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The "open family firm": openness as boundary work in family enterprises

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Abstract "Openness" has become an established norm in the contemporary business environment. However, despite the crucial importance of boundaries and boundary work in organization and management theory, openness—as opening up boundaries of family firms and entrepreneurial families in collaborating with external actors—has received only nascent attention in the family business domain. We introduce the notion of openness in the family business field. Drawing on the organizational boundary and family business literatures, we develop a conceptual framework of family firm openness as boundary work and examine and discuss the drivers, mechanisms, and consequences of openness in family enterprises. Then, drawing on this framework, we set out an agenda for future research that will contribute to a better understanding of openness, boundaries, and boundary work in family firms and entrepreneurial families. We conclude by discussing some contemporary examples of research on the "open family firm."

Plain English Summary Openness as boundary work is a significant challenge for many family firms but is critically important in an increasingly complex business environment. We develop a generative framework and future research agenda. Our main implications are for (1) research: our conceptual framework on openness as boundary work and the research questions we put forward as a critical future research agenda open up many possibilities for further developing meaningful and useful theory on openness, boundaries, and boundary work in family firms and entrepreneurial families; (2) practice: we help family firms, entrepreneurial families, and family

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business advisors better understand the dynamics, complexities, and consequences of openness to make more informed boundary decisions; and (3) society: when family firms open up their boundaries, not only can they create more opportunities for other societal actors, but they can also generate more value than they can do alone.

Keywords Family business · Openness · Boundary work · Organizational boundaries · Social capital · Social networks · Open innovation · Ecosystems · Collaboration · Entrepreneurial family

JEL Classification M14 · D8 · L14 · L21

1 Introduction

> "It's opener, out there, in the wide, open air."
> Dr. Seuss, from Oh, the Places You'll Go!

Openness, or opening up organizational boundaries in collaborating with external actors that make up a firm's evolving ecosystem, is critical in family and nonfamily firms alike. However, opening boundaries to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex, diverse, and knowledge-intensive world (Arzubiaga et al., 2022; Mankin and Cohen, 2004) is a complicated and consequential undertaking. Indeed, as an organizing principle, openness fundamentally alters what organizations are how they function, how they interact with others in their environments, and how they create and maintain value across generations (Dobusch et al., 2018). As dynamic "sites of difference" (Abbott, 1995, p. 862), boundaries are socially enacted through the (inter)actions of the various actors involved, carrying critically important implications for organizing and collaborating. Boundaries can be constructed as porous "junctures" that create opportunities for generative connecting (opening up), but also as rigid "barriers" to collaboration that reinforce separating (closing down) (Quick and Feldman, 2014). Openness, then, is essentially about boundary work as "doing" boundaries (and Taillieu, 2004; Glimmerveen et al., 2020; Langley et al., 2019), whereby actors open up boundaries and continually position each other in terms of particular differences in efficiency, power, competence, and identity (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2005). This process involves a continual balancing act between inclusion and exclusion, dependence and autonomy, freedom and control, and flexibility and stability (Bacharach et al., 2000; Dobusch et al., 2018; Raviola, 2017).

Despite the crucial importance of boundaries and boundary work in organization and management theory (for a review, see Langley et al., 2019), openness—as opening up boundaries of family firms and entrepreneurial families in collaborating with external actors—has received only nascent attention in the family business domain as is the case for boundary theory (e.g., De Massis et al., 2021; Sundaramurthy and Kreiner, 2008). This is surprising because family firms engage in different types of collaborations and networks on different scales and levels and in various capacities. Indeed, even as family firms differentiate from one another and from nonfamily firms, they are highly interdependent with other external actors that make up their evolving ecosystem for creating value (e.g., customers, suppliers, partners, competitors, specialized knowledge centers, universities, and governmental agencies).

We do see that certain studies in the family business field have examined forms of collaborative and open innovation as ways to overcome in-house resource constraints or to combine and align strengths to form new powerful constellations (e.g., Brinkerink et al., 2017; Casprini et al., 2017; Feranita et al., 2017; Kotlar et al., 2020; Lambrechts et al., 2017). We also observe significant heterogeneity across family firms (Daspit et al., 2021; Neubaum et al., 2019) and among entrepreneurial families (Jaskiewicz and Dyer, 2017; Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2018) as to how open they are able and willing to organize and collaborate. Indeed, some family firms open up their boundaries, take the lead as orchestrators or gatekeepers, and are the driving forces of the local ecosystems in which they participate (Casprini et al., 2017; Lambrechts et al., 2017), while others operate more in the background, keeping their boundaries relatively closed. However, our understanding of the conceptualization, drivers and mechanisms, and consequences of openness in family enterprises is still in its infancy. Therefore, in this article, we build a framework and offer a future research agenda as a springboard for further creative and actionable theorizing on openness in family firms. We conclude with an overview of the articles in this Special Issue on the "open family firm."

2 Openness in family enterprises: conceptualization, drivers and mechanisms, consequences, and future prospects

2.1 Conceptualization: openness as boundary work

Openness is about boundaries and boundary work, and these, according to many, reflect the essence of organizing and structuring organizational life (e.g., Langley et al., 2019; Paulsen and Hernes, 2003; Santos and Eisenhardt, 2005). The organizational literature on boundaries is increasingly moving away from the entitative conception of boundaries as given and stable fixed demarcations of groups and organizations as bounded entities in favor of a processual view that conceives boundaries as continuously socially constructed and interpreted, emergent and dynamic, inherently tension-laden, and centrally constitutive of the ongoing process of organizing (Brorström and Diedrich, 2022; Glimmerveen et al., 2020; Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Langley et al., 2019; Quick and Feldman, 2014; Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010). In the processual view, boundaries can both connect and divide (Quick and Feldman, 2014) and are subject to human agency through boundary work, the “purposeful individual and collective effort to influence boundaries (…); demarcations; and distinctions affecting groups, occupations, and organizations” (Langley et al., 2019, p. 704).

In their review of the literature on boundary work, Langley et al., (2019) identified three conceptually distinct but interrelated forms of boundary work: competitive, collaborative, and configurational. *Competitive* boundary work focuses on how groups/organizations defend, contest, and create boundaries to differentiate themselves from others in oppositional ways (e.g., protecting territory and excluding others) to maximize their social position, status and legitimacy, power, resources, and other advantages. This echoes what Quick and Feldman (2014) refer to as enacting boundaries as “barriers” to collaboration between groups/organizations that reinforce separation (closing down boundaries). By contrast, *collaborative* boundary work centers on how groups/organizations negotiate, (re)align, blur, accommodate, and downplay boundaries to build connections with others to pursue collaborative aims constructively (e.g., including others) to enable collaboration, learning, and coordination. This is in line with what Quick and Feldman (2014) refer to as enacting boundaries as “junctures” that enable generative connections through translating, aligning, and decentering differences (opening up boundaries). *Configurational* boundary work focuses on how people from the “outside” (e.g., entrepreneurs, business associations) arrange, buffer, and coalesce boundaries affecting others, ensuring that certain activities are brought together, and others are kept separate among groups to enable effective collective action (e.g., through designing experimental spaces or boundary organizations for achieving new forms of interaction; for insights on family boundary organizations, see De Massis et al., 2021), reconfiguring patterns of collaboration and competition among groups. A specific form of this type of boundary work that is receiving increasing attention is network brokerage (Burt, 2005; for a review, see Kwon et al., 2020), describing “an activity of a network actor (broker) occupying a structural position (bridge, structural hole) between two or more otherwise disconnected actors (…), and it typically involves an exchange or interaction between the broker and the [others] (…)” to achieve the goals of the broker (often an entrepreneur) and/or the collective (Kwon et al., 2020, p. 1093). In characterizing boundary work as the “sayings and doings of purposeful individuals and collectives,” Langley et al., (2019, pp. 731–732) emphasize that competitive and collaborative boundary work typically are mutually connected, that one type of boundary work can generate the other, and that boundary work is inherently tactical and situated in local influences and circumstances.

Glimmerveen et al. (2020), focusing on the emergent processes in which boundary work is done through people’s actions, demonstrated boundary work’s processual, dispersed, and political dynamics. Their study characterizes “doing” boundaries as (re)erecting, challenging, or transforming boundaries over time and across sites to continuously trace and work with emerging connections and disconnections. In this line of thinking, boundary work is “a constant to-and-fro between (…) boundary *opening* and boundary *closing*” between actors (who is included and who is excluded; actor-directed boundary work), issues (what is on/off the agenda; issue-directed boundary work), and authority positions (who is more/less able to influence the process; authority-directed boundary work) (Glimmerveen et al., 2020, p. 1529, italics added). Hirschhorn and Gilmore (1992), describing the "new" boundaries of alternative, technology-enabled flexible organizations that have also been called "boundaryless," distinguished between four boundaries people need in relationships to be the best they can be and that thus must receive constant attention to enable productive organizing. The authority boundary indicates "who is in charge of what," the task boundary specifies "who does what," the political boundary points to "what is in it for us," and the identity boundary is about "who is us and not us" (Hirschhorn and Gilmore, 1992). These boundaries are primarily psychological and must be explicitly attuned between the actors involved to be clear and supported.

Santos and Eisenhardt (2005), viewing organizational boundaries as demarcations with the environment, distinguish between four boundary conceptions that firms can enact in combination: efficiency, power, competence, and identity. Adopting a legal view, defining what is and what is not owned by the organization, the *efficiency* conception delineates the transactions carried out *within* the organization (vs. the market) (Williamson, 1981). According to this view, a firm's boundary work entails setting boundaries to minimize the governance cost of activities and exchange. Adopting a permeable view, the *power* conception demarcates which other actors the organization exerts influence over (e.g., suppliers, customers, institutions) (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). Here, the firm's main boundary work involves setting boundaries to maximize strategic control over crucial strategic relationships by controlling critical dependencies or defending against other actors seeking to reduce the organization's sphere of influence. The *competence* conception, a dynamic view, delineates the organization's unique resources (Barney, 1991). This view argues that firms' boundary work consists of setting boundaries to maximize the value of their distinct dynamic bundles of resources and ensuring that their resource configurations evolve together with market opportunities. Taking a holistic sensemaking perspective (Weick, 1995), the *identity* conception demarcates the dominant mindset of "who we are" as an organization for organizational members and external actors (Albert and Whetten, 1985). Within this conception, boundary work resolves around achieving and maintaining cognitive and emotional coherence between the organization's identity and its activities.

Boundary work, as outlined above from organization theory, as processual and dynamic, as opening and closing organizational boundaries through (inter) actions, implies that entrepreneurial families as the most influential group within family firms (Chua et al., 1999) also engage in boundary work ("doing" family boundaries) to determine the "appropriate" degrees of openness in collaboration with external actors. Whether entrepreneurial families open or close their boundaries is related to the nature of families as very complex social groups (Frank et al., 2019), among which considerable diversity also exists.

2.2 Drivers, mechanisms, and consequences of openness in family enterprises

Building on Santos and Eisenhardt (2005)'s four boundary conceptualizations—efficiency, power, competence, and identity—we argue that the drivers of openness as boundary work for family firms are very much intertwined. For example, when family firms make boundary decisions about "efficiency," they are typically willing to engage in particular transactions outside the firm through the market (e.g., outsourcing) only if doing so enables them to maintain or further strengthen their "power" and "identity," to use Santos and Eisenhardt (2005)'s concepts. Indeed, supporting and nurturing family control and influence, and belongingness and identity, have been theorized as essential non-economic goals for many family firms because attaining these goals generates socioemotional wealth for the entrepreneurial family (Berrone et al., 2012; Chrisman et al., 2012; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2019) and thus are not likely to be sacrificed when collaborating with external actors. Because the family's identity and reputation are strongly linked to that of the business (Chrisman et al., 2012), family firms and entrepreneurial families have more to lose than nonfamily businesses in any reputational damage caused by collaboration with external actors who may violate the trust bestowed upon them (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2014).

When family firms make decisions to open up their "competence" boundary, for example, when faced with in-house constraints in expertise, resources, and capacities (a deficit-driven focus) or to combine and align strengths to form new powerful constellations (a strengths-driven focus), they are likely more willing to do so with collaboration partners from the local community, with whom they typically have a high level of involvement and commitment (Lumpkin and Bacq, 2022). The greater spatial proximity of these partners allows for more face-to-face interactions, which provides a greater sense of control and a lower risk of reputational damage (Freel, 2003). Thus, family firms’ decisions about opening up the competence boundary will always consider the impact on their identity and power boundaries.

Power boundary decisions are also a direct driver of family firm openness. Opening up boundaries can be driven by the desire to maintain or increase control within the industry, network, or supply chain. However, while opening up boundaries by family firms often goes hand-in-hand with experiencing a particular fear of losing control (Lambrechts et al., 2017), by contrast, collaborating with external partners can also actually enable family businesses to exert greater influence and help set the direction of their industry, and ensure that this direction is in line with their strategic intent. Indeed, Lambrechts et al. (2017) found that by taking up central orchestration roles in their open innovation networks—managing knowledge mobility, ensuring that value is shared equitably among network partners, and facilitating trusting and long-term relationships (similar to the “fraternization” concept of Casprini et al., 2017)—family firms can successfully engage in opening up their boundaries while minimizing concerns about loss of control.

Similarly, preserving or strengthening the firm and family identity can directly drive family firm openness. In case the family firm can acquire or strengthen, through collaborations, the identity of, for example, a frontrunner, a radical or green innovator, or a socially responsible employer, they are likely more willing to open their boundaries because greater visibility and reputation among their stakeholders will enhance the family’s socioemotional wealth (Campopiano and De Massis, 2015). However, identity boundary decisions for family firms are challenging because they encompass not only goals that strengthen or preserve the business identity but also family-centered non-economic goals to maintain the family’s cohesion, values, harmony, and social status (Astrachan and Jaskiewicz, 2008; Chrisman et al., 2012; Zellweger and Astrachan, 2008). Understandably, because family and firm identity are so intertwined (Chrisman et al., 2012), changes (positive and negative) at the identity boundary have greater consequences for family enterprises than for nonfamily firms; “who we are” as an entrepreneurial family and “who we are” as a family firm mirror each other.

So far, we have primarily discussed the drivers and mechanisms determining the family firm’s *willingness* to increase its openness with external actors. However, to open up their boundaries, family firms must be not only willing but also able (De Massis et al., 2014). Challenging and transforming boundaries to work with emerging differences, similarities, and connections (Glimmerveen et al., 2020) rest on the ability of the entrepreneurial family and the family firm to build and nurture high-quality relationships (Lambrechts and Gnan, 2022; Lambrechts et al., 2009) that shape “trust, mutuality and joint learning” with collaboration partners (Senge et al., 2007, p. 47). Social capital resources indeed stem from high-quality interpersonal relationships (Anderson et al., 2018; Bolino et al., 2002; Lambrechts et al., 2009). In general, family firms, because of their long-term orientation, are able to build close internal communities and enduring external connections with outside parties (Huybrechts et al., 2011; Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2005; Miller et al., 2009), which result in higher embeddedness in local communities (De Massis et al., 2018a). This is related to the tendency and ability of many family firms to collaborate in informal ways with external (knowledge) partners, unlike nonfamily firms (Casprini et al., 2017; De Massis et al., 2015; Duong et al., 2022). This ability stems from the trust embedded in the long-term, quality relationships they build (Duong et al., 2022; Muñoz-Bullón et al., 2020) and family firms’ widespread reputation with external parties as reliable business partners (Deephouse and Jaskiewicz, 2013; Van Gils et al., 2019). Indeed, “extensive formalization indicates a lack of trust and blunts the value of social relationships” (Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003, p. 405). At the same time, the family’s particularistic strategies can lead to uncertainty and alignment problems with “outsiders” who are neither familiar nor easily acquainted with family-centered non-economic goals because these are harder to communicate (Chrisman et al., 2014). Indeed, a closer look at the supply practices of family firms by Maloni et al. (2017) shows that family firms prefer to collaborate with partners that have similar characteristics to themselves. Family firms thus tend to open their boundaries to firms with similar values and orientations, and these are often other family firms that understand "the family factor" as self-evident.

However, family businesses are a heterogeneous group, as they differ in the extent to which they have deliberately invested in building collaborative capacity in the business family and the family firm that enables them to successfully establish and preserve high-quality relationships within the owning family, within the family business (family and nonfamily), and with external actors. In creating collaborative capacity, the family and the family firm appreciate their "strengths and positive potentials, unite around greater meanings and shared goals, and activate (…) generative designs that serve to open those systems to better and more valued possibilities" (Cooperrider and Fry, 2020, p. 267).

For the family system, this process is enabled by the establishment of formal family governance mechanisms, such as a family council, family meeting, or family constitution (Arteaga and Menéndez-Requejo, 2017) that serve to help build a well-functioning business family that has one clear shared vision for the business, does not impede the business system through destructive family conflict, and speaks with one voice to its internal and external partners (Suess, 2014). Equally important and often complementary to formal family governance are informal family governance mechanisms (Astrachan, 2010; Bloemen-Bekx et al., 2021; Chrisman et al., 2018; Pieper, 2007) as the "relational, interactive and self-enforcing mechanisms [e.g., sharing legacy stories] used by a business family to help nurture more or less complex family relationships and manage expectations" (Bloemen-Bekx et al., 2021, p. 2) because they help foster high-quality family relationships, cohesion, and affective commitment to the family firm and business family within and among generations. Understandably, the better the family system functions, the easier it will become to communicate and thus collaborate with external actors.

In the business system, the family firm's governance characteristics will also reflect upon the firm's ability to open up to external partners. Including outside directors on the board of directors and/or allowing nonfamily members on the top management team will likely make it easier to open boundaries with external parties. That is, in addition to sending a powerful signal of openness to the outside world, nonfamily managers and outside directors typically bring in their network contacts that serve as "bridges" to new collaboration opportunities with external parties (Hillman and Dalziel, 2003; Kim, 2007).

In addition to these internal factors and mechanisms causing family firms' heterogeneity in the degree of openness, external factors can also affect their ability to open up boundaries (Audretsch et al., 2018; Clarysse et al., 2014; De Massis et al., 2018b). Operating in an industry with a limited number of dominant players will, for example, provide very different opportunities for collaboration compared to industries with a dispersed landscape of players. In case the family firm is one of a few dominant players, it might try to collaborate with others, often taking up the role of orchestrator, but whether it succeeds also depends on the willingness of the other players to open their boundaries. Getting organized in a very dispersed industry system might be more challenging for family firms as maintaining control over a large number of collaborations requires significantly more time and resources. Furthermore, favored by their long-term orientation and emphasis on reputation, family firms often operate in a high-quality niche market (Hennart et al., 2019), which might be so specific that finding external partners is more complicated. Family firms are also more dominantly present in some industries than others (e.g., construction, agriculture, the beer industry, the newspaper industry), suggesting that these industries better allow them, compared to nonfamily firms, to leverage specific family-unique capabilities (e.g., social capital) across generations (De Massis et al., 2018b).

Thus, from the above discussion, it is highly likely that when family firms and entrepreneurial families engage in boundary work in making boundary decisions, i.e., "open, close, or expand their self vis-à-vis the other" (Bacharach et al., 2000, p. 706), they take into account (a combination of) these willingness and ability considerations as related to opening up their boundaries. Thereby, the conceptual account developed in this article responds to calls by several authors (e.g., Langley et al., 2019; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005) to consider multiple boundaries as interrelated and view the how and why of boundary work as strongly situated and influenced by contextual influences and considerations. Since boundary work in family firms can have significant competitive, collaborative, and socioemotional effects through its impact on cost efficiencies, spheres of influence (power), competencies, and identity (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2005), openness as boundary work is of paramount strategic importance in family firms. In Fig. 1, we integrate our conceptual development into a framework of openness as boundary work in family enterprises. Family firm openness as boundary work is presented as the overlap of willingness considerations on the one hand and ability considerations on the other, embedded in industry and ecosystem characteristics. The arrows in the willingness section, starting from efficiency and competence, indicate that family firms will only open their efficiency and competence boundaries if this preserves or strengthens their identity and power boundaries. The arrows in the ability section point to the interplay between the various concepts, with enduring high-quality relationships at the center.

2.3 Future prospects on openness as boundary work in family firms

Table 1 is inspired by the framework above to provide promising research questions to inform future research on openness, boundaries, and boundary work in family firms and entrepreneurial families. Although these questions are not exhaustive, we believe they are generative in broadening and deepening family business research and practice, contributing to the family business domain and beyond.

As Table 1 illustrates, many themes and questions related to openness as boundary work in family enterprises require further research, qualitative, and quantitative, to further develop understanding and new theory helpful to academics and practitioners alike. By conceptualizing openness in family firms and entrepreneurial families as boundary work, we aim to highlight openness’s relational-interactive, processual, and contextual character. In other words, openness is performed by family firm actors-in-context with external actors, over time, within and across generations, and has profound implications, which are shaping ways of organizing and creating value with others. Indeed, by theorizing openness in family firms as boundary work in context, the complexity and far-reaching implications of the concept emerge, enabling researchers to better investigate and understand its antecedents, conditions, mechanisms, microprocesses, outcomes, and forms.

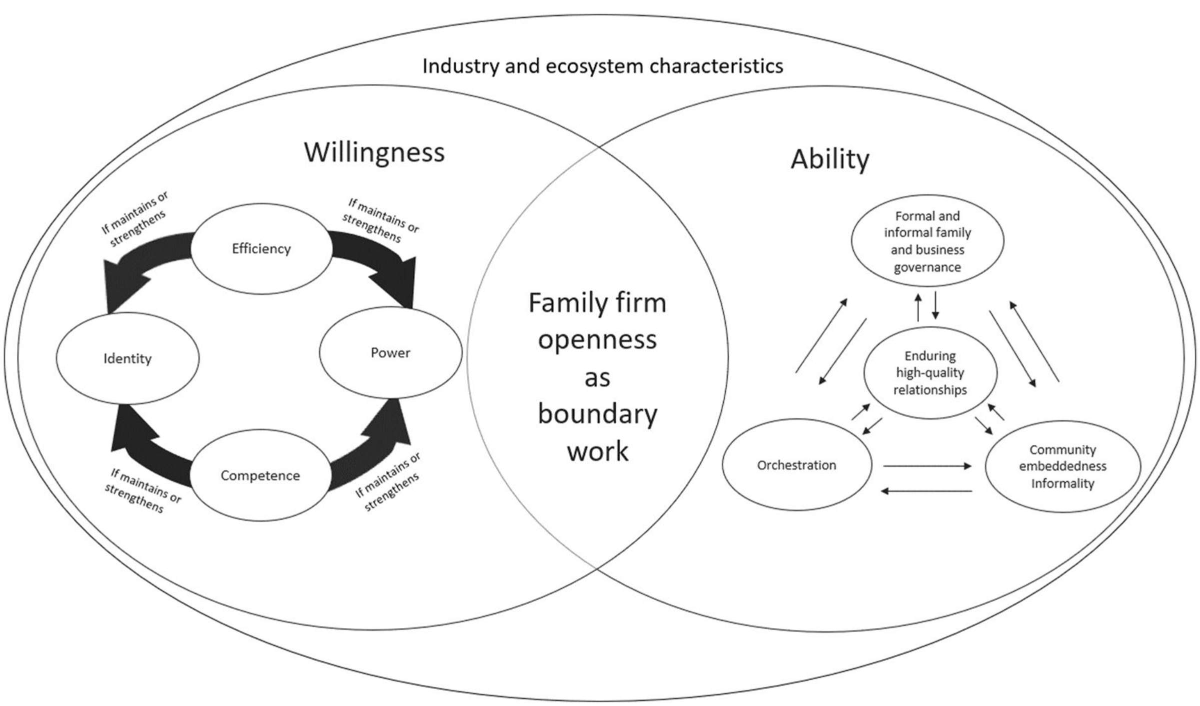

Fig. 1 Framework of family firm openness as boundary work

Table 1 Future research questions on openness as boundary work in family firms

Theme	Research questions
Effectiveness	•What is effective boundary work in family firms and entrepreneurial families? Are there differences in effective boundary work between family and nonfamily firms and among different types of family firms and entrepreneurial families? •What boundary work strategies and practices are most effective in family firms, and under what conditions, considering family firm heterogeneity? •What formal and informal governance combinations enable effective boundary work in family firms and entrepreneurial families? How do these combinations come about, and how do formal and informal governance mechanisms coevolve effectively? •How do the different dimensions of the family's socioemotional wealth affect openness as boundary work and vice versa?
Process	•Which mechanisms do family owners and nonfamily employees use to challenge and transform boundaries? •How does openness as boundary work develops over time in family firms, and why? •When and how do family firms open their boundaries to firms with different values and orientations, and how do they manage possible uncertainty and alignment problems with (very) different others?
Actors	•Who is engaging in openness as boundary work in family firms and entrepreneurial families, and with what effects on their social position within the firm or within the family? What is the role of the founder and the next generation in boundary work, and how do they relate? •What are the psychological foundations of family firm actors' choices to undertake network and collaboration activities, implying openness as boundary work? How do family firm actors' specific heuristics and/or personality traits affect such choices? Do the typical social aspects of family firms (such as trust and loyalty) reinforce the affirmation of some heuristics and/or personality traits?
External social capital	•Under what circumstances do families encourage or discourage members to develop ties outside the family system for business purposes? •What are the mechanisms by which external social capital is formed in family firms? How do family firms leverage social capital to establish collaboration with other firms? •How do different family firm actors extract benefits from forming and reactivating social ties with external parties and get access to resources through social relationships? •How do different types of family embeddedness affect the formation and development of social capital and vice versa?
Cooperative capacity and high-quality relating	•How do actors build cooperative capacity and high-quality relationships in family firms and owning families, and how is this conducive to openness as boundary work? •Which resource combinations enable collaborative capacity-building for openness in family firms? Do these combinations of resources differ for family and nonfamily businesses and among different types of family firms? How and why?
Strategic leadership and change	•What types of lead roles (e.g., orchestrating, network brokerage) do family firms take up in the networks/ecosystems in which they participate? Why and under what conditions? •How do orchestration and network brokerage occur in the family business context? What are the differences in orchestration and brokering processes, outcomes, and antecedents between family and nonfamily firms and among different types of family firms? •How are family businesses changing their organizational culture, strategy, structure, leadership and HR practices, and governance mechanisms to make openness a strategic priority? •How do family firms and their external partners co-shape collaborative/open innovation or joint learning at the network/supply chain/ecosystem level? What kind of boundary work is needed?

Table 1 (continued)

Theme	Research questions
Generational dynamics	•How does the succession process affect openness as boundary work, and vice versa, in family firms? •How do different generational stages of the family firm (founder-led vs. sibling partnership vs. cousin consortium) differ in openness as boundary work? •How can internal and external social capital be nurtured in the transition from one generation to the next in a family firm? How can the social capital of the senior generation be integrated with the social capital of the new generation? How do intergenerational social capital dynamics unfold?
Industry and ecosystem characteristics	•How do characteristics of different industries or ecosystems affect family firms' willingness and ability to open up their boundaries? How do the business and/or entrepreneurial ecosystem characteristics shape different ways of opening up boundaries in family firms? •How do network relationships within and across industries influence the development of networking/collaboration phenomena involving family firms?
Outcomes and consequences	•How do different configurations of the family firm's ability and willingness affect openness as boundary work, and with what outcomes (e.g., in terms of performance, innovation, and sustainability)? How do "open" family firms differ from "closed" family firms in their (financial, innovation and sustainability) performance? •What are the positive consequences and negative unintended consequences of openness as boundary work for family firms and enterprising families?

3 Contemporary research on the "open family firm"

The articles in this Special Issue help give more "flesh and blood" to the concept of openness in family firms, clearly illustrate the benefits of examining openness as boundary work within the family business field, and advance the conversation around this crucial phenomenon. Table 2 provides an overview of the seven papers published in this Special Issue, highlighting the research questions they answer, the theories used, the data and methods employed, the key findings, and how they contribute to our understanding of family firm openness. We consider them in turn.

In their fascinating literature review, "Social network research in the family business literature: A review and integration," Yates et al., (2022) synthesize and highlight the contributions of social network studies to family business research. By performing an inductive coding process on 69 articles published in 29 high-impact journals from 1988 to 2020, the review identifies prevailing themes in the literature and outlines a platform for future research. Furthermore, this article discusses the main theoretical mechanisms underpinning the relationship between heterogeneous family and nonfamily network ties and family firm outcomes. Overall, it finds that network structure, social capital, and family firm-specific network content are key mechanisms linking family firm networks to performance outcomes.

In the second article, "The role of similarity and complementarity in the selection of potential partners for open innovation projects in family firms," De Groote et al., (2022) argue that engagement in open innovation collaboration by opening the organizational boundaries of family firms is mainly driven by the family owners. Based on 53 semi-structured interviews nested in 10 Swiss case studies and including 15 expert interviews, they postulate that to engage in collaboration, family firms must manage their perceptions of the similarities and complementarities between themselves and their potential partner and integrate these into an accepted level of anticipated fit. The results reveal that, during the selection phase, in particular, the elements of fit have to be weighed in light of the openness of the given firm and perceived preferred levels and mechanisms of control, which the family influences in the family firm.

In the article, "How family firms use governance mechanisms to mitigate the risks of ecosystems: A case study from healthcare," Cobben et al., (2022) question how family firms use formal and informal governance mechanisms to mitigate relational and

Table 2 Contemporary examples of studies on the "open family firm"

Authors	Research questions	Theories/perspectives	Data and methods	Findings and how they contribute to our understanding of family firm openness
Yates, Vardaman, & Chrisman	What are the roles of social networks in family firms, and how are those roles different from nonfamily firms?	Social capital theory, social network perspective	Systematic literature review: 69 articles	Unique network structures, social capital, and family firm-specific network content are key mechanisms linking family firm networks to economic and non-economic performance outcomes
De Groote, Schell, Kammerlander, & Hack	How do family firms select open innovation partners?	Open innovation	Qualitative study: 53 semi-structured interviews nested in 10 case studies and including 15 open innovation expert interviews in Switzerland	(1) To engage in collaboration, family firms must manage their perceptions of the similarities and complementarities between themselves and their potential partner and integrate these into an accepted level of anticipated fit (2) The owning family drives openness towards external partners
Cobben, Neessen, Rus, & Roijakkers	How do family firms use formal and informal governance mechanisms to mitigate relational and performance risk when governing ecosystems?	Open innovation, governance, resource-based view, behavioral theory	Qualitative study: explanatory single case study of a Belgian family firm that initiated and governs an ecosystem	(1) Formal/informal governance mechanisms are complements to mitigate relational and performance risks inherent to collaborating within an ecosystem (2) The choice of governance mechanisms differs for relational versus performance risk (3) Changes in perceived risk over time result in shifts in relative dominance of formal/informal mechanisms
Kim, Sexton, & Marler	How does inter-organizational cooperation moderate the relationship between family ownership and firm innovation?	Mixed gamble perspective	Quantitative study: 2114 SMEs in South Korea	Inter-organizational cooperation is a significant contingency of family-owned firms' innovation. Family firms that cooperate with external partners, particularly non-commercial organizations, are more willing to be innovative

Table 2 (continued)

Authors	Research questions	Theories/perspectives	Data and methods	Findings and how they contribute to our understanding of family firm openness
Guenther, Belitski, & Rejeb	Under which circumstances can small family firms use their unique characteristics to achieve an innovation output premium from open innovation compared to small nonfamily firms?	Ability-willingness paradox, open innovation	Quantitative study: 6272 small firms in the United Kingdom (UK) during 2002–2016	(1) Family SMEs overcome their lower willingness to engage in collaborations when collaborating with customers within regional proximity (2) Family SMEs generate an innovation premium compared to small nonfamily firms
Debellis, Torchia, Quarato, & Calabrò	To what extent does board openness to nonfamily directors affect family firm internationalization?	Social capital theory	Quantitative study: a panel of 7707 Italian family firms (11 years)	(1) Board openness to nonfamily directors affects family firm internationalization. More specifically, there is a curvilinear relationship between the presence of nonfamily directors on the board and foreign direct investment (FDI) geographic scope for older family firms (2) Except for the young ones, family firms have a broader FDI geographic scope when the board is dominated by one homogeneous type (either family or nonfamily directors)
Pütz, Schell, & Werner	How and to what extent does CSR mediate the relationship between familiness and absorptive capacity in small and medium-sized family businesses?	Signaling theory, dynamic capabilities	Quantitative study: Survey of 327 German family SMEs	(1) Familiness shapes absorptive capacity, mediated partially by the family firm's customer-orientated CSR actions (2) Openness to absorbing external knowledge is a critical competitive advantage, especially for small and medium-sized family firms, where CSR can function as a credible quality signal for the firm

performance risk when governing ecosystems. Based on an explanatory single case study of a Belgian family firm initiating and governing an ecosystem, they conclude that in an ecosystem led by a family firm, formal and informal governance mechanisms work complementarily to deal with relational and performance risk and that different combinations of governance mechanisms should be used to manage relational and performance risk. When ecosystem members perceive changes over time in perceived risk, the authors argue that family firms in an ecosystem orchestrator role should change the balance between formal/informal governance mechanisms by stimulating the active participation of ecosystem members.

In the fourth article, "Innovation as a mixed gamble in family firms: The moderating effect of inter-organizational cooperation," Kim et al., (2022) wonder how inter-organizational cooperation moderates the relationship between family ownership and firm innovation. Based on a sample of 2114 SMEs in South Korea, they show that inter-organizational cooperation by partnering with non-commercial organizations is associated with higher levels of innovation. They conclude that policymakers seeking to facilitate innovation can incentivize or provide mechanisms that encourage these partnerships to ensure economic growth and the long-term survival of family firms.

In their extensive empirical study, "Overcoming the ability-willingness paradox in small family firms' collaborations," Guenther et al., (2022) argue that while open innovation constitutes a central strategy for family firms, not all are equally able to govern these collaborations. Based on a sample of 6272 small firms in the United Kingdom (UK) during 2002–2016, they reveal significant differences in the ways small family and nonfamily firms innovate and collaborate with external partners, as well as the reasons why they do so. Their results demonstrate that the extent to which collaboration with external partners can be managed may relate to specific firm characteristics: small family firms overcome their lower willingness when collaborating with customers within regional proximity and, based on their unique characteristics and superior ability to govern these collaborations, are able to generate an innovation premium compared to small nonfamily firms.

In their study, "Board openness and family firm internationalization: A social capital perspective," Debellis et al., (2022) build on social capital theory to investigate the extent to which board openness to nonfamily directors affects family firm internationalization. They suggest that board compositions relate to different levels of bonding (internal) and bridging (external) social capital, which then affect firm internationalization, resulting in a curvilinear relationship between the percentage of nonfamily directors on the board and foreign direct investment (FDI) geographic scope. Based on a panel dataset of 7707 Italian family firms, they confirm a balanced juxtaposition of family and nonfamily directors in more mature firms, which is detrimental to FDI geographic scope. They also show that, except for young family firms, broader FDI geographic scope emerges when the board is dominated by one homogeneous type, either family or nonfamily directors.

Finally, in the article, "Openness to knowledge: Does corporate social responsibility mediate the relationship between familiness and absorptive capacity?" Pütz et al., (2022) propose and test a model in which corporate social responsibility is the critical feature that links familiness as a family-specific resource to the family firm's ability to absorb external knowledge. Based on surveys of 327 German SMEs, their results support their main hypothesis that the relationship between familiness and absorptive capacity is positively mediated by employee- and customer-focused corporate social responsibility activities.

In sum, the seven papers in this issue collectively demonstrate the wide range of aspects and portfolio of theoretical lenses that can be employed to study openness in family enterprises. They are also representative of aspects that characterize the concept of openness as boundary work illustrated in the framework put forward in this article.

4 Conclusion

We believe that an agenda on openness as boundary work in family firms is timely and warranted because family firms are increasingly opening up their boundaries, and openness fundamentally changes what family businesses are, how they function, and how they interact with their environments. In this article, we have introduced the notion of family firm openness as boundary work, highlighted the need to study openness in the family business field, developed a conceptual framework, and examined the drivers, mechanisms, and consequences of openness in family enterprises. We have also proposed an agenda for future research by delineating some critical questions that hold the potential to advance current knowledge on openness, boundaries, and boundary work in family firms and entrepreneurial families, and we illustrated contemporary examples of studies on the “open family firm.” Given the many aspects associated with studying openness as boundary work in family enterprises and the complexity of this phenomenon, we have only scratched the surface of the issues that need to be investigated. Nevertheless, we will consider our efforts to have been successful if we have encouraged scholars to tackle some of the research questions that an agenda on openness as boundary work in family firms suggests and if we have improved family firms, entrepreneurial families, and family business advisors’ understanding of the dynamics, complexities, and consequences of openness to make more informed boundary decisions.

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