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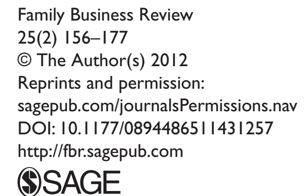

Advising the Family Firm: Reviewing the Past to Build the Future

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Abstract

This study reviews the literature on advising family firms and integrates past contributions in such a way that scholars can use the findings as a foundation to launch future research. It reviews 105 articles and other research contributions published since 1983. The findings suggest that although advisors play a crucial role within family firms, there remains to date a lack of rigorous academic research. These past contributions are integrated into a framework that provides a first step toward developing theoretical arguments and charting directions for future research that address the nature of the family firm–advisor relationship.

Keywords

advising, advisor, family business, literature review

Introduction

Who gives advice to family firms? What kind of advice do they give? And is the advice valuable? These are important questions that deserve answers. Although literature surveys find that advising family firms is a prevalent topic, the majority of articles are more a product of consulting practices rather than a result of rigorous academic study (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma 2003). Out of 16 articles on advising, Dyer and Sánchez (1998) find that none are based on qualitative or quantitative research. Since their review there have continued to be a limited number of scholarly studies. Yet authors suggest that understanding advising is key to working with family firms (Aronoff, 1998) and may affect our ability to understand family dynamics, decision making, and firm performance.

The literature on advising family firms reveals that although it has received significant practical attention, the attention to theoretical concepts has been virtually ignored (Upton, Vinton, Seaman, & Moore, 1993; Ward, 1990). As noted by Astrachan and McMillan (2006),

> No studies have explored the long- or short-term efficacy of family business consultation or various interventions. . . . There is a great cause for concern about the lack of research on the efficacy of consulting methods, approaches, and interventions. We still do not know what works, when, why, for whom, or for how long. Likewise, we do not know when we as consultants, are inflicting unintended damage. . . . Clearly . . . we need more research, not just on what works, but what is harmful as well. (p. 362)

To respond to these concerns, this review takes stock of the contributions on advising family firms that have been published to date to develop an understanding of the current state of the research and its evolution over

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the past 30 years. The aim is to create a framework that integrates past research and provides a foundation to launch future research. As noted by Dyer and Sánchez (1998, p. 287), by obtaining an understanding of the past we can relate past and current knowledge to one another, thereby improving and enhancing theories and methods. I proceed by discussing the review methodology, followed by the findings and the ensuing framework. Subsequently, I discuss how the framework provides guidelines for future research.

Review Method

To capture the literature on advising, I began by reviewing academic journals from 1980 until 2011. As it was only in the early 1980s that family firm advisors began to achieve recognition (Kaslow, 2006), this time period allowed me to capture the literature's earliest articles. I conducted a search using the following criteria. The articles had to include terms that referred to both *advising* and *family firms*. The terms used to capture advisors were *advice*, *advise(-s, -ing)*, *advisor(s)*, *consult(-ing, -ant)*, *counsel(-or, -ing)*, *therapy*, *therapist(s)*, *professional expert(-s, -ise)*, and *mediate(-ors, -tion)*. The terms used to capture family firms were *family (business(es)*, *enterprise(s)*, *firm(s)*, *-owned*, *-controlled)*, *founder(s)*, *founding*, *generation(s)*, *governance*, *owner(ship)*, *private*, and *privately held*. The search was conducted using EBSCOhost Business Source Premier, ABI/INFORM, and JSTOR databases using the aforementioned search terms. Each article was examined for its relevance and for citation trails that lead to other contributions. The search resulted in 105 journal articles, 8 books, 23 book chapters, and 3 survey reports published since 1980.

The earliest articles were published in 1983 and the most recent articles in 2010. The largest numbers of articles were published in 1998 (16), which reflects a two-part series published in the *Family Business Review*. Early articles were based on personal consulting experiences whereas more recent ones used surveys. The majority of articles focused on offering prescriptions (64), followed by surveys (22), conceptual (8), qualitative (6) interviews, and one literature review with a section on advisors. A number of the surveys were exploratory in nature where the purpose was not to produce statistically significant results (e.g., Upton et al., 1993).

A total of 224 authors contributed to the articles (authors contributing more than once were counted multiple times). The most prolific authors identified themselves as family business consultants (63). Management professors accounted for 46 of the contributions followed by entrepreneurship professors (22), organizational behavior professors (16), family therapists (14), and lawyers (9). The remaining authors were other professionals.

The distribution of authorship and the nature of the articles demonstrate the dominant role of nonacademics and the limited number of theoretical or empirical advancements. Although each contribution sheds light on some aspect of advising, taken together they remain fragmented. To develop an overarching theme I group these studies into five categories: types of advisors and their attributes, choosing advisors, the advising process, contexts, and outcomes. In integrating these studies, I develop a framework that is used to position the findings within the literature and is then used as a guideline for future research.

Advisor Types and Their Attributes

Types of Advisors[1]

It was in the 1980s that the family firm advisor emerged as a recognized profession (Astrachan & McMillan, 2006). Since that time multiple advisory roles have surfaced that provide support and act as resources for family firms. These advisors are grouped under three general categories: formal advisors, informal advisors, and family firm boards.

Formal advisors. Formal advisors are those hired by the family or firm. They may be external to the firm or hold an internal position. These advisors come from a variety of backgrounds and offer a multitude of services to provide advice and support. Drawing from Tagiuri and Davis's (1982) three-circle model, advisors may work in one or more of the three systems (see Figure 1).

The literature categorizes formal advisors into two main types: content experts and process consultants (Kaye & Hamilton, 2004). Content experts operate within one of the specific systems found in the three-circle model and provide expertise on a particular area, such as tax law or investments. The issue may concern the firm, the family or both, and the services are often

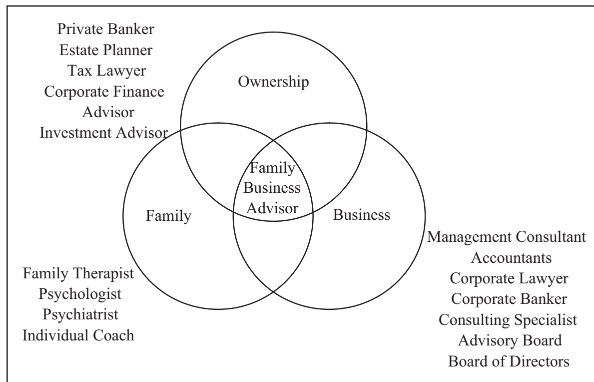

Figure 1. Types of formal advisors
Source. Based on Tagiuri and Davis's (1982) three-circle model and adapted from Hilburt-Davis and Dyer (2003).

transactional in nature (Grubman & Jaffe, 2010). Process consultants focus on establishing structures that allow the family to develop and implement their own solutions, and work at the intersection of family, business, and ownership (Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003). The services they provide are often transitional, taking place over time and possibly generations (Grubman & Jaffe, 2010). Advisors who act as both a content expert and a process consultant are known as a "family systems informed expert" (Bork, Jaffe, Lane, Dashew, & Heilser, 1996).

Scholars caution that advisors need to be wary of overlapping roles and providing advice in areas where they do not have the necessary skills. One way to address this concern is to bring content experts and process consultants together in multidisciplinary teams (Upton et al., 1993). Bringing together advisors with diverse backgrounds helps understand and address the issues that result from the overlap of family and business (Swartz, 1989), and allows content experts to respond to a family firm's holistic needs (Thomas, 2002). The benefits of team advising include multiple views, impartiality, greater emotional distance, and an understanding of both family and business issues (Astrachan & Astrachan, 1996; Swartz, 1989). Yet there are also drawbacks as philosophies and approaches may differ, resulting in disruptive team dynamics. It is also more difficult for teams to gain the trust of family members, and multidisciplinary teams are more expensive (Kaye & Hamilton, 2004; Upton et al., 1993).

Among the types of advisors, accountants are the most likely to hold the role of the most trusted advisor (Chrisman, Chua, Sharma, & Yoder, 2009; Jaffe, Lane, Dashew, & Bork, 1997). Supporting this argument, in a New Zealand survey, Nicholson, Shepherd, and Woods (2010) find that accountants are the most effective and, therefore, also the most common source of advice: 94% of family firms use accountants as advisors, 65% use lawyers, and 48% rely on bank advisors. Findings from the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company's (MassMutual Financial Group, Kennesaw State University, and Family Firm Institute, 2007) survey also show that 30% of family firms consider their accountants to be their most trusted source of professional advice. The family accountant is also often integral in creating and administering family offices in larger firms, or organizing the use of a multifamily office. Although the focus of a family office is typically on wealth management, the advisor administering the office coordinates content experts who provide counsel on investments, taxes, and trusts, among others, all with a focus on preserving the family history, legacy, and wealth (Junge, 2006; Swaim, 2004).

Informal advisors. Informal advisors are those not formally engaged with the family or firm. Found within and outside the family, they include trust catalysts (LaChapelle & Barnes, 1998), spouses (Gillis-Donovan & Monyihan-Bradt, 1990), and mentors (Boyd, Upton, & Wircenski, 1999).

In interviews with more than 60 individuals in 7 family firms, LaChapelle and Barnes (1998) identify the role of trust catalysts. Trust catalysts act as a bridge of trust between generations. They provide advice, support, and empathy, and they inspire family members to trust one another. Spousal advisory roles include chief trust officer (mediator, communication, facilitator), business partner (provides advice on the business), or senior advisor (relationships problem solver; Poza & Messer, 2001). Wives as a specific group of spouses may play a particularly critical role as advisors as research suggests that they are often more intuitive about people (Gillis-Donovan & Monyihan-Bradt, 1990). In turn, mentors may be family or nonfamily members. In interviews, Boyd et al. (1999) find that 62% of family firm executives are informally mentored by a family member, 21% informally by nonfamily, and 15% formally by family. The authors further find that informal mentors are more flexible, creative, and better communicators, but there are also more concerns over a lack of time, goals, and continuity.

Family owners may also seek advice from other family firms (Lester & Cannella, 2006), peer advisors (Lank & Thomassen, 1991; Pare-Julien, 2006), or informal networks, relatives, and friends (Yan & Sorenson, 2006) who have experience that is relevant to their unique situation. For example, Yan and Sorenson (2006) discuss the importance of *Guanxi* in Confucian family firms in providing advice and counsel. Confucian family firms are embedded in a social context where interpersonal relationships and mutual support are essential. Before key decisions are made the firm's network of relatives, friends, and other Chinese firms is consulted. In Confucian cultures, adult children will also turn to their parents for advice and are expected to consult with them long after they take over the family firm (Yan & Sorenson, 2006).

Family firm boards. The literature posits that family firm boards are a valuable source of advice (Alderfer, 1988; Corbetta & Salvato, 2004; Ward, 1988). Ward and Handy (1988) substantiate this claim in a survey of 147 family firms. The authors find that the number one function of boards (47%) is to provide advice. Similarly, in a survey of 192 Finnish family firms Mustakallio, Autio, and Zahra (2002) find that providing advice is a key role of the board; and in a survey of 1,141 U.S. family firms, Chrisman, Chua, and Litz (2004) show that boards are an important influence in decision making.

Family firm boards may consist of either a board of directors or an advisory board. Boards of directors have a legal standing, voting rights, and provide formal oversight, whereas advisory boards do not have such a standing or rights and are primarily used to provide advice (Tillman, 1988). Advisory boards may be preferred over a board of directors to limit liability insurance (Whisler, 1988) and as sources of advice from firms that are reluctant to have a formal board (Jonovic, 1989). Horan (2003) suggests that family firms are more likely to listen to advisory boards as they participate in their creation. Using case studies Lambrecht and Lievens (2008) confirm that firms find it safer to accept advice from advisory boards. Without legal status they are also easier to dissolve if the relationship turns unamicable and the decision-making power remains with the family. Although family firms may want to receive advice, they do not necessarily want to be directed (Lambrecht & Lievens, 2008).

Through both advisory boards and boards of directors, family firms gain the benefits of multiple advisors with diverse expertise. Boards provide counsel regarding strategy, planning, firm performance, compensation, family conflicts, and succession (Heidrick, 1988; Poza, Johnson, & Alfred, 1998; Schipani & Siedel, 1988). In Ward and Handy's (1988) survey they find that advice is mainly focused on strategic issues (16%), followed by organizational issues (9%), CEO priorities (4%), and then succession (2%). Other authors contend that having advisors on the board from other family firms can help mitigate family conflicts as they represent an impartial third party (Lester & Cannella, 2006). Moreover, board advisors also help family members not involved on a daily basis to understand the business issues (Beckhard & Dyer, 1983).

Attributes

Authors have identified a number of characteristics and competencies of effective advisors. Characteristics refer to personal traits whereas competencies refer to specific skills and expertise.

Characteristics. Characteristics of effective advisors include trustworthiness (Kaye & Hamilton, 2004), honesty and integrity (Mathile, 1988), common sense and commitment (Nash, 1988), loyalty and humility (Dennis, 1993), and courage and patience (Peg, 1996). In interviews, LaChapelle and Barnes (1998) find support for many of these characteristics. The authors find that having a strong character (consisting of integrity, honesty, and credibility), caring (being supportive, empathetic, and understanding), and predictability (keeping promises and following through) are all important in advising and building trust. Grubman and Jaffe (2010) further propose that advisors are warm, psychologically aware with an understanding of family characteristics and issues, and possess emotional intelligence.

Other authors suggest the importance of self-awareness. Self-awareness includes the ability for advisors to understand and manage their own anxieties, beliefs, and limitations (Johnson, Jones, Leach, & Martin, 2006), recognize their impact on the family firm, understand when they have intervened inappropriately, and analyze what they can do differently (Brown, 1998). The more advisors can understand their own strengths and weaknesses, the better they can appreciate how their own characteristics influence their work with family firms (Hubler, 1998).

Competencies. Competencies of effective advisors include experience, technical skills, and interpersonal abilities. Depending on the advisor's expertise, technical

skills can come from law, finance, management science, and behavioral science (Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003). These specific skills cover a wide range of areas including estate and tax planning in law, investments and risk management in finance, governance and strategic planning in management science (Dashew, 1996), and family dynamics and communications in behavioral science (Lansberg, 1983). In order to address family firm specific issues such as ownership and succession, Lane (1989) suggests that advisors also require a broad understanding of the areas that intersect all professions so that they are aware of when to refer the family to other experts.

What truly differentiate effective advisors are the softer interpersonal skills. For example, Budge and Janoff (1991) assert that family firm advisors must be more open and vulnerable than nonfamily firm advisors. In order to develop a relationship of trust with the family they need to have empathy, independence, understand diverse perspectives (Dennis, 1993), and recognize and balance the overlap and complexities between the family and business systems (Goodman, 1998). In fact, Upton et al. (1993) state that an inability to understand how family dynamics affect the business is the primary mistake of advisors.

There is also a variety of communication skills associated with an advisor's interpersonal abilities. These include listening (Dashew, 1996), facilitation (Alderfer, 1988) and integrating emotional and rational matters (Peg, 1996). The ability to provide objective opinions and insights on both business and family issues is a critical competency noted by numerous authors (e.g., Krasnow & Wolkoff, 1998; Mueller, 1988; Swartz, 1989). Where advisors can act as both a confidant and a devil's advocate, they can bring another voice to the discussion (Mueller, 1988).

Interpersonal approaches can also create obstacles and put the family firm at risk. These include getting too close, being drawn into disputes, and having dual relationships that can result in a lack of objectivity and a reluctance to provide candid opinions (Barach, 1984; Haynes & Usdin, 1997). Where close relationships are necessary authors suggest arranging for external oversight (Vago, 1998). White (2007) notes several other problematic approaches, including avoiding relational issues or trying to treat all issues, being pulled into a messenger role, hearing only one side of the story, trying to make everyone happy, and losing sight of the business goal.

The articles reviewed in this section provide a strong foundation for understanding advisor types and attributes. Yet the articles focus on different dimensions, come from various disciplines, and do not build on the work of one another. As a result the literature remains fragmented. Furthermore, many of the studies are not grounded in academically rigorous methods but are based on description and personal experiences. Although I have identified numerous types of advisors, there are no theoretical or empirical studies that focus on identifying a systematic typology of advisors and the attributes that would be associated with each type. The attributes required of an expert tax advisor would differ from a process consultant advising on governance. Furthermore, limited work has been done on explicitly distinguishing between external and internal advisors and their ideal array of attributes. A richer understanding of who advises and their distinctive characteristics and competencies is needed.

Choosing Effective Advisors

To ensure that the process of advising is effective, choosing the right type of advisor is critical. The biggest challenge in finding an effective advisor is to first understand the needs of the family firm (Mathieu, Strassler, & Pearl, 2010). Although the most common method is by word of mouth, the problems that result include having an inappropriate advisor, a lack of objectivity due to personal ties, and a lack of knowledge of the requirements of effective family firm advisors. Instead, Mathieu et al. (2010) suggest that family firms need to establish objective criteria, determine what issues and gaps they are trying to solve, and define appropriate benchmarks.

In their New Zealand survey, Nicholson et al. (2010) find that family firms select advisors based on previous experience (75%), followed by reputation (71%) and personal rapport founded on trust (64%). Trust is especially critical in choosing advisors because privacy is essential to family firms (Lester & Cannella, 2006). Referrals for advisors often come from outside sources such as the family firm's banker, accountant, or lawyer (Swartz, 1989) and are selected based on personal references and integrity (Hamilton, 1992). Advisors for board membership are frequently suggested by other board members, though external advisors may also be brought in to help establish a tailored board that will meet specific objectives (Horan, 2003; Mathile, 1988).

Choosing advisors is one of the most overlooked topics, yet advisor choice is critical to ensure an effective advising process. An unsuitable advisor may inadvertently do more harm than good. Further research is needed to understand the process of choice and how that process is linked to advisor type and attributes. Scholars may also consider not only the individual level of the advisor but also how choice may affect or be affected by the group and organizational levels.

The Process of Advising

Until recently advisors did not differentiate between family firms and other businesses (Goodman, 1998). The presence of multiple systems and increased cognitive challenges means that traditional advising models do not adequately address family firm needs, resulting in unsatisfactory outcomes (Mitchell, Morse, & Sharma, 2003; Swartz, 1989). Instead, authors suggest that advisors use a systems perspective to understand family dynamics and how they overlap with business (Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003, 2006; Upton et al., 1993). In addition, there is a need to attend to both process and content in order to concurrently manage the conflict between the practical immediate needs of the firm and the longer term emotional needs of the family (Koiranen, 2003; Metzger, 1988). This affects both how advisors intervene and the advising tools they use.

The Intervention Process

The literature on how advisors intervene primarily focuses on prescriptive steps to guide advisors (e.g., Dreux IV, 1990; Nawrocki, 2005). The intervention process typically follows four main iterative phases that often overlap: contracting, assessment, planned change and implementation, and evaluation and maintenance (Gersick, Davis, Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997). They may be broken down further into more detailed steps. For example, Lane (1989) prescribes six steps, whereas Hilburt-Davis and Dyer (2003) outline nine steps. Providing a detailed discussion is outside the scope of the review, but I present the four main phases below.[2]

The contracting phase consists of the initial contact to determine expectations, issues, approach, fit, and a contract that defines the project (Gersick et al., 1997; Lane, 1989). Fees are also set, which can vary depending on the project, expertise, and whether the advisor charges by the hour, day, or project (Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003). During the assessment phase, advisors gather information through interviews, gain an understanding of the firm, governance, and family, establish trust, and develop insights into the problem (Gersick et al., 1997). To understand the true issue, past (Brown, 1998) and potential future issues and conflicts also need to be identified (Montgomery & Sinclair, 2000). As Prince (1990) argues though, the quandary is that often the problems for which advisors are sought are rarely the true issue. Many of the issues and disputes have deep and emotional historical roots.

In the planned change and implementation phase, advisors organize and share findings with family firm members, develop recommendations, and initiate a course of action (Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003). Authors concur that in order for the intervention to be successful the family must support change and be willing to devote time and resources to the process (Gersick et al., 1997; Lane, 1989). The level of change and type of intervention tools used vary depending on whether the issue is technical or emotional, content or process related, and at the individual, group, or system levels (Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003).

The evaluation and maintenance phase is ongoing. Unless an explicit deliverable is specified the advisor's role diminishes over time, after which he or she may be paid on a retainer or called on an as-needed-basis (Gersick et al., 1997; Lane, 1989). As noted by authors, it is difficult to concretely measure success in family business advising (Astrachan & McMillan, 2006). Yet it is important to help the family evaluate the process to help them understand the positive changes they have undergone (Gersick et al., 1997).

Advising Models

Authors advocate a number of advising models that categorize information, coordinate thoughts, and propose a means to resolve issues (Kadis & McClendon, 2006). Although the models are specific to the original discipline of the advisor, the underlying common thread is that the overlap of family and business requires a unique advising approach (Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2006). Many of the models are based on Bowen's family systems theory, organizational development, systems theory, family therapy theories, or a combination thereof. Although each of the models has similar objectives, they

also take different approaches based on their specific perspectives (see Table 1).

Bowen's theory draws from psychology and is based on human behavior. It views the family as an emotional unit with complex interactions. This theory contends that family members are emotionally interdependent, affecting one another's thoughts, feelings, and actions; soliciting each other's attention, approval, and support; and reacting to one another's needs, expectations, and troubles (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Authors drawing from Bowen's theory (e.g., Baker & Wiseman, 1998; Bork, 1993; Gillis-Donovan & Monyihan-Bradt, 1990) suggest that advisors can apply the theory to help the family recognize and understand behavior patterns that affect the business, to make necessary changes, and to move the business to a more professional level of operation.

Organizational development is based on involving the family in the change process. It focuses on how members communicate, make decisions, and how change occurs (Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003). Process models stress understanding the difference between process (how members say things) and content (what members say), and the importance of each (Hilburt-Davis & Senturia, 1995). Authors further suggest that advisors can use process models to help family firms connect feelings with future planning in order to appreciate the emotional implications of change, to understand why certain choices are made, and to understand the connections between personal, family, and business interests (Vago, 2004).

Models based on systems theory draw from Tagiuri and Davis's (1982) three-circle model. They concentrate on conflicts that arise due to the intersection of the different systems. System theory models emphasize the need to focus on the issue in the relevant circle while at the same time taking into account the dynamics of the entire system (Gersick et al., 1997). Furthermore, the complexities in each of the three circles increase as the family and firm move through different developmental stages, and structures, roles, relationships, and needs change (Gersick et al., 1997).

A number of models are based on a combination of theories (e.g., Bork et al., 1996; Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003; Jaffe, Dashew, Lane, Paul, & Bork, 2006; Moncrief-Stuart, Paul, & Craig, 2006). As outlined in Table 1, each takes a slightly different approach. Yet in general they agree on a need to recognize the family, business, and individual stages of development and how they overlap; focus on both process and content; develop structures and processes that encourage effective communication, trust, and governance; and guide the family through growth and change.

Last, family therapy draws from behavioral health models that focus on relationships (e.g., Flemons & Cole, 1992; Kadis & McClendon, 2006; Kaye, 1991). Family therapy considers three dimensions: the self (individual), the system (family), and society (business; Kaslow, 1993; Weir, 1996). The underlying assumption is that good relationships are the foundation for a successful business and problems in the family have an adverse effect on the firm. Family therapists suggest that understanding the past is one of the keys to understanding current patterns of interactions (Brown, 1998). For example, as outlined in Table 1, Kadis and McClendon (2006) promote the use of a reconciliation model, which centers on mending relationships that have deteriorated because of long-standing conflicts. Similarly, Kaye (1991) describes the use of a conflict-resolution model. In family firms, members cannot simply walk away from issues: They share long-term goals, play simultaneous roles in intersecting systems, and often react to one another in ways that prolong and exacerbate the problem. In mapping out the conflict cycle, advisors help family firm members determine how to unlock the cycle (Kaye, 1991).

The articles describing how advisors intervene and the advising models, answer what advisors do and offer prescriptive steps. The models are based on theories from family business, organizational development, and psychology, yet what is still needed is the development of a theoretical understanding as to the process of advising. Moreover, the models have not been validated (Ward, 1990) and there is no scholarly research that has explored what should be used, when, why, for whom, for how long, or when the models may cause unintentional harm (Astrachan & McMillan, 2006).

Contexts

Many of the articles reviewed describe both national and organizational contexts that influence the advising process. For example, advising models that work within one organizational context do not necessarily transfer easily to another, and advisors from outside the host country face difficulties such as a lack of professional contacts and personal networks in the foreign

Table 1. Advising Models

Theory	Foundation	Author	Premise	Fundamental processes
Bowen's theory	Psychology, human behavior	Bork (1993)	The family as an emotional unit affects how relationships are handled, and explains attitudes, feelings, actions, communications, and conflict resolution within the family firm	Parents, children, and each generational branch, all effect how messages, rules, and behavior expectations are handed down and carried through the family; these messages affect the business. If families do not learn how to change the original patterns of behavior they continually will revert back to them.
		Baker and Wiseman (1998)	How the advisor manages himself in the presence of others who are anxious or distressed	Self-awareness, calm, managing anxieties, thoughtfulness, broad views, remaining neutral and how advisors interpret issues, all affects the outcome of the advising process.
		Gillis-Donovan and Monyihan-Bradt (1990)	Bowen's concept of "triangles" suggests it is not possible to account for behavior in any system without considering at least three people	There is an invisible third party that others turn to for advice and support. Without recognizing this invisible inside advisor, it is difficult to understand the behavior within the triangle.
Organizational development	Process management	Hilburt-Davis and Senturia (1995)	Difference between process (how members say things), content, (what members say), and the importance of each	Process-content management steps include recognizing the congruence of content and process, understanding when the family is not ready to listen, distinguishing the advisor's needs and issues, addressing underlying issues, respecting resistance to change, and assisting the family to deal with change.
		Vago (2004)	Integrated change management connects feelings with planning to understand emotional implications of changes, choices, and connections between personal, family, and firm	By engaging the family firm members in meaningful conversations about their future, advisors help family firm members recognize their needs, greed, internal, and external influences to manage change.
Systems perspective	Systems theory	Gersick, Davis, Hampton, and Lansberg (1997)	Overlap of family, business, ownership, and life cycles creates complex challenges resulting in an emotional environment	Each of the three circles is important during the advising process. The type of advisor, the approach, and whether to use an advisory team depends on the stage of the firm.
Combination	Process/systems	Bork, Jaffe, Lane, Dashew, and Heilser (1996)	Family and business systems each have different traits and roles	Process-systems phases include the following: working with whole systems; balancing stakeholder needs; developing communication, business structures, and personal boundaries; helping with growth and change; and collaborating with others.
		Hilburt-Davis and Dyer (2003)	Action research model—family firms differ from nonfamily firms in systems perspective, process/content, multidisciplinary teamwork, and emotions	The advisor helps the family gather information about issues that is fed back to the family. These data are then used to develop a plan for change which the advisor assists to implement.

(*continued*)

Table 1. (continued)

Theory	Foundation	Author	Premise	Fundamental processes
		Jaffe, Dashew, Lane, Paul, and Bork (2006)	Aspen Business Group model—focuses on structural changes and relationship shifts. It emphasizes importance to structures, communication, governance mechanisms, and development of essential documents	Elements of Aspen Business Group include the following: engage the whole system; use process consultation and interventions to establish communication, governance structures, team, and skill building; include the family's advisory system; move individuals and systems in positive directions; reframe experiences positively; create a context of trust, integrity, and communication; help members of family firms and individuals become more differentiated; and recognize that the system has its own time frame.
		Moncrief-Stuart, Paul, and Craig (2006)	Aspen Family Business Inventory—asserts that traditional assessments do not capture the complexities of the dual system	Aspen Family Business Inventory is made up of 10 scales with 10 questions in each scale that focus on how the family manages personal and business relationships.
Family therapy	Good relationships are the basis for a strong firm	Kadis and McClendon (2006)	Reconciliation model—centers on mending relationships that have deteriorated because of past issues	Key elements include the following: recognize patterns of interaction that negatively affect the firm and family, help family reconsider relationships by facing present and past issues, and rebuild relationships by creating a positive environment and cohesion.
		Kaye (1991)	Conflict-resolution model—conflicts arise from issues other than those being disputed. In family firms members cannot walk away from issues; they share long-term goals and have concurrent roles in intersecting systems	Conflicts are within groups as opposed to between groups; these conflicts follow patterns and are based on undiscussed issues, where members react to one another in ways that prolong and exacerbate the problem. By mapping out the conflict cycle, advisors can determine how to unlock the cycle.
		Flemons and Cole (1992)	Family and firm are two contexts with distinct boundaries, serving as a separation and a connection, but are still defined in relation to the other	Advisors help family firms establish and identify context markers that establish the boundaries that separate the family from the business.

country (Vago, 2006). These varying contexts are reviewed below.

National Contexts

The diversity of cultures in other countries has important implications for advising family firms. Authors suggest that the cultural heritage, religion, and traditions, as well as the economic and political conditions of the host country can all affect the advising process (Vago, 2006). The research that was reviewed on advising in national contexts can be classified into three broad dimensions: religion, insularity, and collectivism.

Differences across religions influence both a country's laws and traditions. Knowledge of these differences can have consequences for how an advisor approaches

the advising process and the subsequent recommendations (Ward, 2000). For example, Paul, Munajjed, and Alacaklioglu (2006) note how in Saudi Arabia it is critical for advisors to be well versed in Sharia law. These laws, which are based on the Koran, govern inheritance laws and affect issues surrounding succession and how the wealth is divided up among wives and children. Religion in Saudi Arabia, as well as in other Middle Eastern and African countries, allows men to have multiple wives. This increases both the complexity of family firm relationships and the challenges surrounding succession planning (Paul et al., 2006).

To illustrate further, in India management is based on three primary systems that are rooted in religion: the caste, the *jajmani*, and the *panchayat* systems. As explained by Karofsky (2000), the caste system creates societal layers by differentiating between classes. The jajmani system defines the transactional norms among those layers of classes. The panchayat system brings equality to the castes, where members of the panchayat group act as arbitrators and social leaders. If advisors can assume a panchayat-type role they are more likely to be listened to and trusted. To take on this role, Karofsky (2000) asserts that advisors need to build confidence and trust, respect the family and their wisdom, and yet not become emotionally entangled.

Insularity refers to how open the country and its culture are of outsiders and hiring external advisors. Insularity stems from a number of different origins, including cultures that place great importance on privacy and secrecy, economic development, and a preference for advisors from one's own culture (Vago, 2006). For example, Lansberg and Perrow (1991) suggest that in Central and South America the need for privacy and secrecy renders family firms reluctant to hire advisors. Hassid and Maggina (1993) also find this reluctance to confide in outsiders in Greek cultures. In a study of Greek family firms, the authors find that firms prefer to turn to the family itself as their source of advice. Similarly, Donckels and Lambrecht (1999) show that East Central European family firms shy away from obtaining outside advice, choosing instead to rely on relatives and peer networks. Reasons cited for not using advisors include high costs, a lack of confidence in knowledge, concerns over confidentiality, aggressive sales methods, and lack of follow-up (Donckels & Lambrecht, 1999). Conversely, other cultures are simply low-trust societies. Bork (2006) asserts that Turkish locals mistrust even their own friends or families. As a result, there is little in the way of an advisory system.

Many less developed economies have few professional family firm advisors, which also affects how open family firms are to seeking advisors. As of 2006, there were only two advisors with Family Firm Institute membership in Trinidad and Tobago[3] (Rahael, 2006) and in Turkey (Bork, 2006). In South Korea, which is quickly growing economically, 87% of firms are family firms yet there are no family business advising firms. Instead, firms rely on a small number of websites for advice (Kim, 2006). Similarly, in Chile where 93% of firms are family firms, there is only one firm that advises to family businesses (Yunis, 2006).

When family firms from insular cultures do turn to advisors there is often a preference to rely on advisors native to the country. These advisors have intimate knowledge of the language, culture, and policies. For example, Mello (2006) contends that Brazilian firms prefer to rely on local advisors who are aware of the social and political prestige of family firms, and how the devaluation of the currency affects many strategic decisions. In a survey of 331 family firms, Adendorff, Boshoff, Court, and Radloff (2005) confirm similar arguments by showing that Greek family firms are more likely to turn to advisors from within their own ethnic circle.

Collective oriented cultures focus on the significance of family harmony, social standing, and relationships. To illustrate, in India family harmony is more important to one's status than success in the family firm (Karofsky, 2000). Individual identity is also based on family and social relatedness as opposed to task knowledge. Consequently, although advisors require task knowledge, Karofsky (2000) asserts that they also need to become pseudofamily members in order for family firms to share and discuss the true issues. Other cultures have similar beliefs. For example, in Lebanon, family firms enhance one's social standing as opposed to be seen as a money-generating activity (Fahed-Sreih, 2006). In Brazil (Mello, 2006), Chile (Yunis, 2006), and many other countries in Central and South America (Lansberg & Perrow, 1991) the family name, harmony, honor, values, and respect to the founder are the central focus. Families are proud of their name and each generation is responsible for the name's preservation.

Organizational Contexts

In addition to national contexts, advisors face numerous organizational contexts that affect the advising process. The major ones identified in the literature

include developmental stages, copreneurs, conflicts, health issues, succession, and reluctance to heed advice.

Family firms in different generational phases differ in their needs for advice. Advice needs decrease from the first to the second generation as family experience increases yet increase from the second to the third generation as task conflict increases (Bammens, Voordeckers, & Gils, 2008). Gersick et al. (1997) provide a thoughtful overview of how the advising process is affected by developmental stages. In the early stages owners benefit most from having a personal relationship with a trusted advisor. The advisor often remains behind the scenes, supporting and challenging the owner, providing a broad perspective, and making referrals to experts where necessary. In the second generation, issues center on family interrelationships. Understanding the relationship between family dynamics and the firm, and securing the trust of all the family members become important. In addition, experts on wealth management and estate planning are often required. Once the firm moves into a more complex structure, such as a cousin consortium, it begins to resemble a nonfamily firm and formal structures, policies, and processes become more salient. At this stage often a team of multidisciplinary advisors is best suited (Gersick et al., 1997).

Copreneurs, defined as couples who are in business together, have patterns of interrelations that may be destructive to the family and the firm. Hilburt-Davis and Dyer (2003) describe how patterns of conflict, distancing, pursuer/avoider, over-/underfunctioner, and triangulation may all present risks to the firm. For example, couples in conflict may be unable to work together to develop a shared vision for the firm and their anger may spill over into the business. Similarly, couples who distance themselves from one another may send duplicate or contradictory messages to employees, duplicate one another's work, and generally be ineffective communicators. Hilburt-Davis and Dyer (2003) suggest that advisors work with couples to develop formal agreements, structures, and processes, and yet be cautious with respect to becoming involved and taking sides.

In a survey of advisors, Jaffe et al. (1997) find that more than half of their clients have family conflicts that make it difficult for them to follow business advice. Conflicts include issues of equality, collaboration, age, and gender (Astrachan & McMillan, 2006). Such conflicts spill over into the business and have implications for content experts who are not trained to deal with this relational component of advising (White, 2007). For example, in a consulting example Babicky (1987) describes how surface issues within the firm could not be solved until the family conflicts were resolved. Authors therefore suggest that advisors need to be aware of family conflicts, assess their own skill levels to manage such conflicts, and make referrals to family-dynamics professionals as appropriate (Grubman & Jaffe, 2010).

Health issues affecting family firms include elder health, substance, and process (e.g., gambling) addictions, learning disorders, and mental health problems (Bork, 1993; Bork et al., 1996; Grubman & Jaffe, 2010; Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003). Scholars maintain that the first challenge is to recognize that there is an issue, as the family and business will have developed coping mechanisms to deal with the problem, including hiding or denying its existence (Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003). The skills required to assist the family firm in managing these issues are generally beyond the scope of family firm advisors and authors contend that advisors best refer the family to the appropriate experts (Hilburt-Davis & Dyer, 2003).

Advising on succession takes special consideration as it is based on a process of continuity as opposed to a singular event (Gersick et al., 1997). Advisors perform a key role in succession as they are often the first ones to broach the subject, assist in planning and implementation, determine optimal timing, and provide postsuccession support (Montgomery & Sinclair 2000; Upton et al., 1993). Advisors can also aid families in recognizing when it is not in their best interest to pass on the firm to the next generation and instead advise on alternate options (Drozdow, 1998; Kaye, 1996, 1998; Levinson, 1983).

A number of authors propose specific processes for succession. For example, Chrisman et al. (2009) offer an eight-step process that prepares the family to develop their own solutions; organize goals, policies, and successor criteria; groom the incumbent; and direct the timing and implementation. Ayres (1998) also provides prescriptive steps but focuses more on the senior generation's needs to maintain a desired lifestyle versus the firm's ability to pay. In turn, the guidelines provided by Scott (2000) include more directive steps, such as the importance of having the incumbent gain outside experience, allowing the incoming generation to make their own mistakes, and beginning the succession planning early.

Last, a number of authors contend that the reluctance to heed advice is a critical challenge. Unless there is a

sincere desire on the family's part to compromise for the sake of the firm, results will be unsatisfactory (Blank, 1987). Often the family member who seeks advice is the one with pain but not power. For example, Levinson (1983, p. 76) notes that the most difficult part of advising is when the head of the family firm does not have "enough pain to want to change." It is often only when their own efforts have failed that they will turn to an advisor (Vago, 2004).

The literature asserts that the reluctance to heed advice occurs for multiple reasons. For example, family firms are known for privacy and are averse to going outside their inner circle for advice (Chua et al., 2003; Rue & Ibrahim, 1996) or being told what to do by outsiders (Nash, 1988). Family firms may also perceive that advisors might pressure them to change (Vago, 2004). In a survey of 303 family firms, Poza, Hanlon, and Kishida (2004) confirm these arguments and find that owners resist efforts by advisors. Research further suggests that a family firm's acceptance of advice may be tied to its level of inward focus. In a survey of 489 U.S. family firms, Sundaramurthy and Dean (2008) show that advice from external advisors is related to the firm's level of internationalization. Family firms that are more externally focused are more apt to accept external advice and to engage in international expansion.

National and organizational contexts have a salient impact on the advising process. Advising in other countries or addressing firm-level issues, all affect how advisors can effectively intervene and add value. Apart from a small number of surveys, much of the literature is based on descriptions or prescriptions derived from advisor experience. Furthermore, research on national contexts has focused on individual countries, yet cultural differences arise within and across countries. Although the articles reviewed provide insights and inform us firsthand about challenges in advising in alternate contexts, there remains significant opportunity for scholars to explore theoretical questions regarding the contexts and conditions surrounding advising.

Outcomes

Although many of the articles reviewed allude to the desired and satisfactory outcomes of engaging advisors (e.g., more effective decision making, improved relationships, and increased trust), there are a limited number of studies that explicitly measure outcomes. These can be categorized into firm outcomes and family outcomes and are reviewed below.

Firm Outcomes

Researchers find that having advisors leads to a number of positive firm outcomes, including enhanced decision quality, increased planning, diversity, breadth of knowledge, and improved firm performance. For example, in a survey of 331 Greek firms, Adendorff et al. (2005) find that family firm members have emotional attachments to the core business and lack objectivity in certain business decisions. In the study, advisors helped family firm members separate personal goals from company objectives and reduce emotionally charged issues.

The majority of studies focus on the outcomes of advice provided by boards. To illustrate, Blumentritt's (2006) survey of 133 U.S. family firms shows that an important outcome of board advice is increased planning. He finds that family firms with advisory boards are 300% more likely to engage in strategic planning. They are also more likely to engage in succession as opposed to firms that only have a board of directors or no board at all. Advice provided by board advisors may also lead to improved performance. In a survey of 72 Singapore family firms, Lee, Phan, and Yoshikawa (2008) show that board advisors complement CEO knowledge by providing breadth of knowledge, leading to enhanced postsuccession firm performance. Their findings also suggest that advisees are an important part of the equation: Only when successors have appropriate work experience are they able to successfully leverage advice.

Other scholars also find that advice from boards increases the diversity of knowledge. In a survey of 192 Finnish family firms, Mustakallio et al. (2002) study how active the board is in providing counsel on strategic decisions and how often family firm members solicit the board's advice. The authors find that by questioning assumptions and providing objective advice, board members encourage family firm members to consider alternate courses of action. This results in enhanced strategic decision quality and increased commitment to execute decisions.

It is also argued that by providing objective advice and increasing the diversity of knowledge boards decrease firm dependence on the owner. Findings though have been mixed. In a survey of 765 Canadian

family firms, Feltham, Feltham, and Barnett (2005) did not find support for these arguments. They find that neither advisory boards nor boards of directors reduce dependence. However, in a survey of Lebanese family firms, Fahed-Sreih and Djoundourian (2006) substantiate the claim that firms with advisory boards are less likely to centralize their decision making in one person and are more likely to take advice into consideration when making decisions and planning. Conversely, it has also been suggested that boards may negatively affect the decision-making process. In a survey of boards of Italian family firms, Corbetta and Tomaselli (1996) find that family firms believe that boards slow the decision-making process.

Family Outcomes

According to Kaye (1998), the quality of family relationships is the true measure of an advisor's success. The goal of an advisor "should not be to increase the number of family businesses that survive into the next generation, but to *narrow* the number to only those whose family businesses enhance their lives"(Kaye, 1998, p. 280). In support of this argument, Poza et al. (2004) find that family relationships do indeed benefit from heeding advice. After surveying 79 firms and 303 family firm members they came to the conclusion that receiving advice from an advisory board results in increased family unity, working cooperatively, and fewer conflicts.

Similarly, other authors suggest that having an advisor improves the ability of family members to manage tensions and conflicts (Swartz, 1989). Outcomes include fewer conflicts, improved interrelationships, and increased trust among family members (Jaffe & Lane, 2004; LaChapelle & Barnes, 1998; Lambrecht & Lievens, 2008). In a theoretical article, Sundaramurthy (2008) proposes that external advisors increase family competence trust, which is the belief that parties entrusted with a job are both willing and capable of performing it well. In developing competence trust, firms are better able to build bridges between siblings and between parents and siblings, resolve retirement and ownership issues, balance emotional dynamics, become more objective, and clarify family members' roles (Sundaramurthy 2008).

In summary, there are a limited number of studies on advising outcomes. As noted by Astrachan and McMillan (2006), "no commonly held views of measures are available to gauge the success of a consultation. And perhaps most notably, no studies have explored the long- or short-term efficacy of family business consultation or various interventions" (p. 353). The studies reviewed do suggest that advice can lead to enhanced planning, knowledge, performance, and family unity, yet most focus on the role of boards. Many family firms use both family- and firm-specific advisors simultaneously. As a result, there may be interaction effects of the different types of advisors that are as of yet unexplored. Furthermore, as suggested by Lee et al. (2008), the advisee may also have an effect on the outcome of the advice. It may depend on his or her level of experience or his or her willingness to accept advice. This relatively blank canvas provides an opportunity for scholars to make rich contributions to the literature on advice outcomes.

Developing a Research Framework for Advising Family Firms

In surveying the extant literature, advising family firms appears to be well established in terms of applied research. However, there remains to date a lack of theory building. Although the research reviewed contributes to a broad understanding of advising, its cumulative impact is limited by the scope of issues addressed, a lack of standardized research constructs and theoretical concepts, and limited research methods. As suggested by Ward (1990), few studies have researched how advisors make a difference or have validated any of their approaches. Consequently, there is a need to heed Astrachan and McMillan's (2006) call for research on the effectiveness of methods and interventions on advising family firms.

Although many of the articles are based on descriptive cases and firsthand experiences, they allow us to get close to the action of advising. They reveal facts, opinions, and insights about advising. Yet without adhering to academically rigorous methodologies, these descriptive articles may also result in bias, poor recall, and poor descriptions (e.g., Yin, 1989). What is needed is more collaboration between practitioners and researchers. Practitioners can identify the actions and access sources. Researchers must search for the meaning of those actions, their interlinkages, and what the act represents to develop theoretical propositions. We should learn

from these studies and then apply the theoretical and empirical research findings back to practice.

To develop theory and to inform practice, researchers need to tease out the soft variables and the underlying intricacies and dynamism of family firm advising relationships. As per Bacharach (1989), "the primary goal of a theory is to answer the questions of how, when, and why, unlike the goal of description, which is to answer the question of what" (p. 498). The predominantly descriptive and prescriptive studies allow us to explore the "what," but in order to develop the theory we must now ask ourselves how and why advisors advise, understand the context, and explore if they are "inflicting unintended damage" (Astrachan & McMillan, 2006, p. 362).

At the same time, this review also reveals that an overarching framework exists that may organize the existing contributions into a more coherent perspective and that may serve to motivate future research. By pulling together the various contributions, this framework is a first step toward developing theoretical arguments that address the nature of the family firm–advisor relationship and tap the process of advising. The major dimensions that have been emphasized and their representative citations are modeled in Figure 2. Arrows have been omitted as relationships may be reciprocal, and the causality and flow of processes remain to date unknown. Figure 2 reflects the associations that have been examined in prior contributions and that may be explored in future research. The model thereby helps facilitate a synthesis of the past to identify areas for future research. For example, advisor choice may be affected by type, characteristics, competencies, and contexts. Each of these may also have an effect on the intervention process and the advising models used.

In the following sections, I develop suggestions for future research in accordance with the dimensions identified in the review. Both Sharma (2004) and Chrisman, Chua, and Sharma (2005) contend that family firm research is best advanced by applying and adapting established mainstream management theories to family business. There are a number of scholars in management who have studied advisors from which family firm research could borrow, and in return family firm scholars may then inform the general literature on advising. As a result, I also suggest below several areas from which future researchers might draw.

Advisor Types and Their Attributes

There is a need for a holistic exploration of advisor types and their respective attributes. Currently, authors describe advisor types and their attributes in isolation from one another without linking studies to develop a cumulative knowledge base. Many of these articles are descriptive in nature, providing information about a specific type of advisor and the desired characteristics and competencies. Yet no scholarly work has studied the different advisor types or systematically categorized them. Little is also known about the differences between internal and external advisors, their attributes, and the type of advice they provide. Developing a typology of advisors that extends beyond the major categories of content experts and process consultants and teases apart their distinctions would be an important first step toward establishing a research area on advising family firms. Both advisor types and their attributes may also have a significant effect on other components of the advising process. A more theoretically grounded investigation of advisors and their attributes may help develop our understanding of how and why different types of advisors and desired characteristics and competencies emerge.

Choosing Effective Advisors

To date, only a limited number of authors have explored how family firms choose advisors. When sharing their sacrosanct secrets family firms are exposed to the risk of opportunism. This risk suggests a need for the careful screening and selection of advisors, and negotiating incentives that discourage opportunistic tendencies. Future research could explore the underlying process of choice and what factors may lead to or discourage opportunistic tendencies. While surveys have begun to provide us with data on how external advisors are engaged by the firm, how are internal advisors chosen? It may be that internal or trusted advisors are not explicitly chosen but over time they emerge. Yet we know little about how this process occurs.

We also know little about why family firms seek advice—What factors at the individual, group, and organizational level encourage (or discourage) family firms to seek and heed advice? Scholars may also explore other theories that would help inform who family firms turn to for advice, such as social network theory. For example, although social network theory suggests that

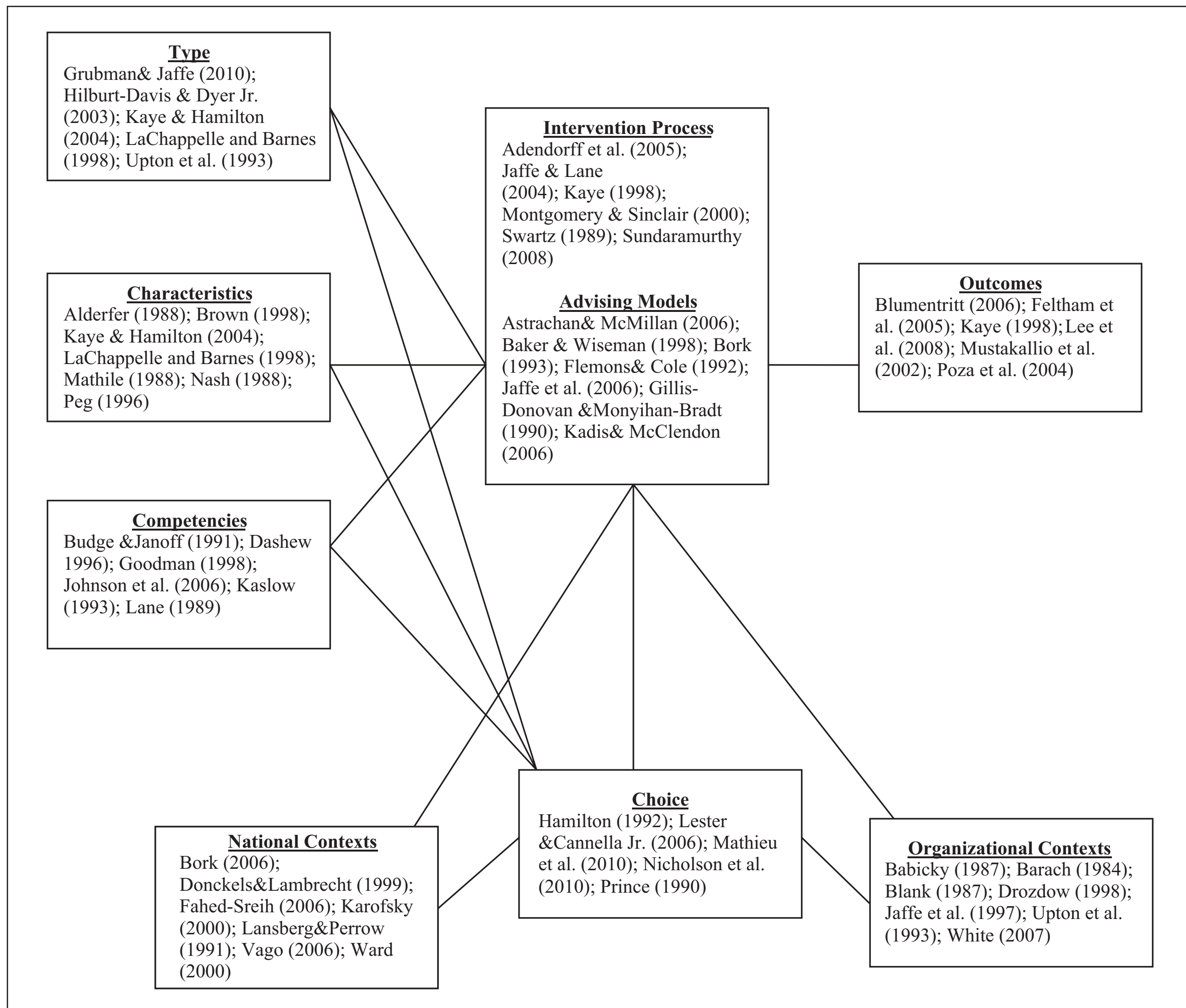

Figure 2. Organizing framework for research on advising family firms

individuals are more willing to seek and accept advice from others who share similar characteristics, seeking advice from those who are dissimilar can provide more objective advice (e.g., McDonald, Khanna, & Westphal, 2008; McDonald & Westphal, 2003). Future researchers could explore the factors that affect a family firm's advice-seeking behaviors and that encourage the selection of advisors who are either more similar or dissimilar, and the effect on outcomes.

The Process of Advising

Although authors have developed individual models of advising based on theories from other disciplines, they have not tested the validity of the models. Which ones work under what conditions and what are their respective outcomes? Lane (1989) notes that as the field of advising continues to develop "it is important to develop effective models of helping" (p. 5). Yet to further our

understanding to help family firms, what is needed is the development of the constructs and theory underlying the advising process.

Toward this end, future research would benefit from incorporating more constructs tied to advising, such as Sundaramurthy's (2008) research on competence trust. To illustrate, as trust is important in advisor–family firm relationships, we need theoretical explanations, falsifiable hypotheses, and empirical tests that tap into the elements of trust and their relationships in the process of advising. Future researchers may undertake longitudinal studies that explain patterns in the evolution of advisors' influence over time and how the nature of the relationship changes as both parties increase their trust in one another.

We also know that change is an important part of the intervention process, yet no theoretical or empirical studies have explored how advisors interpret and sell change. How do advisors help family firms make sense of and cope with change? How do advisors lead the process of change? An important part of the change process is the advisor's ability to capture and direct family firm members' attentions to particular issues and help them understand these issues. How do advisors capture and influence family member's attention? How do they decide what issues to bring to the family's attention? Why are some advisors able to have a greater influence? How do advisors ascertain what is the right time, place, issue, and way to approach family firm members? When and to what extent are these efforts successful in influencing the family firm's perception, and does this serve the family firm's purpose?

No one to date has modeled family firm–advisor relations. Using qualitative methods such as grounded theory, researchers could explore how this relationship develops and evolves over time. There are numerous variables that could affect an advisor's effectiveness. For example, as the advisor develops a closer relationship to the family, how do these strengthening ties affect the advising process? Do advisors become more effective as they develop a deeper understanding and are let into the family secrets, or does it affect and diminish their independence?

Moreover, the literature views the advising process from the stance of the advisor. Yet advice giving, seeking, and taking (or leaving) are related and reciprocal activities. In order to understand what leads to effective advising, perhaps one needs to first appreciate why family firms seek advice and then take or leave advice. Future researchers would be well served to identify the triggers and enablers that lead to advice-seeking and advice-taking/advice-leaving behavior. For example, variables to consider regarding advice-taking/advice-leaving may pertain to who advises, what is advised, how it is advised, or the characteristics of the advisee(s).

Contexts

As outlined in the review, individuals with different cultural orientations perceive, interpret, and respond to advising differently. These differences affect the way that advisors from other cultures interact with host-country family firms and the richness of the family firm–advisor relationship. For example, asking direct questions in Asia may create loss of face, yet the same directness may be acceptable in a North American context. Furthermore, advisors socialized by different national cultures vary in the extent to which they are influenced by contextual cues. These theoretical differences suggest that advisors from different cultures will differ in the way they approach the advising process, and the way they assist family firm members to understand issues. Contextual cues, taken together with attributes of the context and the strategies used by the advisor, will influence the advisor's ability and the effectiveness of the advising process. These theoretical underpinnings of the role that national and cultural contexts have on the advising process remain unexplored, providing a fertile environment for future research.

Contextual cues arise not only from national contexts but also from organizational ones. Such cues may include perceptions of formal and informal firm support, open-mindedness, and the quality of the relationship between the advisor and family firm members. Scholars could examine whether advisors need to use specific framing language depending on the context that fits divergent clients' preferences. How do the strategies that advisors use to help family firms understand issues differ in the varying contexts? How do advisors determine if the family firm context is favorable or unfavorable? What are the contextual cues that suggest such a positive (or negative) context? Advice-giving, advice-seeking, and advice-taking behaviors are all influenced by the national or organizational context. How does the organization's internal environment support (or weaken) these processes?

Outcomes

The review shows that there are limited studies that establish links between advising activities and family firm outcomes. There is little evidence therefore concerning when and to what extent advisors succeed in influencing family firms and the effect on firm performance. Moreover, although it is often assumed that there is a positive association between advisors and positive outcomes, there is a strong likelihood that advice also results in negative outcomes.

A lack of theoretical rationale may explain why this area has remained relatively unexplored, as without theory it is problematic to argue for a cause-and-effect relationship. By applying and adapting mainstream management theories, scholars may begin to develop a theoretically grounded research agenda. For example, advising family firms shares fundamental assumptions with the resource-based view. Assuming that advisors are engaged because there is a gap between the knowledge and capabilities of the family firm and what is required for successful results, advisors can act as a knowledge resource to fill that gap. By transmitting both tacit and explicit knowledge through effective interventions, advisors may assist the firm in developing knowledge resources that lead to fruitful outcomes (e.g., Chrisman & McMullan, 2000).

Positive and negative outcomes may be measured at intermediate and organizational levels. Intermediate-level outcomes are more difficult to identify and understand, yet are critical if family relationship quality is a critical measure of success (e.g., Kaye, 1998). Using case studies and surveys scholars can research the effectiveness of internal processes, how information is interpreted, capability development, and decision quality. Affective intermediate outcomes such as attitudes, values, communication, and collective interrelations may also be studied. At the organizational level, researchers would be well served to explore the relationship between advisor activity and firm performance. These activities may include specific elements of strategic planning, efficiency of implementation, innovation, growth, financial performance, and survival.

Family firm scholars can also draw from previous management research on advising outcomes. For example, research on leader–member exchange suggests that frequent advisory interactions yield higher performance (Bauer & Green, 1996). Furthermore, research on social ties shows that the level of advice is positively related to firm performance (Westphal, 1999). In an inductive study on decision making, Eisenhardt (1989) finds that CEOs make faster decisions when they use a two-tiered advice process. In her study, although multiple members of the executive team give advice, the CEO focuses on advice given by the most experienced advisors. These trusted advisors help quicken the development of alternatives, provide a sounding board, and are trustworthy, thereby allowing the CEO to be open. These are only some examples of empirical studies that scholars can draw on and extend to the family firm context.

Last, there is a need for links between each of the dimensions. The development of theory that links conditions leading to, and outcomes flowing from, the intervention process is as important as the advising process itself. For example, researchers could examine how the characteristics, functional background, and relationships that advisors have with the family affect the effectiveness and the outcome of advice. To illustrate, social network theory suggests that CEOs who rely on like-minded advisors do not rectify poorly performing strategies, ultimately undermining firm performance (e.g., McDonald & Westphal, 2003).

By using the framework in this review, scholars could develop a coherent stream of research leading to a cumulative knowledge base on advising. There is a need for both substantive theory that focuses on family firm issues, and grounded theory that allows for higher order implications, captures core concepts, and allows for a deeper understanding. For example, theory could be developed based on how advisors contribute to strategic decision making. Following, researchers could draw from established theories to develop propositions. Subsequently, these relationships could be explored empirically using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. In doing so, researchers may capture the breadth of advisors' activities as well as their antecedents and consequences. This review presents only a representative sample of areas that are unaddressed. Other issues warrant further investigation.

This literature review suggests that advisors may fulfill family firm needs. Yet the process itself remains shielded. We need to understand the evolution of the family firm–advisor relationship, the process of advising, and its outcomes. These dimensions are strongly interlinked and may provide for an initial core set of variables. Conceptualizing the variables captured by the contributions reviewed in an integrative framework as

presented here, is a first step toward advancing our theoretical understanding of advising family firms.

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Notes

1. The literature does not differentiate between *advisors* and *consultants* and on occasion uses them synonymously, where authors suggest that advisors *consult* and consultants *advise*. To avoid confusion I use the term *advisor* unless quoting authors. I thank the helpful comment of one of the reviewers for bringing this to my attention.
2. See Hilburt-Davis and Dyer (2003) for a detailed overview of prescriptive steps in advising family firms.
3. In many countries Family Firm Institute membership is a recognized signal of family firm advising professionalism.

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Bio

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