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Narrative Memory Work of Employees in Family Businesses: How Founding Stories Shape Organizational Identification

ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with how founding stories are sustained across multiple generations of employees in family firms and how these stories influence organizational identification. Drawing on a social memory perspective and narrative memory work, we explore the retold founding stories of employees in a large agricultural family firm. Our study demonstrates that founding stories transform firsthand memories into collective memory across multiple generations through intertwining intradiegetic storytelling with material and relational processes. The effortful work of remembering together across familial and social relations, spaces and embodied ways explains how successive generations understand their belongingness to the organization.

Keywords: founding stories, family firm, memory work, organizational identification, collective memory, historical narratives

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INTRODUCTION

As powerful representations of a family firm's past, founding stories are increasingly used to understand how narratives of the past pervade and reinforce shared values, norms, and beliefs over time (Jaskiewicz, Combs, & Rau, 2015; Sasaki, Kotlar, Ravasi, & Vaara, 2020; Suddaby, Silverman, De Massis, Jaskiewicz, & Michelotta, 2021) to shape family business behavior (Boevers & Hoon, 2021; Ge, De Massis, & Kotlar, 2022; Kammerlander, Dessi, Bird, Floris, & Murru, 2015; Labaki, Bernhard, & Cailluet, 2019; Suddaby & Jaskiewicz, 2020). Founding stories emerge from the relational engagements that employees were part of in everyday life with the founder and founding family, conveying the values and core beliefs of the family firm (Zwack, Kraiczy, von Schlippe, & Hack, 2016). These historical narratives constitute symbolic resources of the past (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Suddaby & Foster, 2017; Wadhvani, Suddaby, Mordhorst, & Popp, 2018) which members of family firms use to enact and recreate their experiences. Persisting long after the death of the founder (Sinha, Jaskiewicz, Gibb, & Combs, 2020), founding stories acquire an extended life as they become retold by those who were not a participant in the narrated events (Linde, 2009). These stories are polyphonic as multiple generations of employees share stories' values and worldviews to make sense of the present and guide perceptions of what they deem to be central and enduring about their organization (Foroughi, 2020; Foster, Coraiola, Suddaby, Kroezen, & Chandler, 2017; Hjorth & Dawson, 2016).

Rhetorical history research indicates the use of narratives in helping members understand 'who they are/or what they stand for as an organisation' (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Foster, Suddaby, Minkus, & Wiebe, 2011; Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Suddaby, Foster, & Quinn Trank, 2016), highlighting the role of stories in shaping organizational identity. We know that past referents affect member's salience (i.e. important and central to one's self-concept) in the organization (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Ravasi, Rindova, & Stigliani, 2019), but lack an

understanding of how the transmission of the past relates to what makes successive generations of members feel connected to the firm. Studying how lived experiences with the founder and the founding family transmit across generations through founding stories is theoretically important for explaining organizational identification over time (Bednar, Galvin, Ashforth, & Hafermalz, 2020). Founding stories create shared meanings that connect members in affective and emotional ways to the organization across both time and tellers (Basque & Langley, 2018; Foroughi, 2020; Zwack et al., 2016) and, as such, can be expected to influence future generations' identification with the family firm.

To understand how the multi-generational transmission of the past shapes organizational identification in family firms, we adopt a social memory perspective. Memory work scholars direct attention to remembering together in mnemonic communities as the mechanism for transmitting firsthand memories across members of a community (Foroughi, 2020; Halbwachs, 1992; Middleton & Brown, 2005; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Zerubavel, 1996). It has been suggested that memory work is an act of joint remembering that allows members to coalesce around a shared understanding of the past (Foroughi, Coraiola, Rintamaki, Mena, & Fischer, 2020; Foster et al., 2020). Stories are seen as profound to sustaining this collective memory in organizations (Suddaby, Israelsen, Bastien, Saylor & Coraiola, 2022), particularly through intradiegetic storytelling which invites everyone into the small world described by the narration, creating a co-presence. Our study is concerned with this intradiegetic world as the “world inhabited by the characters and plot of the narrative” (Suddaby, Israelsen, Mitchell, & Lim, 2021, p.7), and how members of a group tell and retell stories as specific intradiegetic narratives as if they were a part of the inner world occupied by characters such as the founder, family or other organizational members. Accordingly, we expect that joint remembering across multiple generations functions by bringing those who were not a participant in the narrated events into the world inhabited by the founder and the

founding family, connecting them to the family firm. We understand this as narrative memory work, which we define as the effortful work of joint remembering through intradiegetic storytelling of related events and lived experiences with the organization. Given employees' affirmative desire to connect to the founding family and the legacy of the founder (Jaskiewicz, Combs, & Rau, 2015; Pieper, Smith, Kudlats, & Astrachan, 2015; Hammond, Pearson, & Holt, 2016), we expect members of family firms to be particularly receptive to founding stories and the enactment and recreation of these experiences.

We assume that narrative memory work links between founding stories and the belongingness of subsequent generations, i.e. what makes members of communities feel connected, valued and important to the organization. As such, we are interested in the work of joint remembering which transmits the past across time and across generations to invite successive employees into the living memories of the family firm, thereby shaping their identification with the organization. Hence, we explore *how founding stories are sustained across multiple generations of employees and how these stories impact belongingness to the family firm.*

To address these questions, we examine founding stories concerning the past experiences and encounters in everyday life with the founder and owning family of a large agricultural family firm. Drawing on interviews and field observations of 19 families working together with their family members up to the fourth generation, we explore the founding stories that acquired a retold status, i.e. retold by narrators other than the original protagonist. Our study thereby seeks to capture the polyphonic stories as part of the collective memory of the family firm that are told by employees who are engaged as families across generations within the company and participate directly in carrying the family firm's deeply grounded character to subsequent generations.

First, we present our findings on joint remembering through founding stories according to the core values and beliefs they convey, namely 1) adoring the past, 2) pride in progress and 3) sense of intergenerational reciprocity. Intradiegetic storytelling imbues these values and core beliefs which are expressed and adopted across multiple generations, bringing together successive employees and their larger worlds with the inner world of the founder and the owning family. Furthermore, we identify the relational and material processes through which the past is remembered together, thereby sustaining memory across multiple generations. Finally, our study demonstrates that the intertwining of intradiegetic storytelling with material and relational processes affects how successive generations of members understand their connectedness to the organization. Our study sheds light on the retrospective-, present- or future-oriented motives of belongingness that employees acquire with their family firm as being inherited from prior generations.

Our exploratory study offers three main contributions. First, we contribute to the body of literature on narratives and memory in family firms (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Sasaki, Kotlar, Ravasi, & Vaara, 2020; Suddaby, Silverman, De Massis, Jaskiewicz, & Michelotta, 2021). Advancing these historically-informed approaches to family business research, we show that in order for founding stories to transform firsthand memories into collective and vivid memories across multiple generations, intradiegetic storytelling is relationally and materially co-constituted. Revisiting the supposition of members' emotional detachment over the passage of time (Erdogan, Rondi & De Massis, 2020), our study illustrates that introducing subsequent generations into the intradiegetic world of the founder minimizes this emotional distance to the past, sustaining stakeholder engagement in family firms over time.

Second, contributing to literature on the social memory perspective and organizational memory studies (Foroughi et al., 2020; Foroughi, 2020; Mena, Rintamaki, Fleming & Spicer, 2016; Olick & Robbins, 1998), we demonstrate how narrative memory

work is made more powerful by eliciting members' responses in a range of familial and social relations, spaces and embodied ways. These relational and material processes of remembering with members of a community strengthen the transmission of collective memory of the organizational past across successive generations. Joint remembering through intradiegetic storytelling creates a co-presence that brings together multiple actors and accounts of the past with the present to evoke emotions about the past.

Third, shedding light on the motives of belongingness that employees acquire with their family firm, we advance an understanding of how descendants experience their connectedness to the family firm as being linked to the intergenerational nature of collective memory. We theorize the implications of temporal orientation in motives of belongingness for organizational identification (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Bednar et al., 2020; Shipp, Edwards & Lambert, 2009) and show that retrospective-oriented, prospective-oriented and present-oriented motives of belongingness help us to understand identification in relation to key family business phenomena.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES AND ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Founding stories and organizational identification

As historical narratives, founding stories constitute symbolic resources (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Foster et al., 2011; Wadhvani et al., 2018) used by individuals to make sense of the present and create new knowledge. Literature on family firms has focused on these powerful stories about the origin of the family firm that founders leave long after their demise (Kammerlander et al., 2015; Pieper, Smith, Kudlats, Astrachan, 2015; Suddaby et al., 2021). Founding stories entail both oral and written representations of a family firm's past (Hjorth & Dawson, 2016; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Sasaki et al., 2020) that align individuals with organizational values and play a role in regulating workers' identities (Zwack et al., 2016).

As living stories (Boje, 2008; Jørgensen & Boje 2010), founding stories emerge from the relational engagements that employees were part of in everyday life with the founding family of the family firm. These stories acquire an extended life as they become retold by those who were not a participant in the narrated events, but heard them from someone else (Linde, 2009). In contrast to curated organizational founding stories (e.g., Basque & Langley, 2018; Hatch & Schultz, 2017), retold founding stories enact and recreate communities' experiences with the founder and the founding family (Foroughi, 2020). Entailing normative and polemical dimensions (Linde, 2009), retold stories are representations of a founder's viewpoint where certain aspects of the situation are valued (e.g. image, reputation, entrepreneurial spirit, emotions) while others are disvalued or even disqualified. Given their polyphonic nature, founding stories are retold by multiple group members who share the stories' particular values and worldviews to make sense of the present, guiding their perceptions of what they deem to be the central and enduring attributes of the organization (Foroughi, 2020; Foster et al., 2017; Hjorth & Dawson, 2016).

In the body of studies addressing 'rhetorical history' (Foster et al., 2011; Suddaby, et al., 2022; Suddaby et al., 2021; Suddaby, Foster, & Quinn Trank, 2010; Wadhvani et al., 2018), scholars identify the use of historical narratives in helping members understand 'who they are/or what they stand for as an organisation' (Suddaby et al., 2016). By drawing upon historical accounts, family businesses ensure that identity is continuously enacted and expressed, thereby sustaining the strategy-identity nexus (Boevers & Hoon, 2021). Narratives about the past also serve as conduits for identity work whereby the stories that entrepreneurs tell shape who they become, as these stories change how they view themselves (Saylors, Lahiri, Warnick & Baid, 2021). Concerning the role of stories in shaping organizational identity, studies found that past referents affect member's salience (i.e. important and central to one's self-concept) in the organization (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Ravasi et al., 2019).

Identity and the processes of identification binding members to organizations are thereby constituted in the shared narratives that members author (Humphreys & Brown, 2002).

Narratives of the past enable members to make sense of an organization's identity and the extent to which they perceive an overlap between the identity of the organization and their self-concept, perceiving a sense of oneness with the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

Across time and tellers, stories connect members in affective and emotional ways to the organization (Bell & Taylor, 2016; Eisenman & Frenkel, 2021; Foroughi, 2020), and can be expected to influence future generations' identification with the organization. However, research has devoted less attention to how these stories transmit the past from earlier to later generations. Studies examining the narratives of family firms' history, tradition and legacy that persist over time (Boevers & Hoon, 2021; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Pieper et al., 2015; McEvily, Jaffee, & Tortoriello, 2012) alert us to the potential of remembering together in that with whom we remember is just as important as what is remembered. This suggests that telling and retelling stories together can be regarded as a powerful means for transmitting memory over generations of employees.

Narrative memory work as joint remembering

To help us consider the multi-generational transmission of the past, we look to social memory studies and the body of work on memory in organization studies. Memory work scholars acknowledge oral tradition and storytelling as the primary mechanism for how collective memories are sustained over time in organization (Middleton & Brown, 2005). Turning to the theorizing on remembering as a social activity (Halbwachs, 1992; Schwartz, 1982), social memory studies highlight the practices and processes of remembering (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Zerubavel, 1996). As Halbwachs (1992) maintains, individuals recount memories only if they can place themselves in the perspective of the group that shared these memories.

Building on the awareness of social remembering as stemming from social interactions between organizational actors (Rowlinson, Booth, Clark, Delahaye, & Procter, 2010; Schwartz, 1982), organizational memory studies inquires into the ways that remembering “shape- and are shaped by- present and future choices, behaviours and strategies in and around organizations” (Foroughi et al., 2020, p. 1726). Although the act of remembering itself is individual, organizational actors draw on shared narratives of a past event to frame and inform how and what they remember (Ybema, 2014; Bell & Taylor, 2016; Foroughi & Al-Amoudi, 2020). Foster, Wiebe, Coraiola, Bastien and Suddaby (2020) demonstrate that reactivating the long-term past and making it present again plays an important role in how actors interpret the past and construct their own versions of the bygone days of organizations. The processes of remembering are thus a means for members to experience events and encounters they were not directly involved in, thereby turning past events into vivid memories. What actors remember, in turn, matters for how they serve the present purposes of an organization and what they feel connected to in the organizations.

As Foroughi (2020, p. 1352) maintains, storytelling is “an attempt to ‘jointly remember’ the past during which group members create a shared understanding [...]”. From this perspective, much of what we remember is based on how we remember *together* as a mnemonic community (Zerubavel, 1996). In these processes of joint remembering, members draw from traces that may take the form of stories, archival documents, monuments, or museums that represent the past event (Eisenman & Frenkel, 2021). Remembering together is thereby a powerful means for transmitting firsthand memories across members of a community (Foroughi, 2020; Middleton & Brown, 2005). Viewing the founding story as a trace of memory work, Foroughi’s (2020) study points to how particular retellings of the founding story reaffirmed what each group of employees thought the core purpose of the organization was and restored collective identities. Members in a community jointly share a

common recollection of a past event to sustain a collective memory over time. In these communities, members coalesce around a definite understanding of a past event (Halbwachs, 1992), although not having experienced the event directly, or learned about it indirectly.

Stories play a key role in sustaining this collective memory (Suddaby et al., 2022), relating particularly to intradiegetic storytelling in organizations. Memory work allows members to carry on an understanding of the past through intradiegetic storytelling that invites everyone into the world described by the narration, creating a co-presence. Narrative theory distinguishes between intradiegetic and extradiegetic levels (Genette, 1983) and has been used to demonstrate how stories told in the context of other stories are persuasive for contextualizing the present (Suddaby et al., 2021). Suddaby et al.'s (2021) work refers to Genette's concept of the 'story-world' which entails the intradiegetic world as the world inhabited by the characters and plot of the narrative they represent and the extradiegetic world occupied by the listener with its historical meta-narratives in the broadly held cultural discourse. Our study is concerned with the intradiegetic world and how members of a group tell and retell stories as specific intradiegetic narratives as if they were a part of the inner world inhabited by characters such as the founder, family or other organizational members. Intradiegetic storytelling introduces these worlds from the past to subsequent generations, creating a co-presence with larger worlds in the present. Accordingly, we expect that the act of joint remembering across multiple generations functions by bringing those who were not a participant in the narrated events into the world inhabited by characters in the stories. The tellers can thereby recreate experiences with the founder that they have learned from their communities' storytelling. We understand this narrative memory work as an important means to bring subsequent generations of employees into the living memories of the family firm, strengthening their bonds to the organization. We define narrative memory work as the effortful work of joint remembering through intradiegetic storytelling of related events and

lived experiences with the organization, thereby transforming firsthand memories of the organizational past into collective and vivid memories across multiple generations.

Narrative memory work across generations as key for identification in family firms

Prior research has indicated that keeping the collective memory of the founder alive over multiple generations is key for family firm performance, and in particular, competitive advantage (Ge et al., 2022; Labaki et al., 2019), transgenerational entrepreneurship (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015), strategic change (Sasaki et al., 2020) and innovation (Kammerlander et al., 2015). Stories about the founder not only inform the collective memory of a family firm, but function as shared versions of the past (Zwack et al., 2016) that can be used to guide present behavior and future actions, connecting successive generations of members in affective ways. Given these members' desire to connect to the founding family and the legacy of the founder figure (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Pieper et al., 2015), we can expect them to be particularly receptive to these stories. At the same time, however, there are risks of passing time in family firms, namely that it creates an emotional distance between the members of the family firm and past events. Particularly as new generations enter the firm, characteristics of the previous family generation and the founder can fade or become lost over time (Erdogan, Rondi & De Massis, 2020). Mena et al. (2016) note that not only remembering, but also forgetting is a function of memory. While older employees may forget about the past events, employees who are new to the firm may recall the past only in a blurred way (Foroughi & Al-Amoudi, 2020), as a result of which they may suffer a loss in identification.

Building on the above, we seek to better understand how narrative memory work links between founding stories and the belongingness of subsequent generations. To do so, we define motives of belongingness as what makes members of communities feel connected, valued and important to the organization (Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010) in relation to their

subjective experience of the past, present and future (Shipp et al., 2009). In this paper, we are interested in the work of joint remembering which transmits the past across time and across generations to invite successive employees into the living memories of the family firm, thereby shaping their belongingness. Hence, we question first, *how are founding stories sustained across multiple generations of employees* and second, *how do these stories impact belongingness to the family firm?*

We explore the founding stories that are told by employees who are engaged as families across generations within a firm founded or owned by another family. These employees are not blood or marriage genetically related to the founding family (Tabor et al., 2018; Xi et al., 2015), but work together with their own relatives in up to the fourth generation and carry the family firm's deeply grounded character to subsequent generations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In order to understand how founding stories are sustained across multiple generations of employees and how these stories impact belongingness to the family firm, we explore 'Green Harvester', an agricultural firm in Germany. To investigate the founding stories that employees tell and retell in family firms, we opted for a narrative analysis that captures the past's relevance for the present and the future (Argyres, De Massis, Foss, Frattini, Jones, & Silvermann, 2020; Dawson & Hjorth, 2012; Hamilton, Cruz, & Jack, 2017; Smith, 2016). Our narrative analysis involves the exploration of a large corpus of interview, documentary and observational data (Lê & Schmid, 2020; Riessmann, 1993).

Research Setting

Green Harvester is a suitable setting for examining the multi-generational transmission of the past, particularly as it is rich with employees who are engaged as families for up to four generations within the firm given its standing in the local rural employment context. Green Harvester is thereby characterized by both longstanding members and newcomers who share the same employer with their blood-or marriage based relatives, but are not genetically related to the founder and owning family. Based upon purposeful-theoretical and snow-ball sampling (Patton, 2002), we identified 110 members from 19 families having sociobiological linkages (e.g. great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, children, aunts and uncles, cousins) that reach back from the founding period of Green Harvester to those family members working in the company today (see table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Green Harvester is a third-generation family firm in Germany with annual sales of € 3.9 billion (annual report 2019) and 12,000 employees in the producing sector of agricultural machines. Founded in the early twentieth century, Green Harvester bears the name of the owning family. In the 1950s, the son of the founder entered the business co-leading the firm with his father. Although the second generation successor is not the original founder of the company, he is perceived as a founding figure alongside his father within the workforce, having achieved significant growth of the company. Today, members of the Green Harvester family are involved in the business by holding strategic positions. Succession from the second to the third generation of the owning family was ensured approximately ten years ago, when the daughter of the owner became chairman of the board. The company is a global player with 35 subsidiaries in 19 countries. Green Harvester's headquarters is still located in its original location in a rural area in Western Germany.

Data Sources

We collected data from 46 employees belonging to 19 families whose members have been working for up to four generations in Green Harvester. Apart from semi-structured interviews, we also used field visit observations to the company and families at home, ethnographic fieldwork notes and diverse retrospective archival and visual material to understand the joint remembering across the generations. We thereby observed the ethnographic elements (Smith, 2016) which allowed us to immerse ourselves not only in the current generation's experiences, but also in those of the first and second generation family members, e.g. company books, families' private archives including their memory boxes, photos, letters and other artefacts.

Between the years 2017 and 2020, we collected our rich data set capturing these founding stories across the multiple generations wherein the richness of data is grounded in the researchers' reflexive and ethnographic stance to the participants' view (Riessman, 1993). To explore narrative memory work as the effortful work of joint remembering, we gathered data from multiple actors in their communities. This allowed us to trace the cross-generational family webs along with their familial and social relations and spaces of remembering together. Table 2 provides detailed information on the rich multiple sources of data we used in our narrative analysis.

Insert Table 2 about here

Narrative Analysis

Consistent with established approaches for qualitative-interpretivist methodology, an inductive approach to theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989) was used by moving back and forth between data and an emerging theoretical understanding of the transmission of founding

stories across generations in the family firm. Since adequacy is critical in presenting and theorizing the experiences of participants (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), we selected a structured, transparent procedure to move from empirical facts and first-order statements, through an interpretative aggregation of these data.

In a first step, we used an open-coding approach (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) in which we read and re-read each interview several times to categorize and label direct statements. We brought this information into a chronological order along the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th generations, while retaining the core elements of narrative analysis such as building connections between events, the passage of time, and individual intentions (Riessman, 1993; Smith, 2016). As we are interested in those stories that emerge from the relational engagements that people were part of in everyday life with the founding family of the family firm (Linde, 2009), we noted these instances where employees shared accounts of past events and lived experiences with the founder and owning family. We began to notice that the same stories were being retold by members. As we are concerned with the specific intradiegetic narratives told by employees as if they were a part of the world occupied by the characters, we first analyzed each of the stories regarding ‘who tells (and performs) the story’ and ‘who do storytellers tell their story to in everyday life’ (Smith, 2016). We thereby contextualise these stories in their specific time and circumstances and as a product of multiple voices across different generations of employees. To better understand the intradiegetic world inhabited by the characters such as the founder, family or other organizational members (Suddaby et al., 2021), we then analyzed the set of stories for the viewpoint of the protagonist/main character in each story to identify the core beliefs and values the stories convey about the family firm that are imbued across multiple generations. According to the salient differences across the stories, we labeled these as: 1) Adoring the past, 2) Pride in progress and 3) Sense of intergenerational reciprocity (see table 3).

Second, two independent researchers discussed impressions about the familial and social relations and spaces in which organizational members remember together, bringing together the researchers' context-related interpretations during the data collection. Analyzing our data revealed that sharing visual and material artifacts including photographs, slideshows, certificates and family firm merchandise was intertwined with storytelling. We further noted the employees' sensory responses to these material aspects (e.g. joy, tears, sorrow, pride). In doing so, we identified the relational and material processes through which memories are sustained from early childhood onwards.

In a final step of analysis, we examine how memory work shapes and maintains the belongingness of successive generations. We analysed the data for their motives of belongingness in terms of how the younger members and newcomers understand their connectedness to Green Harvester. In re-reading our interview transcripts and field notes, we analyzed the newcomers' dispositions toward the past, present and future. We thereby identified differences in the retrospective, prospective and present-oriented motives of belongingness in the 3rd and 4th generations. Through dialectical interrogation as imaginatively engaging in a back and forth inquiry between the phenomenal world and existing theory (Hoon & Baluch, 2020), we interpreted these different dispositions that constitute the motives of belongingness of the next generation.

FINDINGS

To offer insights in joint remembering of the past across multiple generations, we explored how founding stories are sustained across up to four generations of family members. We found that intradiegetic storytelling imbues the values and core beliefs across generations, bringing successive employees into the inner world of the founder and the owning family. We reveal that by telling and retelling these stories, employees express and adopt the core beliefs

and values that are implicitly or explicitly conveyed by the main characters in the story. Furthermore, we identify the intertwining of storytelling with the relational and material processes through which the past is remembered together, thereby sustaining memory across multiple generations. We demonstrate that joint remembering constructs and reaffirms affinities to the founder and the owning family among the employees. Finally, we indicate that narrative memory work as joint remembering shapes and maintains the motives of belongingness of the next generation to the organization (retrospective-oriented, prospective-oriented and present-oriented motives of belongingness).

Intradiegetic storytelling that imbues core values and beliefs about the family firm

First, we present the stories according to the different core values and beliefs they convey, namely 1) Adoring the past, 2) Pride in progress and 3) Sense of intergenerational reciprocity (see table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

Adoring the past: In the founding stories imbuing the core beliefs and values of the founding family's generosity and heroism, these stories are anchored in the glorified past to emphasise the founding figure and owning family. Both the story of a family of Spanish origin and the story of the porcelain perpetuate the image of the heroic founder. Across the interviews and observations, we noted that through these founding stories the employees express and adopt a sense of deep gratitude and appreciation toward the Green Harvester family and a heroization of the past. Through retelling these stories, the members responded with gratefulness and adoration towards the founder and the owning family, often breaking into tears of joy. Constantly backwards-oriented, an adoration of the past is transmitted across members of successive generations.

One of the stories that is retold by employees across the generations is the family of Spanish origin (Family 8) which expresses how welcome the founder made their first generationers feel. According to the tellers, 50 years ago, the founder gave a Spanish family of guest workers not only a job, but also a place to live in the town: “Harvester Founder’s owner gave us a home in ‘barracks’ that were built especially for foreign employees. There is nothing missing.” (I19, Family 8). Not only did the 2nd generationer directly tell this story of how they as a young child, along with their mother and father were welcomed by the founder, but also subsequent generations recalled this story from their own childhood onwards. Third generationers of this family repeatedly refer to this story of life, recounting their feelings of gratefulness toward and veneration of the founder.

A further story that the employees told and retold was the porcelain story about the owner’s wife at a company anniversary celebration. This story conveyed the heroic image of the Green Harvester’s owner given the owner’s wife’s insistence on using porcelain rather than paper plates. A mother (2nd generation) told the following story with a voice full of emotion: “About 30 years ago, we, my colleague and me, we placed the cake on paper plates as it was delivered by the bakery. The owner's wife did not like this at all. She was really upset. Normally, she was a really calm women. But in this situation she said in a harsh tone: ‘My employees should eat from the good porcelain dishes.’ ... I tell you, from then on we only used the high-quality dishes.” (I5, Family 2). This story was retold across subsequent generations to glorify the generosity of the Green Harvester owners and responded to with a deep sense of appreciation toward the owner’s wife.

Pride in progress: In the stories imbuing the core beliefs and values of the spirit of technological progress, business growth, product development and innovation, the future of the company makes up the reference point. Through these stories, the members enact and

recreate a sense of entrepreneurial spirit across the generations. Collectively sharing business-related stories that are optimistic and future-oriented, members of the successive generations express and adopt feelings of ‘pride in innovative products and progress’.

One of the founding stories that is retold is the seven-year economic ‘hog cycle’ (Family 1). This story depicts an economic cycle which predicts a crisis each seven years. Members conveyed and curated the image of the owning family always being able to cope with uncertain economic futures. In retelling this story, members from the first generation ingrain and sustain the sound economic decisions of the owning family and the business skills of the founder, focusing on progress and the ability to handle future economic crises across generations. Further, members told and retold the story about the ‘harvester’ and how the company’s first harvesting machine is still being continuously rebuilt and developed. This story perpetuates the image of the harvester as the most innovative product and a building block for the company’s future growth and progress (Family 9; Family 19). Stories about this harvesting machine were repeatedly told across the generations of employees, with the members conveying a sense of pride in Green Harvester’s products and progress and solidifying its power as an enduring symbol of the innovativeness of the company.

Sense of intergenerational reciprocity: The stories imbuing the core beliefs of the company as a nurturer and highlighting values of reciprocity and personal obligations. The points of reference are focused on the immediate, with the employees transmitting the notion that if they keep the company flourishing, their own family will benefit. Here the stories conveying a sense of intergenerational reciprocity such as the rosebush story, gate 4 story, wage bags story are told and retold to which members respond with a set of unwritten expectations towards the company across the generations (Family 4, Family 18). One of the stories that members from the first generation tell and retell is that of the rose bush (Family 4). These members

repeatedly told each other the story of receiving the rose from the Green Harvester's owner more than 30 years ago. Cuttings of the original rose bush were given to and are still physically passed down through the generations of this family. This rose bush takes on an allegorical meaning for the company as a sustainable nurturer. Many members share the story in their own words to indicate that if the rose is nurtured, it will grow and give back, signaling the company as a source of a mutually beneficial contract. The joint retelling of the rose bush story perpetuates the idea that their family's interests and security are intertwined with the company's success. The next generationers adopted a sense of intergenerational reciprocity around the right to life-long employment, conveying that Green Harvester offers job security based upon an intergenerational social contract. From early childhood on, the parents tell and retell this sense of harboring clear expectations with their children and relatives. A daughter (3rd generation) said: "my dad was here, my grandpa was here. ... My ancestors have done a lot for the company, then one should also give the children the chance" (18, Family 4). These sentiments were evident in the emotional responses of the members being visibly upset when their demands remained unmet, recounting that their children were not appointed in the company after finishing the apprenticeship.

Sustaining memory across generations through material and relational processes

Second, we observed that intradiegetic storytelling is intertwined with material and relational processes across members of successive generations (e.g. 3rd and 4th generations). Relational processes refer to the range of familial and social relations and spaces in which organizational members remember together and which bind them to the family firm from early childhood onwards. Material processes refer to the non-verbalized and embodied ways in which remembering occurs (see table 4).

Insert Table 4 about here

Relational processes: We identified the relational processes of with whom employees remember, how they do so and the spaces in which remembering together takes place, thereby connecting the stories about the founder and the family firm to lived experiences. Our findings indicate that the relational processes of remembering together create and strengthen employees' affinities to the core beliefs and values of the founder and the family firm. Remembering together occurred in close familial relations in organizational or domestic spaces with the immediate family, as well as amongst wider social relations of the organizational members (kindergartens, schools, community groups).

The familial relational processes of remembering together demonstrate how mothers, fathers and grandparents instill company memories in their children and grandchildren from early childhood onwards, thereby creating and strengthening their affinity to the organization and reaffirming the core beliefs and values about the founder and the family firm. Without ever having met the founder, a son explained his sympathy toward the founder, recalling how he and his mother would sit together and speak highly of the trademark appearance of the founder and his daily inspection of what was going on in the factory floor. It was striking how the son spoke about his affinity to the owner and his talent as an entrepreneur, despite never having met him: "It is impressive when [owner's name] walks through the company with his straw hat and walker and looks at everything very closely... I have always heard a lot about him from my family, but I see that they are right when they describe him as an entrepreneur... My father also always says: He is a cult figure." (I3, Family 1). These secondhand memories that the son has of the founder he never met indicate that what he remembers is based on how remembering occurs together in the family unit of the son, mother and father reaffirming the core beliefs about the founder as an entrepreneur who made progressive decisions.

In addition to families, we observed the wider social relations involved in the processes of remembering together across multiple generations that serve to create and strengthen an affinity to the founder and to Green Harvester. We found a range of actors and spaces in which remembering together took place in the wider community to connect stories with lived experiences with other groups beyond the organizational members. Pensioners would reminisce about the company's machines when giving preparation courses in the local vocational school. It was striking that pensioners would visit their great-grandchildren's kindergartens, sharing stories of the company and its products with groups outside of their immediate families. Visiting the kindergarten of his great-grandchild, one first generation pensioner recalled how he baked bread with a self-built model to show the children what the family firm's machines are good for. Sharing his story of the company's original machines and enacting these through a model he built himself was an act of joint remembering that invited the youngest generations into the world of the family firm's past and demonstrated the authenticity of these stories. Connecting stories to this lived experience with his great-grandchild and the kindergarten children, the pensioner evokes and builds a sympathetic understanding of the family firm and its products within the local community.

Material processes: In addition to relational processes, we identified material processes through which remembering together is anchored to discrete material artifacts. We found that these devices not only conveyed meanings about the founder, owning family and the family firm, but also triggered sensory responses. We noted employees' embodied reactions to these material aspects (e.g. joy, tears, sorrow, pride) in joint remembering, creating and re-affirming affinities to the family firm past.

As one illustrative example of remembering together through material artifacts, a family proudly brought out a wooden memory box. Filled with historical artifacts, documents

and photographs of celebrations that show the first generation of their family together with the owning family, we found these materials to be a powerful way to invite the multiple generations into the world of the founder. In the interviews, the members told of repeatedly returning to this memory box to reminisce about the founder with their wider family. The sensory reactions to these material artifacts were evident as interviewees often broke out into tears of joy when reflecting on these interactions with the memory box.

These affective responses were demonstrated in further examples of families interacting with certificates and historical contractual documents, all of which are proudly displayed on the walls in the living room at home. Remembering is non-verbalized and embodied with the younger generations cherishing these objects long after the death of their ancestors. A member describes a situation in which the certificate triggers an emotional response for the son: “My father is no longer with us. He died last December, but I honor the certificate where Green Harvester’s owner marked his 39 years of activity.” (I39, Family 17).

How artifacts make the past vivid in the present in embodied ways is also evident in the remembering together through holding slide show evenings within the families. As one family of the first generation described (Family 9), they regularly come together in the evenings to watch slide shows with their descendants, recounting their feelings of joy and pride about innovative products and the growth of the company. Remembering together with their successive generations occurs through the interactions with these material depictions of the development of past product models that invoke the company’s innovative spirit and what it represents. These embodied reactions of joy and pride amongst the members of the family group help to strengthen their affinity to the family firm and its spirit of technical progress.

Narrative memory work as shaping and maintaining motives of belongingness

Our findings thus far indicate that the intradiegetic storytelling along with its relational and material processes bind organizational members to the core values and beliefs of the family firm. Sustaining memory across multiple generations through the reactions elicited by narrative memory work affects how younger members and newcomers understand their connectedness to the organization. Motives of belongingness were not only evident in longstanding members of the family firm, but it was striking how these were expressed by the youngest generation of newcomers into the firm. With narrative memory work occurring from early childhood onwards into other formative periods such as entering employment, we found that memory work as joint remembering shapes and maintains the motives of belongingness of these successive generations. Concerning what makes members of communities feel connected, valued and important to the organization, we identify differences in the *retrospective-, present- or future-oriented motives of belongingness* (see table 5).

Insert Table 5 about here

From multiple interviews, we observed that a focus on an adoration of the company's past shapes subsequent generations' retrospective-oriented feelings of belongingness with the family firm. These past-rooted sentiments of adoration towards the family firm, the founder figure or the owning family guide what successive generations feel connected to and valued by the company as their employer. In several instances, next generationers described feeling connected to the organization in the time of the glorified past. As one daughter explained her reasons for staying with the family firm: "I had to work for a while in a more distant subsidiary with fixed-term contracts. Even though I got better offers from other companies, I stayed here.... I always had in mind from my family that having a contract here in the company is what we adore." (I29, Family 13). Internalised from an early age onwards through

stories of the founder, her connectedness to the family firm is shaped by and maintained through her family's adoration of the company in the past. This retrospective-oriented motive of belongingness, constituted through an adoration of the family firm's past, can also be seen in family members referring to themselves as having 'green blood', emphasizing the agricultural roots of Green Harvester and the green company color. Describing their connectedness to Green Harvester through reference to the company's roots, two next generationers and their father shared the extent to which they feel they belong to and even protected by the company ("green vaccinated"): A son (I40 Family 17) tells: "My dad, my grandpa and my uncle were here. That is always a good sign and that my future is here." The other son (I41, Family 17) said laughing: "already green vaccinated", the father confirmed convincingly: "yes vaccinated..." (I39, Family 17).

Furthermore, we identified a prospective-oriented motive belongingness, whereby the focus on progress shapes what successive generations feel connected to in the family firm. We found multiple instances in our analysis of next generationers describing their connectedness to Green Harvester in terms of the entrepreneurial spirit and technical progress instilled upon entering employment in the company. For example, successive generationers expressed their prospective-oriented feelings of belongingness to Green Harvester in a time of growth and business progress: "We went through a period of enormous growth with [company name] ... You always had possibilities for development... that's what is special about working here." (I2, Family 1). Further examples of this future-oriented motive of belongingness being anchored in and maintained by the firm's constant pursuit of innovation were evident as one son explained: "Although I have been doing this for a very long time now, it is always interesting for me, because something is always developing in the forage harvester new to it, a new product, another product, a stronger product with more innovations and this must be staged again and again and makes the job fun..." (I20, Family 9). Members

of successive generations thereby experience a oneness with Green Harvester, stating that they “have never just felt like an employee” (I21, Family 9).

Third, we noted a present-oriented motive of belongingness in that a sense of intergenerational reciprocity shapes what makes the successive generations feel connected to Green Harvester. As an intergenerational obligation of the company being indebted to its employees, it points to the set of expectations that the next generationers have towards the company in the present. In multiple interviews, sons and daughters conveyed their feelings of belonging to the family firm through these deeply held images of their employer’s informal obligations. For some, this present-oriented sense of intergenerational reciprocity maintained their connection to Green Harvester, with one son noting their expectations to “earn well” (I43, Family 18) and a daughter recalling “why should I go somewhere else” (I8, Family 4).

Across numerous interviews the next generationers recounted feeling connected to the organization in the time when there were numerous generous benefits which they still demand in the present. Describing these expectations of the informal intergenerational obligations that the family firm has to its employees, a member (2nd generation) explained: “I go to my son's master right after the interview. He was not given the job. Supposedly, no budget... Budget, budget... everywhere only controllers. Something like this wouldn't have existed before...” (I28, Family 12). These expectations shape interviewees’ present-oriented feelings of belongingness, as seen in the example of a son questioning the decisions and direction of the family firm. In recounting the expectations across the 1st and 2nd generation of his family into the present day, one son explained: “(...) What will come? Will it remain a family business? We ask ourselves whether it will really stay that way” (I26, Family 12).

DISCUSSION

This paper set out to explore how founding stories are sustained by multiple generations of employees in family firms and how these founding stories impact belongingness. The concept of narrative memory work as the effortful work of joint remembering helped us to examine the transformation of firsthand memories of the founder and owning family into collective memory across multiple generations. Through these purposeful attempts to give meaning to the family firm's past, we found that narrative memory work is undertaken by members up to the fourth generation, whereby great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and sons and daughters remember together. Our findings demonstrate that intradiegetic storytelling brings the values and core beliefs of the founder, owning family and family firm into subsequent generations. In family firms, memory is sustained across generations through the intertwining of intradiegetic storytelling with relational and material processes that enmesh the lives of employees with that of the founder and the owning family. In addition, we found that narrative memory work shapes and maintains the motives of belongingness of the next generation to the organization. Different dispositions to the past, future or present constitute the motives of belongingness (i.e. retrospective-, present- or future-oriented), thereby influencing what successive generations feel connected to in the family firm. Overall, our study shows that the effortful work of remembering together across familial and social relations, spaces and embodied ways is key to explaining how members across successive generations understand their connectedness to the organization.

The power of narrative memory work for sustaining memory across generations

Our insights into narrative memory work as the effortful work of joint remembering bear implications for our understanding of how collective memory is sustained. In order to transform firsthand memories of the founder and owning family into collective and vivid

memories across multiple generations, remembering together with members of a community is relationally and materially co-constituted. Our study provides a more nuanced understanding of how oral tradition and storytelling is a primary mechanism for transmitting collective memory across members of a community (Middleton & Brown, 2005).

First, we show that founding stories have the potential to trigger an embodied sense of connection with the past, substituting one's own experiences by the inherited experiences of others with the founder or family firm. Our exploration of narrative memory work sheds light on collective memory in organizations as a product of with whom we remember, how we do so and the spaces in which we remember together. We demonstrate that the transmission of the past in family firms is based on employees remembering together in which shared extra-individual representations of the past resonate with their group members. In these communities and their social rules of remembrance (Foroughi, 2020; Mena et al., 2016; Olick & Robbins, 1998), "being social presupposes the ability to experience events that had happened to groups and communities to which we belong long before we joined them as if they were part of our own past" (Zerubavel, 1996, p. 290). Families constitute particular communities of memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Foroughi & Al-Amoudi, 2020) whose sociobiological linkages enable the members to re-enact and reframe the past through social interactions (Rowlinson et al., 2010). In these mnemonic communities, the relational and material co-constitution of remembering strengthens the intergenerational transmission of collective memory.

Second, rather than a mechanistic explanation of collective memory as a database, our study sheds light on the ongoing, effortful processes of memory work. Collective memory arises from the social interactions between interested actors attempting to influence shared understandings of the past (Foroughi et al., 2020). Narrative memory work involves the purposeful attempts of members to sustain the collective memory of an event over time and

tellers. Some members are more active in memory work as they may represent the “legitimate bearers of the past” (Mena et al., 2016, p. 727), or have a particular interest in sustaining or obscuring a certain aspect of the past, such as employees, customers and investors or donors. Adding on to family business and organizational memory studies that highlight the role of different stakeholders (Boberg, Boevers, Bormann & Hoon, 2022; Bormann, Backs & Hoon, 2020; Foroughi, 2020; Ybema, 2014), we shed light on how employees act as informal bearers of the past. Our study complements these studies to show the effortful work across generations of employees who are interested in sustaining their accounts of the family firm.

Apart from collective memory as emerging from simple storytelling, we extend our understanding of narrative memory work to show that it is made more powerful by eliciting members’ responses in a range of familial and social relations, spaces and embodied ways. Work on intradiegetic storytelling suggests that talking persuasively about the past entails inviting the reader or audience into the inner world of the characters from the past in ways that connect and resonate with larger worlds in the present (Suddaby et al., 2021; Suddaby et al., 2020). Our study lends explanatory weight to the creation of a co-presence of these worlds, whereby remembering through intradiegetic storytelling is enforced through relational and material processes in non-verbalized and embodied ways. Co-presence thus brings together multiple actors and accounts of the past with the present to evoke emotions about the past. Enmeshing employees’ worlds with the world of the founder and owning family through retold stories with materials and in a range of familial and social relations leads to heightened embodied and affective responses to the past (Eisenman & Frenkel, 2021; Foster et al., 2011; Ybema, 2014). These sensory reactions not only frame what the future generations remember about the family firm, but also serve to reaffirm and strengthen the affinity to the family firm’s past. Intradiegetic storytelling creates a co-presence across successive generations in family firms, shaping what makes them feel connected to the organization.

Linking motives of belongingness and organizational identification in family firms

Our study sheds light on motives of belongingness that employees acquire with their family firm as being inherited from prior generations. Through narrative memory work, founding stories bear an intergenerational effect in which motives of belongingness are transmitted from the grandparent's generation to their children and their children's children. How descendants experience their connectedness to the organization is thereby linked with the intergenerational nature of collective memory in family firms. Narrative memory work matters in that it influences what makes successive generations feel connected to the family firm, enrolling the youngest generation of newcomers into the organization. Concerning what makes members of communities feel connected, valued and important to the organization (Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010), these motives of belongingness differ in terms of members' dispositions to the past, future or present. Acknowledging that different stakeholders have different interpretations about past, present and future moves away from a temporal conceptualization that unambiguously flows from past to future to highlight that time is a resource being used and re-interpreted by individuals and collectives for specific purposes (Mariconda, Zamparini & Lurati, 2021). This subjective experience of the past, present and future has been shown to affect actions, decision making, and patterns of attention allocation (Shipp et al., 2009). Whereas a retrospective motive of belongingness concerns a feeling of nostalgia with attention on past matters and outcomes, a prospective motive of belongingness allocates attention to what the future holds and a present-oriented motive of belongingness focuses on a current timeframe with less consideration given to future actions.

Recent work has begun to acknowledge that organizational identification evolves “over a broader historical sweep of organizational membership” (Bednar et al., 2020, p. 200), reflecting the perceived affiliation and oneness that is developed over time from one's

membership in the organization. Drawing on organizational identification theory (Ashforth et al., 2008; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), we theorize the implications of temporal orientation in motives of belongingness for organizational identification. We show that the retrospective-oriented, prospective-oriented and present-oriented motives of belongingness help us to understand identification in relation to key family business phenomena.

In times of disruptive change, motives of belongingness with a retrospective focus contribute to understanding of how nostalgia manifests in family firms (Bardon, Josserand, & Villesèche, 2014). Succession can heighten members' wistful affection for a period in the past, for example, when the beloved founder figure or owning family as identity markers exit the company. Particularly when leadership functions are delegated to non-family managers, retrospective-focused motives of belongingness explain why members are likely to experience a "honeymoon hangover" (Boswell, Shipp, Payne, & Culbertson, 2009). We expect that if feelings of belongingness are anchored in the glorified past these will come into conflict when new management brings in a change in organizational behaviors and norms. As such, motives of belongingness explain why the strong bond with the family firm declines as members encounter changes in the active involvement of the family in management across generations.

In addition, motives of belongingness shed light on postalgia in terms of an optimistic view that family firm members develop even in turbulent periods of succession or economic crisis. A prospective motive of belongingness engenders future-oriented choices and behaviors in that employees envision a perspective of progress, growth and risk taking. Appealing to postalgia (Suddaby et al., 2021), the organization's changing behaviors overlap with the long-term goal-oriented sense of belongingness. We posit that the prospective-oriented motives of belongingness explain a sense of momentum in terms of a legacy identification (Eury, Kreiner, Trevino, & Gioia, 2018; Hammond et al., 2016) that strengthens members' bonds with the family firm across generations.

Finally, motives of belongingness explain how members experience strategic decision making that alters the direction of a family firm with feelings of loss and a lack of connectedness, but equally may redevelop their connectedness to the family firm when, e.g. a new successor from the owning family arrives in the company. A present focus in motives of belongingness can lead to a conflict between how the organization operates and members' sense of intergenerational reciprocity and expectations toward the organization. At the same time, this motive of belongingness contributes to our understanding of why bonds with the organization are rebuilt in the context of the changing values and norms, thereby leading to re-identification. Hence, this motive of belongingness creates a sense of momentum that involves de-identification or re-identification with the organization (Eury et al., 2018; Kidwell, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2018).

The above discussion highlights how motives of belongingness matter for family firms as communities of remembrance. We posit that the idea of temporal orientations in motives of belongingness also bears potential for scholars of rhetorical history seeking to understand the ongoing relationship between past, present and future in organizations (Schulz & Hernes, 2013). Adding on to research indicating that stories bring about negative and positive affect associated with different temporalities for enrolling wider stakeholders (Suddaby et al., 2021), we show that not only the stories in which members believe, but also their inheritance across generations, shapes members' dispositions to the past, present and future.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

Our exploratory study offers three main contributions. First, the findings of this paper make important contributions to the body of literature on narratives and memory in family firms, and in particular the role of founding stories (Hamilton et al., 2017; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Sasaki et al., 2020; Suddaby, et al., 2021). While prior research has shown the significance of

founding stories for transmitting a family firm's beliefs, tradition and legacy to be used in the present (Suddaby & Jaskiewicz, 2020), this literature has rarely focused on how these stories transmit the past across multiple generations. We provide insights into intradiegetic storytelling as imbuing the family firm's values and core beliefs across generations, bringing successive employees into the inner world of the founder and the owning family (Suddaby et al., 2021). We contribute by showing that in order to transform firsthand memories of the founder and owning family into vivid memories across multiple generations, intradiegetic storytelling is relationally and materially co-constituted. Advancing work on historically-informed approaches to family business research, our study revisits the supposition of emotional detachment over the passage of time in family firms that leads to a fading of the family values, beliefs, customs or meanings across generations (Erdogan et al., 2020). In contrast, we demonstrate that by introducing subsequent generations into the intradiegetic world of the founder, family firms minimize emotional distance to the past to sustain stakeholder engagement over time.

Second, our insights into narrative memory work extend the social memory perspective and scholarship on organizational memory studies (Foroughi et al., 2020; Foroughi, 2020; Mena et al., 2016; Middleton & Brown, 2005; Olick & Robbins, 1998). Memory work as processes of collective remembering is key to sustaining and reconfiguring collective memory, and even the collective forgetting of the past (Mena et al., 2016). We contribute by showing that narrative memory work is made more powerful across generations by eliciting members' responses in a range of familial and social relations, spaces and embodied ways. In families as particular communities of memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Foroughi & Al-Amoudi, 2020), the relational and material processes of remembering strengthen the transmission of collective memory of the past across successive generations. Joint remembering through intradiegetic storytelling creates a co-presence that brings together

multiple actors and accounts of the past with the present to evoke heightened emotional responses to the past.

The third contribution of the research concerns the role of motives of belongingness in understanding organizational identification. Shedding light on the motives of belongingness that employees acquire with their family firm, we advance an understanding of how descendants experience their connectedness to the family firm as being linked to the intergenerational nature of collective memory. We theorize the implications of temporal orientation in motives of belongingness for organizational identification (Ashforth et al., 2008; Bednar et al., 2020; Shipp et al., 2009) and show that retrospective-oriented, prospective-oriented and present-oriented motives of belongingness help us to understand identification in relation to key family business phenomena.

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to explore how founding stories are sustained across multiple generations of employees in family firms and how these founding stories impact belongingness. Examining the retelling of founding stories across four generations in a large agricultural family firm, our study demonstrates that remembering together with members of a community is relationally and materially co-constituted. Through the concept of narrative memory work, we indicate that the effortful work of remembering together across familial and social relations, spaces and embodied ways is key to explaining how members across successive generations understand their connectedness to the organization. As the motives of belongingness that employees acquire with their family firm are inherited from prior generations, our study provides a useful platform for future theorizing on organizational identification in family firms.

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TABLE 1: Organizational Setting of 19 Families in the Family Firm

Family Members	Sex (m= male; f= female)	Family role	Family	Generational stage within the family				Employment status	
				1	2	3	4	Employed	Retired
1	M	Great-Grandfather	19	X					X
2	M	Grandfather's brother	19		X				X
3	M	Father	19			X		X	
4	F	Mother	19			X		X	
5	F	Daughter	19				X	X	
6	M	Son	19				X	X	
7	M	Father's brother-in-law	19			X		X	
8	M	Grandfather	18	X					X
9	M	Father	18		X			X	
10	F	Father's sister	18		X			X	
11	M	Son	18			X		X	
12	M	Cousin	18			X		X	
13	M	Grandfather	17	X					X
14	M	Father	17		X			X	
15	M	Son	17			X		X	
16	M	Son	17			X		X	
17	M	Cousin	17			X		X	
18	M	Grandfather	16	X					X
19	M	Grandfather's brother	16	X					X
20	M	Father	16		X			X	
21	F	Daughter	16			X		X	
22	M	Grandfather's brother	15	X					X
23	M	Grandfather's brother	15	X					X
24	F	Grandfather's sister	15	X					X
25	M	Grandmother's brother	15	X					X
26	M	Grandmother's brother	15	X					X
27	M	Grandmother's brother	15	X					X
28	M	Grandmother's brother	15	X					X
29	M	Grandmother's brother-in-law	15	X					X
30	M	Grandfather	15	X					X

31	M	Father	15		X			X	
32	F	Father's Cousin	15		X			X	
33	F	Daughter	15			X		X	
34	F	Daughter	15			X		X	
35	M	Grandfather	14	X					X
36	M	Father	14		X			X	
37	M	Son	14			X		X	
38	M	Son	14			X		X	
39	M	Grandfather	13	X					X
40	M	Grandfather's brother	13	X					X
41	M	Father	13		X			X	
42	F	Daughter	13			X		X	
43	F	Cousine	13			X		X	
44	M	Grandfather	12	X					
45	M	Father	12		X			X	
46	M	Father's brother	12		X			X	
47	M	Father's brother	12		X			X	
48	M	Cousin	12			X		X	
49	M	Cousin	12			X		X	
50	F	Cousin	12			X		X	
51	M	Cousin	12			X		X	
52	M	Son	12			X		X	
53	M	Son	12			X		X	
54	M	Great-Grandfather	11	X					X
55	M	Grandfather	11		X				X
56	M	Father	11			X		X	
57	M	Son	11				X	X	
58	M	Grandfather	10	X					X
59	M	Grandfather's brother	10	X					X
60	M	Grandfather's brother	10	X					X
61	M	Father	10		X			X	
62	M	Father's Cousin	10		X			X	
63	M	Father's Cousin	10		X			X	
64	F	Daughter	10			X		X	
65	M	Son	10			X		X	
66	M	Grandfather	9	X					X
67	M	Grandfather's brother	9	X					X
68	M	Father	9		X			X	
69	M	Father's Cousin	9		X			X	
70	M	Son	9			X		X	
71	M	Grandfather	8	X					X
72	F	Grandmother	8	X					X
73	M	Father's brother	8		X			X	
74	M	Father	8		X			X	

75	M	Cousin	8			X		X	
76	M	Son	8			X		X	
77	M	Grandfather	7	X					X
78	M	Father	7		X			X	
79	F	Daughter	7			X		X	
80	M	Grandfather	6	x					X
81	M	Father	6		X			X	
82	M	Son	6			X		X	
83	M	Grandfather	5	X					X
84	M	Father	5		x			X	
85	M	Son	5			X		X	
86	M	Son	5			x		X	
87	M	Grandfather	4	X					X
88	F	Grandmother	4	X					X
89	F	Grandmother of husband	4	X					
90	M	Father	4		X			X	
91	M	Son	4			X		X	
92	F	Daughter	4			X		X	
93	M	Daughter's husband	4			X		X	
94	M	Grandfather	3	X					X
95	F	Grandmother	3	X					X
96	F	Mother's sister	3		X			X	
97	F	Mother	3		X			X	
98	M	Father	3		X			X	
99	F	Daughter	3			X		X	
100	M	Grandfather	2	X					X
101	F	Mother	2		X			X	
102	M	Father	2		X				X
103	M	Son	2			X		X	
104	M	Grandfather	1	X					X
105	M	Grandfather's brother	1	X					X
106	M	Mother's brother	1		X			X	
107	M	Mother's brother-in-law	1		X			X	
108	F	Mother	1		X			X	
109	M	Father	1		X			X	
110	M	Son	1			X		X	

TABLE 2: Data Sources Overview

Family	Interviews (Semi-structured)			Observations (field visits)		Archival material & other data	
	<i>Interview type and transcript length</i>	<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Family role, generational stage in company</i>	<i>Position in the company</i>	<i>Years of employment</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Description (and #)</i>
1	3 single interviews (44 pages)	I1	Mother (2 nd)	Administration	32	Field visits in the company (conference room)	Telephone talks after interviews (3); Emails after the interviews (2)
		I2	Father (2 nd)	Administration	28		
		I3	Son (3 rd)	Administration	3		
2	2 single interviews (39 pages)	I4	Son (3 rd)	Industrial	11	Field visits in the company (conference room, cafeteria); Informal ‘floor talks’	Telephone talks after interviews (3); Emails after the interviews (1); Archival material (e.g. pensioners certificate; official and private photos)
		I5	Mother (2 nd)	Administration	47		
3	2 single interviews (28 pages)	I6	Mother (2 nd)	Administration	39	Field visits in the company (conference room)	--
		I7	Daughter (3 rd)	Administration	4		
4	3 single interviews (37 pages)	I8	Daughter (3 rd)	Administration	17	Field visits in the company (conference room); Informal ‘floor talks’	Telephone talks after interviews (2); Collected newspaper article showing grandmother besides owner’s wife doing activities for a local association
		I9	Father (2 nd)	Industrial	46		
		I10	Son-in-law (3 rd)	Industrial	14		
5	2 single interviews (28 pages)	I11	Father (2 nd)	Industrial	42	Field visits in the company (conference room)	--
		I12	Son (3 rd)	Industrial	14		
6	2 single interviews (29 pages)	I13	Son (3 rd)	Industrial	1	Field visits in the company (conference room)	Internal employee newspaper article (‘the generation story’) about their family (5 pages)
		I14	Father (2 nd)	Industrial	35		
7	2 single interviews (25 pages)	I15	Father (2 nd)	Administration	30	Field visits in the company (conference room)	--
		I16	Daughter (3 rd)	Administration	1		
8	3 single interviews (49 pages)	I17	Uncle (2 nd)	Industrial	31	Field visits in the company (conference room)	--
		I18	Son (3 rd)	Industrial	9		
		I19	Father (2 nd)	Industrial	31		

9	2 single interviews (75 pages)	I20	Son (3 rd)	Industrial	33	Field visits in the company (conference room); Home visit	Book chapter about their family story in the 100 th company anniversary book (6 pages); Slide Show
		I21	Father (2 nd)	Industrial	39		
10	2 single interviews (45 pages)	I22	Father (2 nd)	Administration	38	Field visits in the company (conference room)	--
		I23	Daughter (3 rd)	Administration	10		
11	2 single interviews (59 pages)	I24	Father (3 rd)	Industrial	40	Field visits in the company (conference room)	--
		I25	Son (4 th)	Industrial	12		
12	3 single interviews (61 pages)	I26	Son (3 rd)	Industrial	6	Field visits in the company (conference room)	'Wooden box' filled with father's collected archival material (e.g. certificates, newspaper articles, product brochures; photographs)
		I27	Son (3 rd)	Industrial	9		
		I28	Father (2 nd)	Industrial	37		
13	1 focus group interview (49 pages)	I29	Daughter (3 rd)	Administration	23	Field visits in the company (conference room)	--
		I30	Father (2 st)	Industrial	48		
14	1 focus group interviews (28 pages)	I31	Father (2 st)	Industrial	50	Field visits in the company (conference room)	--
		I32	Son (3 rd)	Administration	25		
15	1 focus group interview (31 pages)	I33	Grandfather (1 st)	Industrial	46	Field visits in the company (conference room)	Archival material of grandfather's collection of company-related items
		I34	Father (2 nd)	Industrial	35		
		I35	Daughter (3 rd)	Administration	5		
		I36	Daughter (3 rd)	Administration	1		
16	1 focus group interview (26 pages)	I37	Father (2 nd)	Industrial	46	Field visits in the company (conference room)	--
		I38	Daughter (3 rd)	Administration	20		
17	1 focus group interview (41 pages)	I39	Father (2 nd)	Industrial	41	Field visits in the company (conference room)	Grandfather's collection of archival material (e.g. newspaper articles, photographs) Emails after the interviews (1)
		I40	Son (3 rd)	Industrial	5		
		I41	Son (3 rd)	Industrial	13		
18	1 focus group interview (47 pages)	I42	Father (2 nd)	Industrial	39	Field visits in the company (conference room)	--
		I43	Son (3 rd)	Industrial	10		
		I44	Aunt (2 nd)	Administration	32		
19		I45	Father (3 rd)	Administration	40		--

1 focus group interview (41 pages) I46 Daughter (4th) Administration 13 Field visits in the company (in conference room)

TABLE 3: Polyphonic Founding Stories

Founding stories	Illustrative examples of the story and others talking about the story	Multiple voices across generations telling the story (No. of family members and generations working in the company)	Values and core beliefs conveyed by the protagonist or characters in the story
Adoring the past			
1. Story of a family of Spanish origin	“I came here to Germany with my family when I was 5 years old because my father was able to work for [company’s name]. My mother too... [founder’s name] gave us a home in ‘barracks’ that were built especially for foreign employees. There is nothing missing.” (I19, Family 8)	6 members of the family; retelling the story across the family’s 3 generations of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generosity and welcoming behavior of the founder • Adoration and gratefulness toward the founder
2. Porcelain story	“About 30 years ago, we, my colleague and me, we placed the cake on paper plates as it was delivered by the bakery. The owner’s wife did not like this. She was really upset. Normally, she was a really calm woman. But in this situation, she said harshly: “My employees eat from the good porcelain dishes.” (I15, Family 2)	4 members of the family; retelling the story across the family’s 3 generations of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heroic image of the founder’s wife • Deep gratefulness toward the founder’s wife
Pride in Progress			
3. Hog story	A father told: “We have also had bad economic periods in the company time and again. We call this the hog cycle. This means that every seven to eight years you experience a sharp economic downturn, but then at some point things start to get steeper and you get even better. And I believe that this is	7 members of the family; retelling the story across the family’s 3 generations of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business progress • Pride in the family firm

	something else that distinguishes a family business. To be more precise, the Green Harvester family, the owners, are very attached to their employees.” (I2, Family 1)		
4. Owner out in the field story	A son tells the story about the owner going out into the field to look at the company products in situ: “I think it's great when Green Harvester’s owner, at his high age, is still interested in talking to people. It is his life's work. Last year, for example, he came to the field and took a look at our new product development of the combine harvester. It is still very important to him that this technology is carried forward.” (I20, Family 9)	5 members of the family; retelling the story across the family’s 3 generations of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological development • Pride in owning family’s innovative products
5. Founder rolling up his sleeves story	“I know this from my father's stories, that [founder] was really such a shirt-sleeved man who once said: here, there's a screw. That is my money. It will be kept. Who also once walked through the factory, similar to [owner’s name], and sought proximity to the employees. The entrepreneurial family was always held in high esteem. Our parents understood this very well, what a responsibility they have while maintaining many human traits.” (I1, Family 1)	7 members of the family; retelling the story across the family’s 3 generations of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility to the company’s development • Entrepreneurial characteristics of the family
6. Harvester story	In interviews, 1 st generationers tell the story about the harvester, the company's first product, which still exists today and is constantly being developed. A daughter explained this story: “It’s a meaningful product.” (I46, Family 19) Her father added: “It’s meaningful because it helps to feed the world.” (I45, Family 19) The daughter adds: “It’s a product which certainly has to and will continue to exist“(I46, Family 19) and her father expanded: “It really is a	7 members of the family; retelling the story across the family’s 4 generations of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful products • Pride in owning family’s entrepreneurial spirit

	great product and it makes me proud.” (I45, Family 19)		
Sense of intergenerational reciprocity			
7. Rosebush story	“Green Harvester owner’s wife always had such a beautiful rose bush in her garden. Grandma always liked it. And then she gave our grandmother the cuttings. The bush is still standing in our garden and we hand out cuttings if anyone wants them.” (I8, Family 4)	7 members of the family; retelling the story across the family’s 3 generations of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company as a nurturer • Reciprocity in interactions with the family firm
8. Gate 4 story	“In the past it was normal, grandpa, or even dad still, they are went on Fridays with the car to gate 4 and could buy for really cheap money 'leftovers'... Things that would have ended up on the scrap anyway.... and today it is rather given on the scrap than to give it to its coworkers.... yes in the past those were just different times....” (I43, Family 18)	5 members of the family, retelling the story across the family’s 3 generations of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Altruism and generosity of the company • Respecting obligations towards employees
9. Wage bags story	The father told that in the past, the money was always paid out in cash. He always had to walk from the bank, across the farm and distribute the money with about 750.000 DM. “Everything always worked out fine. Can't imagine it any more today...And today, everything is unpersonal and machine-based.” (I9, Family 4)	7 members of the family; retelling the story across the family’s 3 generations of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company as nurturer • Family firm’s personal interactions with its employees

TABLE 4: Material and Relational Processes Through which Memory is Sustained Across Generations

Material	Illustrative Examples
<p>Material processes refer to the non-verbalized and embodied ways in which remembering occurs</p>	<p><i>Certificates and symbols, mostly in connection with the founder in persona:</i> After the interviews, interview participants contacted us per email and telephone to tell further anecdotes and show their ‘family archival material’ about the company. (Family 1, Family 2, Family 17)</p>
	<p><i>Showing photographs of the founder and his family:</i> Observation: When the families showed us their photographs, they would often break out into tears of joy during the various conversations with members from the first generation when viewing photos of the owner’s wife or when reflecting on these photos and their experiences of meeting someone of the owning family in the village. (e.g. I5, Family 2; I39, Family 17)</p>
	<p><i>Cherishing archival material about the Green Harvester family:</i> A family member (2nd generation) told: “My father is no longer with us. He died last December, but I honor the certificate where [founder’s name] signed his 39 years of activity. I don’t throw that away... its’ family...” (I39, Family 17)</p>
	<p><i>Transmitting company brochures and posters to children:</i> The father (2nd generation) remembered about the son’s child room: “the whole room was plastered with pictures, posters of the company...” (I41, Family 17). And: "I gave my sons a [company’s name] tractor clock for communion, custom-made... I had a real photo made extra small for it.' You have stood behind it and stand behind it... in that way I tried to teach my sons.” (I39, Family 17) Another grandson (3rd generation) told: “Somehow the [company’s name] brochures used to be a kind of picture book for me. My grandfather (1st generation) used to read them to me. Not from children's books, but we just looked at Green Harvester things.” (I4, Family 2)</p>
	<p><i>Showing slide shows at home:</i> A second generationer explains that he regularly organize slide show evenings with their descendants to share their pride about the company’s development and innovative products. (I21, Family 9)</p>
<p>Relational Relational processes refer to the range of familial and social relations and spaces in which organizational members</p>	<p><i>Pensioners joint remembering about the founder with their grandchildren:</i> Pensioners (1st generation) - even after they retire - visit kindergartens and schools (classes where their (great-) grandchildren are). Examples: Baking bread in the kindergarten with a self-built model to show the children what Green Harvester’s machines are good for; collecting Green Harvester miniature machines together with the grandchildren; free vocational preparation courses in technical professions offered by Green Harvester for pupils.</p>

remember together and which bind them to the family firm from early childhood onwards	<p><i>Children remembering about Green Harvester at primary school:</i> His son (3rd generation) added: “You have grown up with it. That already started in primary school. Remember when you had to go to my teacher because she wanted me to stop talking about the company?” (I40, Family 17)...His brother undermines: “Hopefully, I’ll stay on till retirement... for sure, it was always about the company. In art lessons at school, I always painted combine harvesters.” (I41, Family 17)</p>
	<p><i>Mothers, fathers and grandparents remembering together about Green Harvester with their children and grandchildren from early childhood onwards:</i> A son (I3, Family 1) confirmed that he and his mother always spoke about Green Harvester and the decision-making of the owning family. Despite never having met the owner, the son recounted: “It is impressive when [owner’s name] walks through the company with his straw hat and walker and looks at everything very closely... I have always heard a lot about him from my family, but I see that they are right when they describe him as an entrepreneur.... My father also always says: He is a cult figure.” (I3, Family 1)</p>
	<p><i>Parents remembering together at home with their children:</i> A family remembered together with the father reading his child the Green Harvester product catalogue as nighttime bed story. Further we observed the joint remembering of the company’s products in the home between a father and son who both worked as product developers in the company and reminisced about the company’s activities across the world. (Family 9)</p>

TABLE 5: Retrospective, Prospective, and Present-oriented Motives of Belongingness

<p>Motives of Belongingness: What makes members of communities feel connected, valued and important to the organization (Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010) in relation to their subjective experience of the past, present and future (Shipp et al., 2009).</p>		
<p>Retrospective: Past temporal focus of reminiscence and a feeling of nostalgia in terms of wistfulness to return to a past period. Main attention lies on past matters and outcomes.</p>	<p>Prospective: Future temporal focus envisions and evaluates future scenarios whereby attention is allocated to what the future holds and envisaging future events. Main attention is on future matters and outcomes.</p>	<p>Present: Present temporal focus as a “here-and-now” orientation whereby attention focuses on the immediate surroundings and on present time periods. Emphasis is on the current timeframe in decisions with less consideration given to future actions.</p>
<p>Retrospective-oriented motive of belongingness: feeling connected to the organization in the time of the glorified past and the adorable founder</p> <p><i>Illustrative examples:</i> “You just have this feeling of belonging here, of having your place, somehow even your home here, the whole family is here“ (I18, Family 8)</p> <p>“This is a family business where we are feeling safe ... with the owning family always behind the company because they built it up. For several generations! That gives security.” (I39, Family 17).</p> <p>A son told: “My dad, my grandpa and my uncle were here. That is always a sign of goodness and that my future is here.” (I40, Family 17)</p>	<p>Prospective-oriented motive of belongingness: feeling connected to the organization in terms of the growth, entrepreneurial spirit and progress</p> <p><i>Illustrative examples:</i> “You actually only feel good when the company is doing well. If you get the impression that the engine is running” (I1, Family 1)</p> <p>A son explained: “Although I have been doing this for a very long time now, it is always interesting for me, because something is always developing in the forage harvester new to it, a new product, another product, a stronger product with more innovations and this must be staged again and again and makes the job fun... One knows the history of the shredder and the history and the history (...) it's</p>	<p>Present-oriented motive of belongingness: feeling connected to the informal intergenerational obligations the organization has to its employees</p> <p><i>Illustrative examples:</i> A member (2nd generation) told: “I go to my son's master right after the interview. He should not be taken over. Supposedly, no budget... Budget, budget... everywhere only controllers. Something like this wouldn't have existed before. ...” (I28, Family 12)</p> <p>Statement of a son: “(...) My grandparents and parents always saw [owner’s name] and his family here. It's getting less. What will come? Will it remain a family business? We ask ourselves whether it will really stay that way.” (I43, Family 18)</p>

<p>A daughter noted: “I had to work for a while in a more distant subsidiary with fixed-term contracts. Even though I got better offers from other companies, I stayed here.... I always had in mind from my family that having a contract here in the company is what we adore.” (I29, Family 13). Her father added: “...and then you also have to make decisions in favor of the company.” (I30, Family 13)</p>	<p>fun that there is always something new.” (I20, Family 9)...</p> <p>“I have never just felt like an employee...Entrepreneurial spirit was always present... Such way of thinking has been transferred into the family... to our three sons....” (I21, Family 9)</p> <p>During a group interview with his father, a son stated: “It’s exciting here because there has always been some form of change and lots of movement.” (I32, Family 14)</p> <p>“We went through a period of enormous growth with [company name] ... You always had possibilities for development... that’s what is special about working here.” (I2, Family 1)</p>	<p>A daughter (3rd generation) noted: “Of course, my father told me back then that you have a good chance, that it's a good firm, that it's big and very consistent, that you don't do anything wrong at first and that's what you want as a parent for your child....I think my parents' fear was always: I hope she won't become a gymnastics or dance teacher. The main thing is that she does something where you can earn money, which you can do here...” (I8, Family 4)</p> <p>A son-in-law (3rd generation) stated: “...we don't understand why when my wife was pregnant, we expected something different with her contract. I have to say that I would have expected something different....” (I10, Family 4)</p> <p>A son (3rd generation) explained: “It's also very comfortable to belong here. The whole village is Green Harvester, and then my family is Green Harvester, too. The Green Harvester brings the money here, you just earn well. There are only worse options to work elsewhere.” (I43, Family 18)</p>
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