organisations, for example, Weick (1995), Balogun and Johnson (2004), Maitlis (2005), Hernes and Maitlis (2010a), and Maclean, Harvey, and Chia (2012). As noted by Maitlis (2005, p. 21), “sensemaking is a process of

social construction in which individuals attempt to interpret and explain sets of cues from their environments”. Taking into account how the interaction of a relatively small number of simple deterministic elements can generate a complicated framework, Langley (1999) provides 7 sensemaking strategies to understand and explain the processes of change. These strategies are very insightful and helpful in implementing process studies. In short, they are narrative, quantification, alternate templates, grounded theory, visual mapping, temporal bracketing and synthetic strategy. Narrative and quantification may be considered to be the two extremes of a continuum. Whereas narrative strategy involves the reconstruction of events through an extended verbal account considering the ambiguity of the events, quantification methods decompose and code processes into a limited number of numerical categories that are statistically analysed. Between these two extremes are the remaining sensemaking strategies, acting as alternate templates where the same database is analysed with different lenses. Grounded theory involves an inductive bottom-up approach, and visual mapping implies boxes and arrows to represent a large number of dimensions. Moreover, the temporal bracketing strategy permits different time periods to be considered as distinct units of analysis, while synthetic strategy takes the process as an entire unit of analysis and attempts to analyse the data structure.

Finally, in this introductory section about process theory, it is noteworthy to mention what in my view (and in accordance with Langley (2007)) is a subfield of process thinking: *strategy-as-practice*. As noted by Johnson, Melin, and Whittington (2003), a shift in the strategy agenda is needed towards the micro to consider organisation not as entire corporations or business units but as depending on the processes and practices of individuals, groups and networks of people. Strategy-as-practice focuses on micro-activities, aiming to understand how practices shape and are formed by day-to-day activities (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007). According to other authors in the literature, such as MacKay and Chia (2013), this

approach involves a different way of thinking from process that is called post-processual. While process studies focus on individuals and then on their actions, strategy-as-practice addresses the practices and social regularities. Some important references in this context are Johnson, Melin, and Whittington (2003); Balogun and Johnson (2004); Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl (2007) and Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, and Vaara (2011). The next section discusses the potential of process thinking in the family business field by providing theoretical and practical contributions to implement it; further, the section presents some examples.

3. Process theory in family business studies

As described by Van de Ven (2007, p. 145), process theory is the shift from a surface to an in depth analysis, moving from description to explanation. Three different modes of inquiry are depicted to develop process research as parts of an iterative cycle: deduction, induction and abduction. Deduction is theory-driven, induction infers from direct observation and abduction is a back and forth process that considers the existing theories but also takes into account surprising patterns emerging from the data and develops propositions based on observations. The heterogeneity of methods involved to fulfil this goal in organisational studies is also reflected in the family business process research.

Starting from theoretical papers, Shepherd (2003, 2009) addresses sensemaking in family business failures and exit, studying grief recovery learning (2003) and time (2009). In the former article, the author proposed a dual process model to enhance grief recovery, and in the latter, a multi- and meso-level theory of grief recovery time from the loss of a family business is developed. Another interesting area investigated through process thinking is social capital. In their analysis, Arregle, Hitt, Sirmon, and Very (2007) study the process as opposed to the content of social capital in family firms. According to their view, family businesses are unique because they present two forms of social capital: the family's and the firm's. The

authors analyse both the positive and the negative interactions between family social capital and organisational social capital.

Focusing on empirical studies, Sieger, Zellweger, Nason, and Clinton (2011) develop a process model of portfolio entrepreneurship in family business. Four longitudinal case studies are implemented to investigate portfolio entrepreneurship; this is a relevant topic because it plays an important role in the economic landscape, but it is largely unexplored in the family business context (Sieger et al., 2011). Furthermore, Helin (2011) studies family meetings processually through two longitudinal case studies. Two firms are investigated sequentially using multiple tools to develop incremental learning about organisational becoming in family business meetings. In the first company, multiple family and non-family members are interviewed (past analysis); then the emergent need to directly participate in real-time meetings leads the author to “switch modes from story told to story lived” (p. 101) by combining interviews and participation in the meetings (real-time) in the second case study.

A different approach is implemented by Drakopoulou Dodd et al. (2013) to investigate the role of time in family business. The authors conduct multiple case studies by interviewing twelve companies across three countries in different industries and addressing questions about the role of time in family business. What emerges is first that clock-time is perceived as being professional and invoked in the implementation of managerial techniques; second, family and firm threads are intertwined in everyday activity and evolve inextricably together with business and life.

Another interesting area in family business research where process thinking has been implemented is strategic change. Bhalla, Lampel, Henderson, and Watkins (2009), through a focus group, investigate the differences in the strategy-making of ethnic and non-ethnic family firms in the UK; by adopting multiple perspectives, the authors develop a framework

of four schools. Their findings claim that strategy formation is a cognitive process that happens in the minds of various individual actors and emerges as the sum of these individual efforts inside the organisation. Other studies investigating strategy in family business adopt the strategy-as-practice approach. Strategy-as-practice “reorients strategy research towards the work, talk, activities and competencies of individual managers as strategists”, addressing the ‘how’ research question and day-to-day activities and interacting with the context (Chia & MacKay, 2007, p. 222). In their studies, Nordqvist and Melin (2010) and Nordqvist (2012) implement an abductive approach to investigate both micro and macro levels of social interaction among strategists and their practices, considered as the actual doing of strategy (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

Nordqvist and Melin (2010), aiming to develop a deeper understanding of the dynamics of strategy processes in family firms, conduct three case studies to understand the roles, dimensions and meanings of strategic planning. Their findings present three dimensions to the practice of strategic planning: planning modes, planning motives and planning arenas. The authors argue that strategic planning is closely connected to both local and family-related rules but also to the global institutionalised norms that guide planning as a common practice and its role beyond a mere analytical tool. More recently, Nordqvist (2012) examines the social actors and the interactions among family members in influencing strategy formation. This research is based on a longitudinal multiple case study approach and is conducted through interviews, meeting observations (real-time), casual conversation and site visits involving three firms over four years.

A further example is by Salvato (2003); this author proposes a model for strategic evolution by theorising from multiple case studies. Data were collected through interviews with people both internal and external to the companies, some direct observations and also other documents, such as books, artefacts and internal archives. The research extends the literature

on leadership, strategy evolution and dynamic capabilities by incorporating the central role of micro-level processes. More recently, Walsh and Bartunek (2011) address the foundation of new businesses by former members of defunct organisations. The process model developed is composed of four periods of organising: disintegration, demise, gestation and rebirth. Each of these periods is shaped by experiences, interpretive tasks and shared actions.

Aside from case studies conducted primarily through interviews, there is an increasing interest in family business research narratives. Process studies do not reject quantitative methods (Van de Ven & Poole, 2005), but narratives are crucial to the study of organisational processes because “people do not simply tell stories, they *enact* them” (Pentland, 1999, p. 711).

Narratives better explain development in terms of the process order (Van de Ven, 2007) and provide more a concrete rendering of causality (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). In a recent article, Dawson and Hjorth (2012) assert the relevance of narratives as an alternative approach to understanding family businesses. The authors define narratives as the study of the “stories that people tell” (Gartner, 2007, p. 615), claiming that life and knowledge should be analysed in accordance with how they are storied and narrated. Due to the simplicity of the inquiry, narratives involve practitioners more naturally and allow us to examine social dynamics as processes by maintaining the temporality and vividness of real everyday knowledge through language (Dawson & Hjorth, 2012). The article by Dawson and Hjorth (2012) is also an empirical example of the use of narratives in family business research. Starting from two biographies, the authors conduct a narrative analysis by implementing the hermeneutic triad (explication, explanation, exploration) and a dramatist analysis (Burke, 1968). A notable effort in applying narratives to the family business field has been made by Hamilton (2006, 2013) in her investigation of the role of women in family business (2006) and entrepreneurship across generations (2013).

Although process studies have been rarely applied in organisational studies privileging variance-based theory, they may contribute to deepening the understanding of organisational processes by providing a complementary perspective (Zahra, 2007). Not aspiring to be comprehensive, in this section, I present examples of studies addressing multiple topics by implementing longitudinal case studies, narratives and several techniques for data collection. Although process research does not exclude quantitative methods (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, 2005; Langley et al., 2013), my focus has been on qualitative methods as narratives according to the view that they are better able to conceptualise the plot of the story as a generative mechanism in itself (Van de Ven, 2007). For a more comprehensive discussion of the qualitative and quantitative methods uniquely adapted to process research, see Poole, Van de Ven, Dooley, and Holmes (2000).

In the next section, I investigate the reciprocal contribution that process thinking and family business studies may develop. Furthermore, suggestions for future research are provided.

The reciprocal contribution of process thinking and family business

Since its inception, family business research has borrowed many theories from sister disciplines, such as Economics, Sociology, Psychology, Law and Family Systems (Wortman, 1994). The implementation of theories from other fields has allowed family business research to develop and acquire legitimacy. In a more recent period, a need for theories better grounded in family business has been expressed (Zahra & Sharma, 2004), and the idea of 'giving back' has emerged (Sharma, 2004; Melin, Nordqvist, & Sharma, 2014, p. 16). 'Giving back' means not just drawing on existing theory but both improving existing theories through the unique features of family businesses and developing new theories, potentially to be borrowed by other disciplines as well (Reay & Whetten, 2011). Inferring from Zahra's (2007) taxonomy of entrepreneurship, research states that contributions may arise from the combination of two dimensions: the phenomenon investigated and/or the theory implemented.

Both dimensions may be new/emerging or established and the combinations of the variables generate four different scenarios. In accordance with this view, this chapter addresses the implementation of process thinking in family business research as a vessel to further discuss the interactions among actors and the becoming phenomena. Considering the potential for analysing change and processes in family business from a time-embedded perspective, I suggest that further knowledge might be gained by applying this approach both to topics already investigated from different angles and to new areas that deserve investigation.

According to Drakopoulou Dodd et al. (2013), the temporal lens of process theory may be beneficial for addressing those issues that the most prominent theories in the literature, such as the Resource Based View of the firm and Agency Theory, have not yet been able to fully explain. Therefore, family business emerges as a perfect context for implementing process studies. As an example, Zahra (2007) claims an involvement of the temporal relationships among key variables in the causal chain to improve the understanding of phenomena, such as decision-making, in entrepreneurial firms.

The question that now may arise is why neither organisational studies in general, nor family business studies in particular have thoroughly applied process thinking? The answer is not because process thinking is not valuable; evidence shows that the audience is interested in process studies and they are able to provide fresh and relevant knowledge, as witnessed by Bartunek et al.'s (2006) survey. Numerous authors have tried to address the reasons for this gap. According to Langley (1999), implementing empirical research in process studies is challenging because process data are messy and because it is hard to find an approach that does not reduce flux into a number of snapshots. Moreover, as claimed by Maclean et al. (2012), conducting process research requires a deep understanding of the context, the individuals and the dynamics to be studied; to gain this understanding, a high level of accessibility is needed. The answer to these questions emerges from the literature: it might be

that it is hard to collect, analyse and manipulate process data (Langley, 1999). This issue is challenged by Langley (2007, p. 278), who asserts that “If process research is seen as something that one does only when one’s academic legitimacy is already well established then the prospects for the development of process thinking will remain limited”.

The contribution from implementing process thinking in family business studies is and would be manifold. First, process thinking allows researchers to obtain a greater understanding about the micro-processes of change (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Second, the close relationship between the investigated processes and the social interaction involved allows researchers to gather details about how change is accomplished, how plans are translated into actions and how plans are modified and adapted. In family business research, this type of investigation contributes to a shifting focus from individuals and results to relations and processes (Hjorth, 2007; Sharma, 2008). With particular reference to strategy-as-practice, work that involves this approach could make research more relevant for practitioners (Whittington, 2003). Catching the dynamism of real organisational processes by involving process thinking in family business research may generate more actionable knowledge (Langley, 1999). In this regard, the strategy-as-practice approach is more oriented toward the micro-perspective of actions and interactions to uncover actual strategic activities by directly involving practitioners (Johnson et al., 2003). A further implementation of strategy-as-practice in research may contribute to resolving the growing frustration around connecting academic research with practice in organisational studies in general (Johnson et al., 2003) and in family business in particular (Melin et al., 2014, p. 302). Moreover, as noted by Dawson and Hjorth (2012), process studies that investigate ‘how’ questions may contribute to the paradigm-building agenda (Debicki, Matherne, Kellermanns, & Chrisman, 2009) that currently characterises family business and advance theory development with the narrative approach.

Aside from the possibility of conducting further studies in the depicted areas, there are many

other topics suitable for investigation in family firms. Family-owned businesses are oftentimes portrayed to be dynasties (Drakopoulou Dodd et al., 2013); for example, it is not rare to find in the family firm branding portraits its ancestors, iconic objects or sites where the tradition and the heritage of the past shape the present and future (Micelotta & Raynard, 2011). Family enterprise, given a time horizon that spans multiple generations, offers a unique context for developing and testing time-related theories. This aspect is defined by Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2014) as both retrospective and prospective: retrospective referring to family history and corporate culture and prospective in leadership and family legacy. This unique context calls for more research to investigate how and when leadership, human resource practices and culture unfold in family firms (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2014; Sharma, De Massis, & Gagne, 2014). Currently, aside from succession, governance and performance, other topics have received greater interest in family business studies, such as goal setting, resource competitive advantage, internationalisation (Zahra & Sharma, 2004), and new venture creation; institutional contexts, innovation and the informal economy are now emerging in family business research (Sharma, Chrisman, & Gersick, 2012). All of the cited themes involve time, flux and change and are suitable for analysis under the lens of process theory, considering the changing nature of the human being and the complex domain of the family business (Zahra & Sharma, 2004). Considering new product development, and more in general, innovation processes by investigating ‘how’ family firms develop and/or acquire new knowledge and capabilities may lead to an understanding of whether and how family businesses differ firstly from non-family businesses and secondly among themselves in innovation practices. Furthermore, investigating internationalisation and new venture creation through the process approach would elucidate the evolving and change processes that trigger and are triggered by family businesses (Sharma, 2004; Sharma et al., 2012). Depending on the time horizon of interest, different methods are more suitable for implementation. For example,

a NPD project may be investigated through real-time tools, such as ethnographies, that maximise the probability of discovering short-lived factors and changes. However, when strategic decisions span a wide period of time, it would be better to conduct in depth interviews using retrospective accounts.

An additional area where process thinking could contribute would be the study of growth, particularly as shown by Walsh and Bartunek (2011), understanding how the involvement of the family in the business affects the evolving processes through *familiness*. Process research on evolution and lifecycle may allow us to study the temporality and processes of the family with those of the business to increase our understanding of the relationships between these two souls of family business. Furthermore, the goal-setting process is considered to be an area of interest in family business research (Kotlar & De Massis, 2013) that may be enriched by an analysis of how this process unfolds in time not by studying just stages of development but also how the entangled relationships shape the process of goal setting. Financial and non-financial goal setting and seeking may also be analysed to provide awareness about how the intertwined relationship between the family and the business according to the practices implemented is translated into day-by-day practices.

Unfortunately, currently process research is still primarily cross sectional, unable to observe real-time change and becoming. Only by implementing longitudinal and systematic research can this issue be overcome (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 197). Thus, family businesses could be a unique ground that might benefit the development of process theory and the implementation of longitudinal process studies, particularly those involving multiple case studies (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). From a practical point of view, organisational and, more specifically, family business becoming may be studied from a real-time perspective (reconstructing the evolving present) by tracking it back into the past (retrospective studies) or following it forward into the future (Hernes & Maitlis, 2010b). As Van de Ven (2007, p. 208) suggests, a promising

approach is initiating a historical study before the outcomes of a change process become apparent to observe it in real-time without compromising the ability to observe short-lived changes.

4. Conclusions

This chapter aimed to provide an overview of process thinking, considering the interest of family business research in processes and time. This approach may develop a reciprocal contribution. Family business research could develop a greater understanding of how and becoming by analysing practices and evolving events; this would lead to the development of more practitioner-oriented knowledge, which could fill the gap that is now increasing between academic research and practice. Vice versa, the idiosyncratic context of family business with its familiness, long-term orientation and financial and non-financial goals might provide a unique ground for studying the evolving and intertwined processes of the family and the business; this process may 'give back' to sister disciplines by developing new constructs in the family business field that can then be borrowed by other fields to provide further insight related to the operationalisation of process studies.

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