3 Methodology

3.1 Overview of the Chapter

In order to approach the research questions a suitable method has to be applied. First of all it must be decided whether to follow a qualitative or quantitative research design. Therefore, the first explanations are dedicated to the clarification of the differences between those two types of research design and to the reason why a qualitative approach is used. Usually growth research is associated with quantitative studies. However, this research is concerned with finding out "why" and "how" firms grow and therefore, a qualitative research design is needed. To secure quality standards and ensure the traceability of the qualitative results, the evaluation criteria and their implementation in this dissertation are explained. The methodology chapter is so extensive because the suitability of this method to an otherwise mainly quantitatively investigated phenomenon is raised as a research question (Q. 5).

Following the remarks on the reasons for qualitative research and its evaluation criteria, the relationship between the world and the subject observing this world (world-subject connection) is clarified by reviewing and deciding on a research philosophy (3.4). Having described the research philosophies, the decision of the chosen research strategy is presented. As the aim is to gain insights into the growth processes of family firms and the development of theoretical knowledge about this process, a strategy supporting these goals is found by applying Grounded Theory methodology. One advantage of using a Grounded Theory strategy is that existent theoretical concepts can enrich the construction of reality given by the interview partners within theory building. Sub-chapter 3.5 will explain why this strategy is used.

Having explained which research strategy is pursued, sub-chapter 3.6 outlines the time horizon of the research design. The cornerstones of research on processes are described in this context.

Following the elaboration of the time horizon, the procedure of data collection is shown by describing the sampling method and the characteristics of the sample, as well as the content and procedure of the interviews.

The research objects are large and old family businesses that experienced growth spurts in later generations. These firms are therefore capable of providing intensive insights into the processes concerning growth. Believing that the organizations are reflections of the top management team (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) the CEO in charge during the researched time frame was approached to gain reliable and valuable information about on the process of growth.

The interviews held with the representatives of the companies are semi-structured and narration-based, supported by an iterative, adapting guideline. The role of the researcher in the research process is especially acknowledged in sub-chapter 3.7.2.3. Furthermore, first reflections on the characteristics of the interviewees are given. To

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conclude the chapter, the role and use of secondary data and the construct of Theoretical Saturation are outlined.

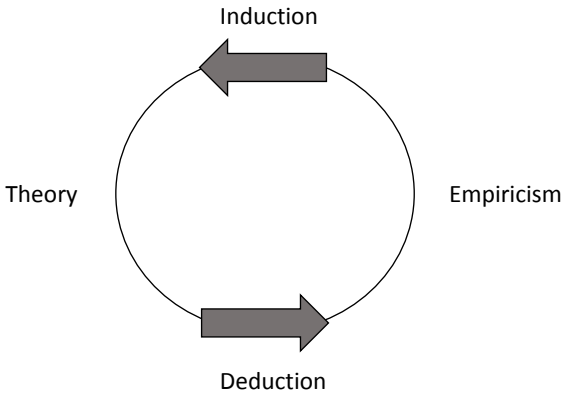
3.2 Qualitative Research and Reasons for Its Application

There are two different ways to approach a research question or phenomenon: Qualitative and quantitative. The major difference is the interplay between theory and empiricism. Quantitative methods use extant theories as basis to prove theoretical constructions through empirical observation (deduction). If theory on the researched topic is available and hypotheses can be derived from existing literature, a deductive approach is suitable. This approach is used to falsify or verify theory, generalizing from the general to the specific.

Qualitative methods use empirical observations as a basis and build theoretical concepts from empiricism (induction) (Rost, 2003). Starting the research with data collection on a specific phenomenon due to scarce or no existing theory is an inductive approach. Induction is used to build theory by generalizing from the specific to the general.

This circular model shows that qualitative and quantitative processes are not competing directions but two mutually supportive processes (Rost, 2000, 2003). Mixed methods designs combine both approaches (e.g. Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 165-174)[64].

Figure 42 Induction vs. Deduction



Source: Author's own figure (adapted from Rost, 2003)

[64] See Saunders et al. (2016) for a detailed description of mixed methods approaches.

The research on growth is mostly associated with quantitative studies (Shepherd & Wiklund, 2009) measuring the input and output factors of growth. Some of these have been described in chapter 2.

As described in chapter 1, a variety of quantitative research projects was done to lay the basis for the observations of the spurts. The "typical" growth development as well as the thoughts on growth corridors (fig. 2 and 3) are based on extensive quantitative calculations and some qualitative studies.

Although the input and output factors are observable and quantitatively presentable, this research is interested in the in-between process which cannot be observed and measured. The process is particularly focused on depicting which dimensions influence family firms' growth and how these dimensions are shaped by the family. The literature review has shown that there are many theories of firms' growth answering particular sub-questions of the phenomenon of growth. The more general theories, for example one of the most famous ones, presented by Penrose, propose some general theoretical thoughts on how to approach the research questions. Yet, no combination of theory or literature or both could be found which proposes testable hypotheses explaining the family influenced dimensions of growth. Therefore, qualitative, theory building research is needed.

Referring to Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 3), Gepart (2004, p. 455) states that "Qualitative research addresses questions about how social experience is created and given meaning and produces representations of the world that make the world visible". As this quote shows, qualitative research is designed to get a better understanding of the process of growth taking place within the family firm. Qualitative research supports the development of guidelines for practitioners.

In conclusion, an extensive quantitative research basis based on the previous research done within this project and by other growth researchers (chapter 1) creates the need for qualitative research which is carried out in this dissertation. This approach tries to balance the perspectives (of qualitative and quantitative) to get a holistic understanding not only of "how much growth" but also of "why and how to grow".

3.3 Evaluation Criteria for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research aims to approach phenomena with the greatest possible openness and flexibility to allow room for the discovery of new, hitherto unknown phenomena or facts (Flick, Kardorff, & Steinke, 2017). The goal of qualitative research is the development of new theories and models. Statistical generalizability and representativeness are not aimed at with qualitative research (Barbour, 2001). Subjectivity and self-reflexivity[65] are striking signs of qualitative research (Mey & Ruppel, 2018, p. 6). Qualitative research focuses on idiosyncrasies and processual

[65] For the important difference between reflexivity and reflection, see Moldaschl (2010).

phenomena, therefore, it is important, as stated within the description of theoretical sampling, to choose the research objects according to their information density and not according to their comparability. Each research object should contribute something new to the research process until Theoretical Saturation (sub-chapter 3.7.4) has been reached. Qualitative research must face the accusation of high subjectivity. Therefore, some quality criteria must be fulfilled in order to enfeeble such allegations of subjectivity and to allow the opportunity to evaluate qualitative research.

Steinke (2017) distinguishes between three basic positions for the evaluation of qualitative research. The first position asserts that quantitative criteria could be used for evaluating qualitative research, such as objectivity, reliability and validity adapted from statistical, hypothesis-verifying research. Researchers applying this view argue that there are uniform criteria of research which could be adapted to each kind of research. Steinke (2017) mentions that some researchers have added qualitative criteria such as credibility to the set of quantitative criteria (Miles & Huberman, 1994). One often used example of quantitative criteria for qualitative research is multiple coding, also known as inter-rater or inter-coder reliability[66], which is a useful tool to overcome the potential subjectivity on the level of analysis (Barbour, 2001). An independent researcher should cross-check parts of the coded data set to make sure the interpretations of the data are not divergent (Barbour, 2001). There are several measurements to examine the inter-coder reliability, such as Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff, 2004, 2011) and the Holsti-reliability coefficients (Rössler, 2005, p. 190). In this dissertation, parts of the data have been coded by another individual who was not present during the interviews.

As a second basic position Steinke (2017) mentions researchers that deny that quantitative criteria could be used to evaluate qualitative research. These researchers recourse to the scientific-theoretical and methodological particularities of qualitative research by formulating their own suitable criteria.

One example Steinke (2017) mentions is the so called member check (e.g. Terhart, 1981, 1995; Kvale, 1995). To accomplish this kind of communicative validation, the results of the data analysis are presented to the former interviewees to examine the validity of the results.

To fulfill these criteria the derived model was presented to and discussed with some of the former interviewees.

Another example given by Steinke (2017) is triangulation. According to Flick (2017), the term triangulation refers to the consideration of a research object from at least two points of view. Triangulation can be discussed as a connection of quantitative and qualitative research (Jick, 1979, 1983), but also within qualitative research (Flick, 2017,

[66] See Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2013) for a comprehensive discussion of useful tools and challenges of inter-coder reliability.

p. 309). Denzin (1978) considers triangulation a validation strategy and distinguishes between four types of triangulation. The methodical triangulation within a method and between different methods is the key concept of Denzin (1978). He further describes the investigator triangulation that uses different observers or interviewers for data generation. Approaching the research question by applying different theories is mentioned as theory triangulation. Data triangulation combines data collected at different points in time, from different locations and from different sources (Denzin, 1978). Triangulation plays as central role in Grounded Theory methodology as Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 65) describe that "slices of data" are important to create theory. "Slices of data" represent different kinds of data. The authors emphasize that the comparative analysis with different slices of data is necessary to test these slices against each other, to generate new knowledge and to develop a useful theory (Glaser & Stauss, 1967, pp. 65-69). Divergent results from different kinds of data can broaden knowledge. Convergent findings can support the generalization (Flick, 2017, p. 318). In conclusion, triangulation can be used as a validation strategy, as an approach to generalization and to broaden knowledge (Flick, 2017, p. 318). To engage in triangulation, more data sources are examined. In addition to the interview data, the annual reports and some material provided by the companies are evaluated.

As a third criterion, Steinke (2017) mentions the validation of the interview situation. The course of the interview is checked to see if the interviewees have answered sincerely. This is done by scrutinizing if there are any hints that the interview was not characterized by openness, trust, willingness to work and a possible small power gap as there should be (e.g. Groeben, Wahl, Schlee, & Scheele, 1988; Legewie, 1987). After each interview, the interview situation was evaluated by the researcher herself adding the perception of the atmosphere to the field notes.

Furthermore, Steinke (2017) points out that there are postmodern researchers who reject the existence of evaluation criteria (e.g.Richardson, 1994, p. 552; Shotter, 1990, p. 69).

Qualitative research is not directed towards intersubjective verifiability but towards intersubjective traceability (Steinke, 2017). Creating traceability is possible through the elaborated documentation of the preconceptions of the researcher, of the data collection, the rules of transcription, the data themselves, the data analysis, and the information sources, such as literal citations, indirect citations and interpretations of the researcher (Steinke, 2017). In addition to the field notes taken after and during the interview, memos were prepared during the coding process as described in sub-chapter 3.5.4.4. Another important criterion mentioned by Steinke (2017) is the application of codified procedures which offers a systematic procedure of coding, such as the steps of initial, focused and theoretical coding within constructivist Grounded Theory, which is applied in this dissertation. Corbin and Strauss (1990, p. 17) formulate seven criteria for evaluating the data analysis process:

"Criterion 1: How was the original sample selected? On what grounds (selective sampling)?

Criterion 2: *What major categories emerged?*

Criterion 3: *What were some of the events, incidents, actions, and so on that indicated some of these major categories?*

Criterion 4: *On the basis of what categories did theoretical sampling proceed? That is, how did theoretical formulations guide some of the data collection? After the theoretical sample was carried out, how representative did these categories prove to be?*

Criterion 5: *What were some of the hypotheses pertaining to relations among categories? On what grounds were they formulated and tested?*

Criterion 6: *Were there instances when hypotheses did not hold up against what was actually seen? How were the discrepancies accounted for? How did they affect the hypotheses?*

Criterion 7: *How and why was the core category selected? Was the selection sudden or gradual, difficult or easy? On what grounds were the final analytic decisions made? How did extensive "explanatory power" in relation to the phenomena under study and "relevance" as discussed earlier figure in the decisions?"*

The procedure of sampling can be found in sub-chapter 3.7.1. How the categories emerged and how they are related to one other can be found in chapter 4.

Having discussed actions to be taken to overcome the allegations of subjectivity, this section will outline how to evaluate the derived concepts and categories from a Grounded Theory perspective. Corbin and Strauss (1990, pp. 17-19) suggest seven criteria to gauge the empirical findings:

"Criterion 1: *Are concepts generated?*

Criterion 2: *Are the concepts systematically related?*

Criterion 3: *Are there many conceptual connections and are the categories well developed? Do the categories have conceptual density?*

Criterion 4: *Is there much variation built into the theory?*

Criterion 5: *Are the broader conditions that affect the phenomenon under study built into its explanation?*

Criterion 6: *Has "process" been taken into account?*

Criterion 7: *Do the theoretical findings seem significant and to what extent?"*

The evaluation criteria are important to ensure traceability. The quality criteria used in this dissertation are discussed in sub-chapter 4.7.1.

Having clarified and described which evaluation criteria are used, the research philosophy is presented next.

3.4 Research Philosophy

3.4.1 *Reviewed Philosophical Approaches*

The research philosophy describes the fundamental attitude of the researcher towards the generation of knowledge. Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144) particularly emphasize five different research philosophies: Positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, pragmatism. To distinguish between different theories of science approaches, Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144)[67] propose to clarify their different assumptions first: The philosophies make assumptions about the nature of reality by asking questions about the relationship between the world and the subject, such as, what is the world like, what are organizations like? These assumptions about the classification of the existing structures are known as *ontology*. Within the multidisciplinary research context of businesses, scholars can recourse to many resources such as numerical, textual, or visual data. Making assumptions about what can be seen as acceptable and valid knowledge is subsumed under the term *epistemology*. The assumptions about the role as researcher and the treatment of values and ethics are referred to as *axiology*. In the following section, five major philosophies are discussed based on their manifestations of these assumptions (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, & Bristow, 2016, pp. 135-144).

3.4.1.1 Positvism[68]

Ontology of Positivism

Positivism believes in one true reality which is real, external and independent. Hilbert (2009) describes that, building on the works of Compte, positivism was born during the 19th century meaning that the gaining of knowledge was based on empirical and thus measurable results. Science thus became verifiable. Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144) mention that empirical traceability became the core of scientific work. Positivism does not consider all theories of science. For example, the humanities are not considered in the positivistic approach (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, & Bristow, 2016, pp. 135-144).

Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144) continues summarizing positivism as follows:

[67] The whole section is based on the ideas of Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144).
[68] This sub-chapter is based on Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144). For further reading on positivism, see Remenyi, Williams, Money, and Swartz (1998).

Epistemology of Positivsm

Within positivism scientific, methods and observable facts are accepted as sources of knowledge. These sources produce law-like explanations as contributions to science.

Axiology of Positivism

The researcher is independent, neutral and conducts value-free research.

Summary and Appraisal of Positivism

Positivists mainly use deductive, highly structured and typically quantitative methods and large samples. Different sources of data can be analyzed. Positivism in business and management research sees organizations as real things such as other physical objects. Applying a positivist philosophy leads to the detection of causal relationships and generalizations by using measurable and observable knowledge to test hypotheses and challenge theories. Therefore, positivism is not suitable when following the aim to build an inductive and explorative theory.

3.4.1.2 Critical Realism[69]

Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144) summarize critical realism as follows:

Ontology of Critical Realism

Reality is seen as something that can neither be observed nor understood through knowledge. The structure of critical realism ontology distinguishes between three layers; the empirical, the actual and the real. Humans can observe sensations of reality (the empirical). The observed is only a small fraction of what humans could have seen (the actual). The underlying causes and mechanisms cannot be observed (the real). To understand reality, sensations are mentally processed by experiences to understand the causal mechanism underlying them.

Epistemology of Critical Realism

Knowledge is historically grounded and a product of the past, especially of human experience. Critical realism assumes that realities are socially constructed, therefore, representatives of critical realism cannot use statistical, quantitative methods to depict reality.

Axiology of Critical Realism

The role of values within critical realist positions is determined by social conditioning. If something really is what we think it is, this and that should happen. Considering a 3-D picture, if the figure displayed by the 3-D picture were reality, a person who runs into

[69] This sub-chapter is based on Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144). For further reading on critical realism, see Riege (2003).

it would get hurt. In reality, what we see is only a sensation. Therefore, the reality cannot be understood independently from its actors. Critical realists must be aware that experiences and cultural background could shape their projects.

Summary and Appraisal of Critical Realism

Assuming that reality consists of the mental processing of sensations and the belief that knowledge is historically situated and socially constructed, a critical realist could uses a variety of methods to construct reality. If the goal of the research is to create a bigger picture of what we actually see, adopting a critical realist perspective could be appropriate.

3.4.1.3 Interpretivism[70]

Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144) summarize interpretivism as follows:

Ontology of Interpretivism

Picking up the criticism of positivism, interpretivists see humans as creators of meaning and not as physical facts. In an organizational research context, this means a multi-perspective approach is needed, as different people create different meanings of a phenomenon. Accounting for different meanings and interpretations of reality, interpretivism assumes a socially constructed and complex reality.

Epistemology of Interpretivism

Interpretivists consider theories and concepts too simple to create knowledge. They use narratives, perceptions and individual descriptions to develop new viewpoints as contributions to knowledge.

Axiology of Interpretivism

Within interpretivist approaches the researcher himself/herself and his/her interpretation play a key role in the analytic process. The researcher should engage in reflexivity about his/her role and the research situation.

Summary and Appraisal of Interpretivism

Having in mind the role of the researcher, interpretivist research is usually inductive and works with in-depth analysis on small sample sizes. Different sources of data can be used. Symbolic interactionism is based on pragmatist thoughts and bridges interpretivism and pragmatism (outlined as the last philosophy in this section) by observing interactions between humans. As companies and their contexts are mostly

[70] This sub-chapter is based on Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144). For further reading on interpretivism, see Kamlah and Lorenzen (1967, 1996).

idiosyncratic, using an interpretivist approach seems a suitable philosophy in business contexts.

3.4.1.4 Postmodernism[71]

Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144) summarize postmodernism as follows:

Ontology of Postmodernism

Enlarging the criticism on positivism, postmodernism attributes a central role to language. Language constructs the structure of the world. The collective determines what is right or true determined by power structures and special context. Postmodernist approaches try to "deconstruct" these realities and to question the power structure by searching for contradictions and inconsistencies.

Epistemology of Postmodernism

The dominant coalition defines what constitutes "knowledge". Postmodernism attempts to critically explore existing thoughts and knowledge and aims to emphasize unappreciated ways of thinking which were precluded by the dominant power structure beforehand.

Axiology of Postmodernism[72]

Postmodernists have a high awareness and reflexivity of the interdependence of the power structures between the researcher and the research objects.

Summary and Appraisal of Postmodernism

In an organizational research context, a postmodernist tries to deconstruct organization theories and aims to accentuate the unexplored and omitted. Postmodernists use a range of qualitative data, challenging them against themselves checking for inconsistencies and the "unsaid".

3.4.1.5 Pragmatism[73]

Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144) summarize pragmatism as follows:

Ontology of Pragmatism

Reality is the practical consequence of thoughts and ideas. The starting and central point of pragmatist research is the problem. The actions of pragmatists aim to find a practical solution rather than abstract outcomes.

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[71] The whole sub-chapter is based on Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144). For further reading on the ontology of postmodernism, see Chia (2003), Derrida (1976) and Foucault (1991).
[72] For further reading on the axiology of postmodernism, see Calás and Smircich (1997) and Cunliffe (2003).
[73] The whole sub-chapter is based on Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, pp. 135-144). For further reading on pragmatism as a research philosophy, see Kelemen and Rumens (2008).

Epistemology of Pragmatism

Pragmatist approaches consider all data as knowledge that is helpful to find an answer to the research problem.

Axiology of Pragmatism

Pragmatist researchers engage in reflexivity and their critical questions and views shape the research.

Summary and Appraisal of Pragmatism

Pragmatism applies quantitative as well as qualitative analyses with a focus on practical answers to the research question. This approach can be helpful if a research phenomenon is ambiguous. More than one type of data or method can be used.

3.4.2 Research Philosophy Used in this Dissertation

After discussing the different philosophical approaches to the understanding of how knowledge is gained, it seems most suitable to choose an interpretivist position for this research project. Interpretivism allows a construction of reality by individuals. The process of growth, which is of interest in this dissertation, is a construction by people, as it is neither observable nor measurable. Only input and output could be observed and measured. Therefore, a positivistic approach, based on quantitative measures and observations, does not seem suitable. Furthermore, the interpretivist approach allows the use of existing literature. Growth is a widely discussed topic and large amounts of literature exist on the general topic of growth. To approach the specific question of growth processes of family firms, where literature is rather rare, the general growth literature cannot be neglected. Additionally, the research philosophy in this research project is influenced by a pragmatic perspective as the aim is, besides the process of growth, to answer the question of the reasons for growth spurts, and to derive normative-pragmatic implications for practitioners. Pragmatic perspectives are useful to derive practical implications and therefore, they are additionally used in this dissertation.

3.5 Research Strategy – Grounded Theory Approach

Having described which philosophical views are adopted, this chapter is dedicated to the research strategy used. Choosing an interpretivist position implies that the phenomenon under research is a construction by individuals. Therefore, a strategy involving the views of people is needed. Building theory from these views and constructing the process of growth is the goal of this dissertation. Reviewing different strategies, such as case studies, narrative inquiry, surveys and archival research, a Grounded Theory approach seems most suitable to build theory from the views and constructions of individuals. To offer a better understanding why a Grounded Theory approach is used, an overview of the general understanding of Grounded Theory and its application in management research is given in the first place.

3.5.1 General Understanding and Application in Management Research

The methodology of Grounded Theory has attracted increasing attention and acceptance in the last few years, serving as a research strategy and as a collection of methodological elements. A study by Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, and Vetter (2000, p. 74) emphasizes the importance of Grounded Theory as a research strategy, stating that in 60% of all their sampled entries, it is the most frequently mentioned research strategy (Mey & Mruck, 2011, pp. 11-12).

Mey and Mruck (2011) state that in the meantime, however, it is increasingly recognized that in times of social change and globalization, quantitative methods are not enough because they focus on the recording of verifiable theoretical knowledge and hypotheses derived from already existing knowledge. Here, especially the eminently important question of the scientific accessibility of "new" procedures for the development of theories is of outstanding importance (Mey & Mruck, 2011, p. 11).

Taking up this claim, the methodology of Grounded Theory, for the first time formulated by American sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967) in a joint monograph "*The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*", should serves as rule-guided, controlled and verifiable "discovery" of theory from data (Mey & Mruck, 2011, p. 11). Grounded Theory is based on a multistage evaluation procedure of different data. This evaluation procedure is based on the method of continuous comparison which Glaser described for the first time in 1965 (Glaser, 1965).

Using Grounded Theory in management research has been becoming more and more popular in recent years, but is still underrepresented (Kenealy, 2008). Walsh (2014) explains that using an open and well-designed Grounded Theory could obviate major shortcomings of research. She describes such shortcomings as “those studies that withhold methodological details/results, and those that select only those data that support a hypothesis while withholding the rest“ (Walsh, 2014, p. 41). This procedure is called “cooking data” by Bedeian, Taylor, and Miller (2010, p. 718 cited in Walsh, 2014, p. 41). A detailed presentation and explanation of the Grounded Theory applied in the respective study is necessary to avoid the mentioned shortcomings and the resulting limitations and criticism.

Tracing the use of Grounded Theory in management studies, Jones and Noble (2007) show that there is a huge flexibility in applying Grounded Theory. The authors suspect the main arguments in the variety of Grounded Theory approaches and a missing tracing and documentation of the development of Grounded Theory. They argue that Grounded Theory methodology has become pliant and that researchers use the term Grounded Theory for nearly every inductive, data-grounded study and with an “anything goes”-mentality (Jones & Noble, 2007, p. 100). This comes along with their invocation to use more discipline and better understanding of different Grounded Theory approaches (Jones & Noble, 2007). Emphasizing an “overly orthodox

application" Fendt and Sachs (2008, p. 430) mention the other side of shortcomings in using Grounded Theory. They propose applying the "newer" forms of Grounded Theory, such as the ideas by Charmaz (2014).

Also surprised by the misunderstanding of Grounded Theory, Suddaby (2006) writes an article about "what Grounded Theory is not", unveiling the misleading application of Grounded Theory.

Taking these considerations into account, this dissertation aims to critically review the development of Grounded Theory approaches[74] and to keep in mind the shortcomings discussed by Suddaby (2006) and the above mentioned authors. It is important to specify which version of Grounded Theory is applied and why it is suitable for the research question (Tan, 2009). It is important to explain the coding techniques used and the emergence of categories to build up plausibility for the reader (Tan, 2009). After describing the historical development, the constructivist approach that is used in this dissertation is explained in detail. This explicit description of the applied procedure is important for evaluating reasons (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 4), as Grounded Theory often faces the the accusation of subjectivity (Jones & Noble, 2007, p. 100; Suddaby, 2006).

In order to understand the essence of Grounded Theory, an overview of the historical development is needed to distinguish between the different approaches within Grounded Theory and to make serious use of them.

3.5.2 Historical Development of Grounded Theory

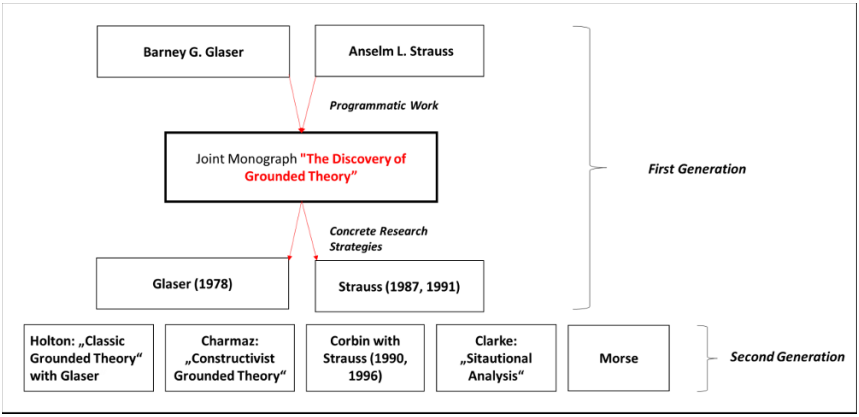
Mey and Mruck (2011, pp. 13-16) summarize that Glaser, one of the founders of Grounded Theory, was a student of knowledge sociologist Robert K. Merton and was educated at the Columbia School, which was influenced by Paul Lazarsfeld, with a critical and rationalistic orientation and a methodical focus on quantitative opinion research. Strauss, the other founder of Grounded Theory, had been socialized in the qualitative tradition: As a student of Blumer (a student of George Herbert Mead, originator of the symbolic interactionist school of thought) and employee of Lindesmith (Lindesmith, 1968; Lindesmith & Strauss, 1949), his background was grounded in the scientific-historical context of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism in the tradition of the Chicago School, in sociological field research (Mey & Mruck, 2011, p. 14; Robrecht, 1995, p. 170).

The following figure (43) shows the historical development of Grounded Theory[75] over two generations.

[74] The author of this dissertation attended several classes and seminars on different Grounded Theory approaches to learn about different assumptions, coding mechanisms and procedures. To keep the focus on the applied type of Grounded Theory, this dissertation limits itself to a short summary of the historical development of Grounded Theory.

[75] This figure is based on the theoretical streams proposed by Mey and Mruck (2011). There are more streams of Grounded Theory methodology. For some more streams, see Seale (1999) for a constructivistic perspective and

Figure 43 Historical Development of Grounded Theory



Source: Author's own figure

Glaser and Strauss, as well as second-generation representatives such as Charmaz (2014) and Corbin (1991), emphasize the connection between Grounded Theory approaches and the mental framework of the social interactionist school (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Hutchinson, 1988; Locke, 2001, p. 25; Pickard, 2007; Riemann, 2011, p. 408). Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory that deals with the interaction between people. This theory of action is based on the idea that the meaning of social objects, situations and relationships is produced in the symbolically mediated process of interaction/communication (Locke, 2001; Mead, 1934).

The fundamental monograph by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is considered a programmatic work with limited insight into a concrete research strategy (Mey & Mruck, 2011, p. 12).

Studying death and dying in hospitals, Glaser and Strauss developed Grounded Theory. They established a cutting-edge statement proposing that qualitative research generates theory from the concurrent treatment of data and analysis. At each stage of the analysis, the data are compared; this is called the constant comparison method (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 5-7).

Mey and Mruck (2011) explain that concrete research strategies were later developed separately from each other: Glaser in 1978 and Strauss in 1987 and together with Corbin in 1990. Corbin, Charmaz, Clarke, Holton and Morse are regarded as the second generation of Grounded Theory methodologists (Morse, Stern, Corbin, Bowers,

Downward, Finch, and Ramsay (2002) for a critical realist perspective. Kock, McQueen, and Scott (1997) argue in a more positivistic way. For a general criticism of using Grounded Theory, see Thomas and James (2006).

Charmaz, & Clarke, 2009). Each of these authors develops his or her own characteristics and application of Grounded Theory[76]. This acknowledges that there are several ways to apply Grounded Theory methodologies, as there are more than one instruction and format (Mey & Mruck, 2011, p. 12).

Mey and Mruck (2011, p. 135) describe that the objectivistic approach by Glaser is further developed with Holton, named "Classical Grounded Theory". The constructivist perspective of Charmaz is more oriented towards Glaser and at the same time distinctly different. Corbin, together with Strauss, has developed a systematic approach (Denzin, 2007 cited in Clarke, 2011, p. 115). Clarke has developed a situationistic approach (Denzin, 2007 cited in Clarke, 2011, p. 115). Morse et al. (2009) emphasize a more pragmatic view of Grounded Theory.

As this dissertation adopts an interpretivistic approach, it seems suitable to apply the constructivist methodologies of Charmaz (2014). As in the Interpretivistic School, the construction of reality is based on its reconstruction by individuals. Further reasons for using constructivistic Grounded Theory are outlined in the following chapter.

3.5.3 Constructivistic Approach and the Reason for its Application

As Charmaz (2014) describes, moving away from the more positivistic view of Glaser and Strauss's early versions of Grounded Theory, the constructivistic view of Grounded Theory was developed in the 1990s.[77] Mainly influenced, fostered and represented by Kathy Charmaz, constructivistic Grounded Theory follows Glaser and Strauss's (1967) idea of an iterative, comparative, emergent, open-ended and inductive methodology in a nonlinear fashion (Charmaz, 2014). Taking up the criticism of the earlier version of Grounded Theory, such as a value-free and neutral researcher, a constructivistic Grounded Theory approach emphasizes the flexibility of methodology and stresses the assumption of a multifaceted, processual and constructed reality where it is important to accept and consider the role of the researcher and the interaction with the interviewee (Charmaz, 2014). As Charmaz (2014, p. 13) states "(…) the constructivist approach treats the research as a construction but acknowledges that it occurs under specific conditions – of which we may not be aware and which may not be of our choosing".

In contrast to the objective stream of Grounded Theory, constructivistic Grounded Theory considers reflexivity throughout the whole research process (Chamaz, 2014). According to Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006, p. 12), the researcher is seen as a partner

[76] The different developments of Grounded Theory of Clarke, Holton, Corbin and Strauss cannot be described here, as their comprehensiveness is too large to be meticulously explained within this dissertation. For further information about the situationistic approach of Clarke, see Clarke (2011) and Diaz-Bone (2013). Glaser and Holton (2004, 2011) give a detailed overview of "classical" Grounded Theory. For the developments of Strauss and Corbin, see Corbin (2011). Strübing (2011) explains the differences between the approaches of Glaser and Strauss. Morse et al. (2009) provide an overview of the second generation of Grounded Theory.

[77] For a more detailed overview of the comparison between the objectivistic approach and the constructivistic approach, see Charmaz (2014, pp. 234-239) and Charmaz (2000).

of the interviewee, not as “an objective analyst” of the data. Critical reflection on the researcher’s role helps to understand his/her use of preconceptions and assumptions. Reflexivity enables a better understanding of the analytical thoughts and theoretical lenses used by the researcher (Mills et al., 2006).

There are two reasons for taking a constructivistic Grounded Theory perspective: The consideration of constructed reality and the role of the researcher, which makes Grounded Theory more applicable and realistic, and the handling of existing literature.

The early versions of Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser’s Grounded Theory and its development together with Holton (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Glaser & Holton, 2007) required the researcher to enter the research process with a blank mind, starting with the data collection and analysis without a biased perception. Later and modified versions, such as the constructivistic Grounded Theory of Charmaz (2014), emphasize the review of literature before entering the research field. As Suddaby (2006) states, expecting the researcher to enter the research field without any prior knowledge and experience is escapist. Prior conceptions derived from reviewing the literature do not necessarily lead to a narrow mind and preconceptions (LaRossa, 2005). Reviewing extant literature can support the conceptualization of the research design and can be helpful to formulate guiding questions for the interview (Charmaz, 2014). Knowing the extant literature can obviate duplicate findings (Dunne, 2011). From a practical point of view, a literature review and notes on the data collection method are needed to get research funding (Barbour, 2001).

Reichertz (2011) states that the Grounded Theory methodology represented by Glaser is an inductive approach following the belief that theories only emerge from the gradual abstraction and condensation of data. The subsequent interpretations and improvements of Grounded Theory, such as by Strauss and Corbin, hold the position that theoretical knowledge is incorporated into the interpretation of the data. This current logic of Grounded Theory methodology's research now has a lot to do with the abductive research logic that was developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (Reichertz, 2011, pp. 279-280).[78]

This fundamental discourse about inductive versus abductive research approaches is explored by many researchers (Glaser, 1992, 2002; Kelle, 1994; Kendall, 1999; Miller & Fredericks, 1999; Reichertz, 2011; Strübing, 2004).

Reichertz (2011, p. 276) mentions that the abductive research approach was first introduced in 1597 by Julius Pacius to translate the Aristotelian Apagogè, and that it remained almost unnoticed for three centuries. Charles S. Peirce picked up this thought, but the systematic application took place decades later (Peirce, 1973, 1976, 1986, 1992 cited in Reichertz, 2011, p. 276, 281). During the following decades, the

[78] For a further discussion of the use of abduction within Grounded Theory methodologies, see Reichertz (2009).

idea of abduction was adopted by many researchers such as Hanson (1965), Tursman (1987) and Wartenberg (1971).

In research literature, the term “abduction” is diffuse and contradictorily used. Abduction is associated with a great scientific theoretical hope: Namely the hope of a rule-based, reproducible and also valid production of new scientific knowledge (Reichertz, 2003; Reichertz, 2011, pp. 281-282; Reichertz, 2017, p. 277).

Reichertz (2017) states that the aim of abduction is not to be as realistic as possible, but to be as rational as possible. The goal is the utility of what has been developed for the specific research question. The order found abductively is thus neither a pure reflection of reality, nor does it reduce reality to its essential components; it is a mental construction. As long as the new order helps to cope with a task, it will remain in force. If the assistance in answering the question is limited, further differentiations must be made. In view of surprising facts, abduction looks for a meaningful rule in the data, which can explain whatever is surprising in the facts. The very end of this process is the formulation of hypotheses that can be tested in a multi-stage process (Reichertz, 2017, pp. 284-285).

Suddaby (2006) mentions that a more recent understanding of abduction formulates the abductive approach as a combination of deduction (from theory to data) and induction (from data to theory), as abduction moves back and forth between data and theory, thereby applying the constant comparative method. Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, p. 148) state that the starting point of an abductive approach is the occurrence of a surprising fact in the data that is developed into a plausible theory.

Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, p. 148) mention that an abductive approach explores a phenomenon by identifying and analyzing topics and patterns from detailed data and integrating these findings into a conceptual framework, thus building up a theory of the specific topic. The developed theory is constantly tested against existing and new data and correspondingly improved and amplified (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, & Bristow, 2016, p. 148).

Richardson and Kramer (2006, p. 500) describe the role of abduction in Grounded Theory as “associating data with ideas” where ideas can be developed from existing theories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

As outlined before, abduction is an essential part of Grounded Theory procedure (Reichertz, 2011; Richardson & Kramer, 2006) and is therefore used as the research approach of this dissertation.

Representing the widely accepted view that data is inseparably tied to theory (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Gergen, 1978; Hanson, 1958; Kuhn, 1962) this dissertation applies a constructivistic Grounded Theory approach. In addition to

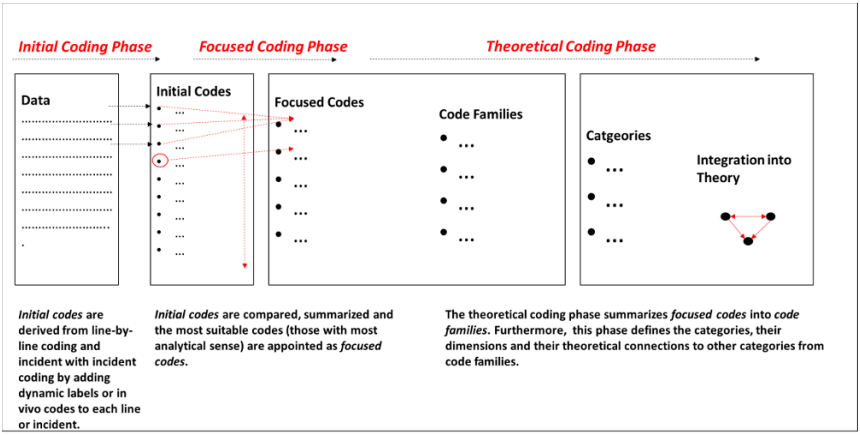
the above-mentioned reasons and advantages of using constructivistic Grounded Theory, such as reflexivity and the handling of literature, not to consider the huge literature base on growth theories and determinants, as well as the specific literature on growth-critical attributes of family businesses, would be a huge shortcoming of this dissertation.

Having described the constructivistic approach by Charmaz (2014) and the reason for applying it in this dissertation, the next sub-chapter will outline how the data analysis is going to take place. This is done in order to ensure the traceability of the findings.

3.5.4 Relevance and Procedure of Coding

Coding is the first analytic step in Grounded Theory research (Charmaz, 2014, p. 109). The gathered data are conceptualized by breaking them up into their components, which is useful for a close examination (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). The Grounded Theory coding process consists of at least two coding phases, the initial coding and the focused coding (Charmaz, 2014, p. 109). The following figure depicts the coding phases applied in this dissertation. These phases are based on the phases proposed by Charmaz (2014) but are adapted to the need of the data used in this disseratation.

Figure 44 Coding Procedure



Source: Author's own figure

3.5.4.1 Initial Coding Phase

On a first tier, coding means labeling fragments of data with terms that define and summarize what the data are about. By extracting segments of data and asking about their meaning, the data are abstracted on an analytic level. Not only the written data are part of the analysis, but also the ethnographic setting in which analytic ideas can occur. These ideas should be secured in a memo (Charmaz, 2014, p. 111), a process

which is discussed in sub-chapter 3.5.4.4. The importance of the initial coding phase is to remain open to all possible theoretical interpretations appearing while ranging through the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 114).

The following questions guide through the initial coding:

"What is this data a study of?" (Glaser, 1978, p. 57; Glaser & Strauss, 1967 cited in Charmaz, 2014, p. 116)

"What do the data suggest? Pronounce? Leave unsaid?" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 116)

"From whose point of view?" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 116)

"What theoretical category does this specific datum indicate?" (Glaser, 1978 cited in Charmaz, 2014, p. 116)

In the initial coding phase, the codes should contain words that describe actions instead of themes or topics to stay focused on what is happening in the data. This prevents the coding from being too focused on the individual level (Chamaz, 2014, p. 116). Static labels contain the hazard of being one-dimensional and overlooking other relevant factors (Charmaz, 2014, p. 117). The use of gerunds as a "heuristic device" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 121) supports the revelation of implicit meanings and emergent processes, and is also encouraged by Glaser (1978, 1998 cited in Charmaz, 2014, p. 124). Using *in vivo* codes can support the discovery of their meanings and their underlying actions (Charmaz, 2014, p. 134). The term in vivo means using the interviewee's words to describe a code (Charmaz, 2014, p. 134).

Having outlined how a code can be described, the question of how much data should be used for one code arises (Charmaz, 2014).

According to Charmaz (2014) there are different types of initial coding practices. One can code word-by-word, which is most useful if the researcher is interested in phenomenology and codes particular documents; such as internet blogs (Charmaz, 2014, p. 124). Concentrating on a different form of coding, the line-by-line coding can help to discover underlying arguments that can be overlooked when concentrating on thematic segments only (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 124-125). Closely related to line-by-line coding is the comparison of incident with incident in the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 128).

Charmaz (2014) explains that line-by-line coding works well with profound data containing information about processes or empirical problems. This coding practice is useful to detect simultaneously occurring events and helps to analyze their origin. It is also useful to analyze in-depth interviews (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 124-125).

As this dissertation is interested in growth processes of family businesses and works with in-depth interviews, line-by-line coding combined with the comparison of incident with incident is used.

The tendency to apply extant theories is controlled by using actions describing the data instead of static labels. New ideas need the openness of the initial coding to be developed. Glaser's idea of open coding as a starting process has even stricter guidelines (Charmaz, 2014, p. 117). He sees the researcher as a subject without "preconceived concepts in mind" (Glaser, 1978, 1992 cited in Charmaz; 2014, p. 117). There are increments of this view among Grounded Theory researchers. Some researchers claim that one should enter the research field without a predefined agenda and with a blank mind. Other researchers interpret this blank-mind guideline to defer from reading and evaluating existing literature related to the topic, as mentioned earlier in this chapter (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634). Glaser and Strauss as "founders" of Grounded Theory themselves state that "Indeed it is difficult to find a grounded formal theory that was not in some way stimulated by substantive theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 79 cited in Suddaby, 2006, p. 635).

3.5.4.2 Focused Coding

The initial codes are related closely to the data. In a second step, *focused coding*, the initial codes are compared, summarized and the most suitable codes (those with most analytical sense) are appointed as *focused codes* (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 138-161). These codes are used to code large slices of data.

The following table presents an example of the focused code "Prioritizing Goals".

Table 3 Example of Focused Code

Initial Codes	**Focused Code**
Independence from supplier	**Prioritizing Goals**
Profitability as primary goal	
Scale back short-term profitability for long-term profitability	
Growth is not the decisive factor	
…	

Source: Author's own table

3.5.4.3 Theoretical Coding Phase

Charmaz (2014, pp. 150 ff.) states that the theoretical coding phase defines the categories, their dimensions and their theoretical connections to other categories. Within the theoretical coding phase, the knowledge of prior literature becomes important. At first, the focused codes are aggregated to code families. The building of these code families is based on information gained from existing theoretical knowledge.

Stern (1980, p. 23 cited in Charmaz, 2014, p. 150 and Glaser, 2005, p. 5) states that theoretical coding "simply means applying a variety of analytic schemes to the data to enhance their abstraction". The ability Charmaz (2014, p. 155) emphasizes is that the researcher must be aware of imposing preconceptions on the data. Employing

reflexivity is helpful to prevent extensively forcing theoretical concepts and preconceptions onto the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 155).

As a first step in the theoretical coding phase, code families are summarized and aggregated from focused codes. These code families are categorized. The resulting categories show interrelationships which are portrayed in the model and supplemented with insights from existing theory (chapter 4).

3.5.4.4 Memo-Writing

Charmaz (2014, p. 162) explains that while engaged in coding processes, it is useful to develop informal analytical notes known as memos. In addition to helping to structure one's analytical thoughts, memos can improve the abstraction level of the analytical ideas. Writing memos confronts the researcher with newly emerging questions that could accelerate and elaborate the coding, the definition of categories and their theoretical relationships (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162).

Mey and Mruck (2011, p. 26) accentuate the role of memos by stating that Glaser and Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 133) emphasized the importance of continuous memo writing in their initial work and in subsequent writings, as memos are crucial to reveal gaps in theory development.

In addition to the increased analytical value of memos, memo writing helps the researcher to reflect about his/her own assumptions and preconditions and thus engage in reflexivity (Charmaz, 2014, p. 165).

Charmaz (2014, pp. 164 ff.) describes different ways of constructing memos. She highlights that there are few guidelines to write memos and encourages the researcher to do what works best for each one, having in mind the analytical added value of the memos.

In this dissertation, memos were created from the very beginning of the research to record and structure thoughts and analytical ideas, as well as to reveal new questions for the remaining data. Besides textual memos, graphical illustrations support the author of this dissertation in perceiving the analytical value of the analyzed data.

Having propounded how to use codes to analyze your data, thus creating theoretical links between categories, and how to reveal gaps and open questions of the data through memo writing, it needs to be discussed which data should be coded and used for theory building and which time horizon should be analyzed.

3.6 Time Horizon

Having described the functioning and application of the research strategy, it has to be decided which time horizon will be used for analyzing the research object. Phenomena can be examined over a longer period of time (Langley, 2007; Meyer, Gaba, & Colwell, 2005) or in a snapshot (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). As described above in chapter 2, growth is a dynamic construct, and once instruments triggering growth are used, it

takes time until results can be observed in the figures of the company. The input and output factors could be observed and measured at different points of time, but the process in-between is subject to reconstructions through narratives of individuals having experienced and shaped this process. Processual thinking has been gaining more attention in the last decades (Barney, 1991; Langley, 2007; Porter, 1991) as the "dynamic"-component has been added to more static theories, such as "dynamic capabilities". Examining processes is especially important for performance related studies (Langley, 2007). Ignoring complex process steps by measuring input and output only can lead to oversimplified results (Langley, 2007). There are various ways to study processes in an organizational context.

Langley (1999) acknowledges the role of the unit of analysis in processual research. She explains that the levels of analysis are hard to distinguish within the process, and that the context must be taken into account.

An organization can be understood as an instrument with which individuals try to achieve personal or collective goals, assert interests and satisfy needs (Bartölke, 1980; Bartölke & Grieger, 2004). Owners or managers set these goals. There is a reciprocal influence as organizations are entities created by individuals and act upon them as such (Bartölke & Grieger, 2004).

In this dissertation it is assumed that individuals form an organization, and that their strategic decisions determine the organization's (growth) strategy (Bertrand & Schoar, 2003; Geyer, 2016; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). To attribute the major role as unit of analysis to the individual in charge is a widely used and accepted procedure in the growth research community (e.g. Davidsson, 1991; Delmar & Wiklund, 2003; Schwass, 2005). Yet, in the processual research within this dissertation, the line between the organizational and individual levels cannot always be clearly defined.

Grounded Theory can be a useful tool to analyze process data (Langley, 1999). Langley (1999) describes that Glaser (1978) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) emphasize different stages of categories as processes. Furthermore, as described in sub-chapter 3.5.4.1, codes and the remaining categories are often labeled with gerunds, which implies a processual thinking (Langley, 1999).

With process research, qualitative and quantitative data can be used to build theory (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Langley, 1999).

3.7 Data Collection

At first, suitable research objects must be selected. The particularities of the sample and the sampling methods are outlined first. Afterwards, the drafting of the interview guideline and the procedure of the interviews are depicted. Finally, the use of secondary data and the phenomenon of Theoretical Saturation are explained.

3.7.1 Sampling

3.7.1.1 Focus on German Family Enterprises

As a closed population is needed, family businesses in Germany are examined. The restriction to a basic population makes it possible to observe and compare the growth spurts. For example, if German and Chinese companies were compared in terms of growth, German companies would grow more slowly, because the whole Chinese economy is in a strong growth phase. This comparison would blur the results.

The literature review shows that the legal constitution of a firm could have impact on growth decisions (see sub-chapter 2.7.1) therefore the restriction to one legal system is used.

Furthermore, it is known from the literature review that aspirations and goals play an important role as input factors of growth (see sub-chapter 2.7.1). These expectations and goals would probably differ between various cultural contexts and should be examined in a separate study based on the findings of this analysis. Moreover, the cultural context is decisive for the understanding of the concept of family and the interaction between family and institutions, such as the state (Kormann, 2017a, p. 10).

3.7.1.2 Adjusted Method of Theoretical Sampling

Adjusted Theoretical Sampling

Within Grounded Theory theoretical sampling is used. Theoretical sampling usually requires that the basic population and its characteristics are unknown (Mey & Ruppel, 2018, p. 27). In Grounded Theory, data collection and data analysis are interrelated (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Having defined the first categories and their properties during coding, new research objects are searched and added according to their suitability to elaborate and refine the categories and the emergent theory (Charmaz, 2014, p. 192). New research objects are added until no new properties of a category emerge. The categories are then saturated with data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 193).

The sampling in this dissertation is oriented towards theoretical sampling, however, there are some modifications due to the research context. As described in chapter 1, the motivation of the dissertation arises from the observation of growth spurts within the 100 biggest German family businesses. Therefore, the basic population is given. Theses cases were interviewed according to the availability of the interviewee.

Achieving Theoretical Saturation

After conducting the first 13 interviews and iteratively constructing the conceptual model, this model was presented to the two remaining interview partners of the sample. This was done to determine if theoretical saturation has been reached and the categories could not be further refined by the insights of the new interviews.

To avoid and weaken the sample selection bias (Berk, 1983) of selecting only “positive” cases that show the growth spurts, two additional companies of the 100 biggest

German family firms which did not grow that much (CAGR of sales < 5%) where chosen to elaborate if the model holds in general, and if there are different manifestations of the dimensions which can explain the double-digit growth of the sampled firms in comparison to the not-that-fast-growing ones.

3.7.1.3 Sample Characteristics of the Family Enterprises

The 100 biggest family businesses (Oelmann, 2016) are the parent population of the chosen sample. These enterprises are ranked according to their sales in 2015 ranging from EUR 2 billion to EUR 200 billion Euro. As the dissertation started in 2016, these were the latest sales figures to obtain. The analysis of the biggest companies was carried out to find out more about the growth rates of long-living family enterprises.

A study by Seibold (2017b) shows that the structural diversity of German family enterprises is huge. The German family business landscape ranges from the 3-men-bakery to multinational companies such as Henkel or Oetker with more than EUR 10 billion of sales. The different size classes have different challenges and opportunities in their growth process. Therefore, it is important to differentiate family enterprises according to their size (Seibold, 2017b). There is a remarkable research stream on the growth of SME (e.g. Davidsson et al. 2005), but less research has been done on large family enterprises. Consequently, the 100 biggest companies have been chosen.

In addition to the restriction to large companies, businesses in the first generation were excluded from the sample, as previous studies (Seibold, 2017a; Seibold et al., 2019) show that, following a life cycle logic of enterprises, first generation businesses have to grow at double-digit growth rates during the first generation, otherwise they will not achieve a certain size in later generations and would not have grown to the biggest German companies. Showing this double-digit growth constantly through the first generation, first generation businesses are not suitable to get insights into the reasons for growth spurts in later stages of the life cycle. Although start-up companies or first generation companies are an interesting object to study growth, their strategy issues could be very special due to their developmental stage and age. Often they are accompanied by consultants such as angel investors or venture capital, making it difficult to identify personal influences on growth. Furthermore, in first generation and start-up businesses, the “family” plays a subordinate role as there is usually one founder or a team of two or three non-relatives.[79] Therefore, these companies have been excluded. The sales figures of 2015 are complemented with the sales data from 1995 and 2006. These sales figures were manually derived from multiple sources such as Hoppenstedt (1997), Simon (2007, pp. 55-59), Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (1996,

[79] It should be acknowledged that there are start-up and first generation businesses that are founded by relatives such as brothers, sisters or one or two families and these are undoubtedly interesting research objects, but not for this special research question.

2007)[80]. The compound annual growth rate was calculated for 1995-2006 and from 2006-2015 with the following formula:

Equation 1 Compound Annual Growth Rate of Sales Growth

$$CAGR\ (t_0; t_1) = \frac{S(t_1)^{\frac{1}{t_1 - t_0}}}{S(t_0)} - 1$$

$S(t_1)$ = Sales in 2006 or 2015

$S(t_0)$ = Sales in 1995 or 2006

The time slot (1995-2006) is used as a time horizon. The reasons for choosing this time frame are the availability of key decision makers of the companies, the availability of data and the overall macroeconomical situation in this period.

The above-mentioned exceptions are excluded. Afterwards, the upper quantile (20%) and the upper quartile (25%) of the 100 biggest companies are selected. Comparing the growth rates of these different sample sizes reveals that 10% is a suitable threshold for the fastest growing companies. The final sample is comprised of 22 firms showing growth spurts of 10% or more.

Having clarified which companies are reasonable research objects to study growth spurts the procedure of the interviews, the role of the researcher and some reflections on the sample characteristics will be given in the next chapter.

3.7.2 Interviews

3.7.2.1 Interview Guideline

Mey and Mruck (2007) explain that the term qualitative interviews refers to a group of procedures that can be arranged along different dimensions. One such dimension is that of interview control, which is expressed through the selected degree of structuring and standardization (Gudkova, 2018, p. 49; Mey & Mruck, 2007, p. 249).

One of the most open and unstructured forms of interviews is the narrative-based interview (Schütze, 1977, 1983). The narrative-generating opening question and immanent demands are the key cornerstones of the narrative-based interview (Mey & Mruck, 2007, p. 251). The semi-structured interview provides a more formal structure (Mey & Mruck, 2007, p. 253). In the first part, open questions are used to ask about explicitly available assumptions and components of the research field (Mey & Mruck, 2007, p. 253). In order to self-critically examine the developing subjective theories, more implicit knowledge stocks are discussed via questions based on theory and finally via questions of confrontation (Mey & Mruck, 2007, p. 253). In the second part, the

[80] Hoppenstedt is a handbook of enterprises which provides sales figures and other key figures from approximately 1955 onwards. The book "*Hidden Champions*" by Hermann Simon contains lists sales figures of large family owned businesses. The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung provides a list of the 100 biggest enterprises every year.

statements of the first part of the interview are structured and communicatively validated together (Mey & Mruck, 2007, p. 253). The structure of this type of interviews is open enough to be able to ask further questions or to skip questions and change the order of questions (Fylan, 2005). In contrast to the narrative-based interview, the researcher has a more structured and active role. A semi-structured interview is suitable when there is only one opportunity to talk to the interviewee (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Another form of interview is the expert interview (Meuser & Nagel, 1991). In this case, the label does not result from the survey type, but from the targeted study group (Mey & Mruck, 2007, p. 254). The interviewees are addressed as actors in the functional context they represent, and the biographical context is not important (Mey & Mruck, 2007, p. 254). The classification of "experts" is controversially discussed (Mey & Mruck, 2007, pp. 254-255).

The interview form used in this dissertation is influenced by all of the types presented above. The guideline is semi-structured but tries to encourage open narrations. The targets of the interviews are the CEOs who were in charge during the respective investigation period (1995-2006) and thus they can serve as "experts" in their field. However, their biographical background plays a central role in the reconstruction of reality.

In Grounded Theory methodologies, the guideline is adjusted based on new insights after each interview. Therefore, the following table will summarize the components of the first version of the guideline.

Table 4 Interview Guideline

Phase	Components	Goals
Introduction	Personal introduction, summary of key figures to suggest competency and preparation	Confidence-building
Starting Question	Could you describe your path into the company and what was your starting point when you took over the company? What has shaped your attitude towards growth?	Narrative-generating question; Relationship between attitude and biographics
Exploring Reasons for Growth Spurts	Starting situation in 1995, comparison to industry-specific growth, specific reasons for growth, ranking of dimensions	Generation of facts
Processual Questions	Concerning innovation management, organizational and financial capabilities, M & A, decision-making strategies, role of family, role of key people etc.	Exploration of process and family influence
Special Family-Related Questions	Family agenda, family strategy, family structure	Family influence
Exploration of Future Situations	Sustainability of growth spurt, new emerging trends	Conclusion and outlook

Source: Author's own table

The interview guideline was pretested with an available CEO who was not part of the initial sample, to make sure that the guiding questions are fully understandable. After this pretest, the formulation of the questions was adapted minimally due to the reflexive discussion with the CEO.

3.7.2.2 Selecting Interview Partners and Procedure of Interview

Selecting Interview Partners

The selected 22 firms were contacted in February 2017 in writing (letter), explaining the project and its details. A fax answering sheet was provided. The letter was directly addressed to the CEO in charge or, if personal contacts were available, to one of the family members directly. The goal was to interview the CEO in charge during the researched time frame 1995-2006. A positive response of 13 out 22 selected companies was received[81]. This is a response rate of 60%. An effort has always been made to speak to more than one family member or person in the company.

[81] Note: An interesting observation is that some of the positive responses were given due to the note that other successful company leaders were taking part in the research project. This could be seen as a type of snowball sampling (see Goodman (1961) and Noy (2008) for a detailed description and application of "classical" snowball sampling), and could be a helpful hint for researchers trying to approach large companies.

Some interview partners required the guideline in advance in order to prepare for the interviews. Due to confidentially issues, confidentially agreements have been signed in some cases so that verbatim quotes need the specific permission of the interviewee. The interviews took place from March 2017 to February 2018.

Procedure of Interview

In total that led to 15 full-length interviews consisting of 13 transcripts and 2 field-note protocols[82]. Two additional interviews from another sample were carried out in order to ensure Theoretical Saturation (3.7.4 and 4.7.2). During and after the interview, field notes were taken, consisting of facts which were stressed by the interviewee as well as perceptions and thoughts of the interviewer. The duration of the interviews ranged from approximately 45 minutes to 2 hours and 45 minutes and was approximately 20 hours in total. If permitted, the interviews were transcribed. This was done by the researcher, which provides the additional advantage that the researcher gets more familiar with the data. Furthermore, the language and tone, as well as noticable specific situations during the interview were written down and compared to the field notes which were drafted during and after the interview.

10 interviews were done face-to-face. Hoyle et al. (2002) acknowledge that the face-to-face interview, although the costliest (Groves & Kahn, 1979), is yet the most advantageous form of interviewing. They mention that during face-to-face interviews, the researcher can notice and explain misunderstandings, provide some further information if needed and concretize vague answers by enquiring. In addition, the researcher can control not only the course of conversation but also its context. The face-to-face interviews were done at the CEO's office. This setting gave the interviewee a comfortable and familiar setting and thus created a constructive environment and atmosphere. Furthermore, visual supplements such as pictures or graphs can be supportive. The interviews in this dissertation were also supported by graphs and figures. Moreover, Hoyle et al. (2002) emphasize that face-to-face interviews provide the highest response rate, the highest possible length and motivation of the interviewees, all of which tremendously improve the data. The length allows addressing complex phenomena. In spite of all the advantages of face-to-face interviews, there are some shortcomings applying to this form of data collection, known as the "interviewer effect". Research shows that the personal characteristics and appearance, experience and expectations of the interviewer can lead to socially desirable answers of the interviewee (Frey & Oishi, 2003; Hoyle et al., 2002).

5 interviews were conducted via telephone as the interviewee preferred this. Telephone interviews have the same advantages and disadvantages as face-to-face interviews have. The visual supports were provided to the interviewee via e-mail in

[82] In two cases an additional interview partner of the family was available but due to confidentiality reasons the interview was not recorded. Yet, field notes were drafted during and after the interview.

advance. The personal appearance does not influence the interview as much as in face-to-face interviews. One shortcoming of interviews via telephone is that the researcher cannot influence the interview setting such as the situation of the interviewee (in car or train or on a trade fair etc.) and therefore, it is more challenging to create an atmosphere of trust. Researchers find that there are no significant differences in the outcomes of telephone and face-to-face interviews (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004), although in this dissertation the impression was gained that the telephone interviews provide more fact-based insights, whereas the personal interviews are higher in their processual and emotional content.

Use of Computer-Assisted-Programm

A computer-assisted program is used to manage the data (QDA Miner 5). Computer-assisted programs are able to simultaneously administer the texts of a project, e.g. the transcribed interviews, with quick access to each individual text. This program supports the storage, the archiving process and the handling of a huge amount of complex data. The actual data processing is done manually and with the help of MS Office products, as it was important for the researcher to engage manually with the data to explore the key concepts and their interconnections.

3.7.2.3 Reflexivity of Researcher

The degree of structuring determines the way in which interviewees are involved in the interview process (Mey & Mruck, 2007, p. 250). As the data collection was done by personal interviews provoking the associated challenges of the interviewer effect, the role of the researcher in the research process must be acknowledged.

The theory emerging from the interview data is a product shaped by the researcher, to whom the social, cultural, local, institutional, interactive and personal circumstances of production are ascribed (Breuer, Muckel, & Dieris, 2018, pp. 84-85). As stated in sub-chapter 3.5.3, the reflexivity of the researcher is central in constructivistic Grounded Theory. Breuer et al. (2018, pp. 84-85) explain that a constituent part of the reflexive process is the view that the researcher appears as a personal, holistic subject and committed protagonist (physical, with a life story, with family and other affiliations, and with ties, with interests, motivations, etc.) in the context of generating social scientific knowledge. Furthermore, Breuer et al. (2018, pp. 84-85) state that the researcher's work takes place in an institutionalized context (science, university, research group, etc.) with specific instruments and tools (methods, technologies, equipment, etc.) under certain conditions, historical, geographical, social and cultural circumstances (location, time, social formation, traditions of thought etc.).

Within this research project the researcher has been aware of her personal-idiosyncratic attributes shaping the research process. Age differences, experienced-based advantages, gender challenges, scientific versus practical context, and her own

family business background must be taken into account when evaluating the results of this dissertation.

Keeping in mind the intented form of a narrative interview with semi-structured components the speaking time of the researcher in each interview is cross-checked. The main part of the speaking time is taken up by the interviewee. This finding is important to ensure the narrative characterstics of the interview. The need of the researcher to intervene is low. This speaks for the clarity and comprehensibility of the interview questions and the topic.

3.7.2.4 Reflections on the Sample Characteristics of the Interview Partners

The reflections of the first interviews revealed that the initial research focuses must be shifted away from the special cases of growth spurts and more to the general growth processes in family firms. The reason was that the questions concerning the spurts revealed only pragmatic and general answers about the growth mode and industry, and the macroeconomical determinants of these spurts. This finding strengthened the re-framing of the research focus from the specific to the general growth processes in family firms.

In a first analytical step, the sample characteristics of the interviewed individuals are examined. The following table summarizes the characteristics of the company and personal background information about the interviewee. Evaluating this information supports the interpretation of the data.

Table 5 Sample Characteristics

Interview Partner	Position at the Time of Interview (2017)	Tenure[83]	Profession	Generation
1	Chairman of the Supervisory Board	> 30	Economics & Management	Family Member
2	Chairman of the Shareholders' Committee	< 30	Economics & Management	Family Member
3	Chairman of the Administrative Board	< 30	Engineer	Family Member
4	Head of Division	n/a	Economics & Management	Family Member
5	Chairman of the Supervisory Board	n/a	n/a	Family Member
6	Former CEO	< 30	Economics & Management	Non-family Member
7	Chairman of the Supervisory Board	< 30	Politics	Family Member
8	Member of the Board	n/a	n/a	Family Member
9	Majority Owner and former CEO	> 30	Jurisprudence	Family Member
10	CEO	< 30	Economics & Management	Family Member
11	CEO	< 30	Economics & Management	Non-family Member
12	Chairman of the Supervisory Board	> 30	Electrical Engineering	Family Member
13	Former CEO	> 30	Mechanical Engineering	Family Member
14	CEO	< 30	Electrical Engineering	Family Member
15	CEO	> 30	Economics & Management	Family Member

Source: Author's own table

Table 6 Evaluation Companies

Interview Partner	Position at the Time of Interview (2018)	Tenure	Profession	Generation
16	Chairman of the Administrative Board	< 30	Jurisprudence	Family Member
17	Honorary Chairman of Advisory Board	> 30	Jurisprudence	Family Member

Source: Author's own table

The response rate of 60% of the initial sample and of 67% of the companies sampled for evaluating reasons is surprising. All sampled companies are large family companies (> EUR 2 billion sales in 2015) which are usually reluctant to participate in to such research inquiries. Family businesses in general are reluctant to serve as research objective (Davis, 1983). Discussing this issue with some interviewees in an informal "small talk" revealed that the positively formulated research questions had opened the path to the possibility of an interview. Furthermore, the extensive personal contacts of the supervisors were very helpful to engage in the interviews. Another interesting finding is that some interviewees noted that they were willing to be interviewed, as other leaders of large companies were part of this research project as well. Although there was a huge interest in the research project, it was difficult to get more than one interview partner in a given company. In two cases, it was possible to talk to another family member.

As this research is interested in growth spurts of later generations, and results of growth processes usually take long to be observable in numbers, old companies were selected (see sub-chapter 3.7.1). The oldest company of the responding sample is older

[83] The average tenure is approximately 30 years. Therefore, the interview partners are classified according to this. The tenure ranges between 14 and 53 years.

than 150 years. This company has more than 100 shareholders due to its long existence. One could assume that all of the old companies have a large number of shareholders, yet only two of the responding firms have more than 100 shareholders. All other companies have less than 10 shareholders. Two companies explicitly mention that the consolidation of shareholders' shares on one shareholder or a small shareholder group is favorable for growth aspirations (Q. 7-9; O. 41-42). The inheritance mode plays a crucial role in growth strategies (sub-chapters 4.5.2.1 and 4.4.4.2).

The interview partners have different positions in the company. The goal was to interview the manager in charge during the respective time period from 1995-2006. Most of them are now in a governance position. In some cases, the manager in charge at this time was not available but his descendants were willing to take part. The prerequisite for descendants to participate is that they hold an active part during the researched period or are able to reconstruct this time. The tenure of the participants is long, on average about 30 years. Long tenure is crucial for the growth development of a company as growth takes time to develop. Short-term profitability must scale back in order to allow for growth. Even the two non-family members have a long tenure, therefore, they can serve as an excellent source of information, as they have accompanied the growth development but represent a different view point on the process due to their status as non-family members. All participants have a company-related education. According to research, education plays an important role in growth aspirations (Wiklund, 2007; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003). The interviewees mentioned the subject of their studies, but they created no link to their growth aspirations. The parental education in form of values and traditions is named as a determinant of growth and developmental aspirations.

3.7.3 Secondary Data

To gain variation in the data sources and to become more familiar with each company secondary data were collected and analyzed. These included material offered by the companies, such as annual reports, company biographies, historical protocols, product information brochures, especially those depicting the researched time frame.

Additionally, some internet research was done. This research revealed information about the family and company history. Thus, it was especially important to understand the “big picture” of the respective family business and to identify key persons of interest for the development of the company. To get a better first impression of the interview partner and to get a feeling for his[84] charisma, some former interviews were read and watched on the internet. Furthermore, some background information about the interviewees was researched and included in the respective interview guideline. This preparation helped the researcher to personally address the interviewee. The

[84] The final sample of respondents consists of men only.

background information and the knowledge of former publicly available interviews, recorded as videos, supported the engagement in reflexivity about the researcher's own role in the interview, the atmosphere in the actual interview, and the behavior of the interviewee.

Preparation is important to get a high information density, yet the researcher has to engage in reflexivity to cope with the preconceptions formed during the preparation and to make useful sense of them in the analyzing process. Given the multifaceted nature of the secondary data, these data are not formally analyzed. Each company provided different information, some did not provide any additional information at all and it was hard to find background information in publicly available sources. These different levels of information are a difficult basis for a formal analysis. Therefore, the secondary data are used for theory building by supporting the reflexivity of the researcher, as mentioned above, and helped to supplement the categories and to round the theory building by triangulation.

3.7.4 Theoretical Saturation

Having described that Grounded Theory combines data collection and data analysis, it is important to note the point of completion.

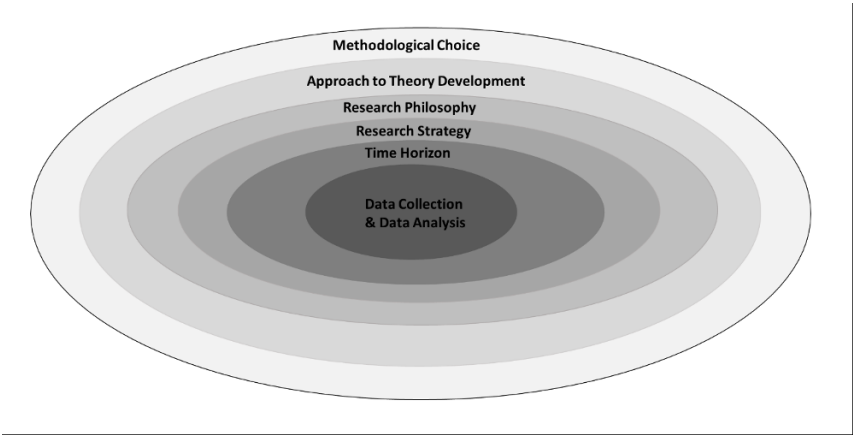
Charmaz (2014) explains that within Grounded Theory, the categories emerge while the researcher is engaged in the data. The category is saturated when including more data will reveal neither new properties of the category nor new insights into the category and its interdependencies to other categories. This point of concluding is called "Theoretical Saturation" (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 214, 345).

This dissertation captures the idea of Theoretical Saturation but has a slightly different approach. The categories and their interdependencies are formed while engaging in the data. But how many companies would be interviewed was clear beforehand. As the observation of the growth spurts which led to the initial research aim revealed a population of 22 companies showing these spurts, these special companies were contacted. The research process itself was informed by Theoretical Saturation as the first interviews revealed categories which were supplemented by additional insights from the following interviews. When no more new insights were gained from new interviews the developed theory was tested with two companies which were not part of the initial sample of the 22 firms. Theoretical Saturation was thus achieved.

3.8 Summary of the Methodological Approach

Chapter 3 has been dedicated to the description of the methodological design of this dissertation. The whole chapter provides an extensive overview of different approaches, philosophies, techniques and procedures. To summarize the key points of the methodological design and to provide a guide through the different layers of the methodological choices for further research projects, a so-called "research onion" (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow, 2016, p. 124) is developed and introduced.

Figure 45 Research Onion



Source: Author's own figure adapted from Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, p. 124)

Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2016, p. 124) propose a different chronological order of their onion. However, the present research has shown that a slightly different order seems more practically orientated.

At first the researcher has to decide on the *methodological choice*. This implies the decision whether to follow a qualitative or quantitative way. This decision mainly depends on the goal of research and the availability of existent literature and theory. The present dissertation aims to follow a qualitative, explorative and theory building approach.

In a second step, the *approach to theory development* must be chosen. The researcher has to decide whether to work inductively, deductively or abductively. The choice of the approach to theory building is mainly determined by the availability of extant literature and theory. Therefore, this dissertation uses an abductive approach.

In a third step, the *research philosophy* has to be chosen in order to clarify the relationship between the world and the observing subject (world-subject connection). It is important to understand the particularities of each philosophy, to be able to find the most suitable one for one's own research questions. This dissertation uses interpretivism and pragmatism to describe the world-subject connection.

Having decided on the research philosophy, a *research strategy* must be chosen. A strategy includes a plan how to answer the research questions. This dissertation uses a Grounded Theory strategy.

As a subsequent step, the researcher has to decide on the *time horizon* of the study. Is a cross-sectional, a longitudinal or processual time frame suitable to approach the research questions? This dissertation uses a processual time horizon.

Concluding, it has to be decided how the data on the respective research questions are *collected and analyzed*. This procedure can be determined by the research strategy, as in the case of Grounded Theory which is used in this dissertation.

The following chapter 4 is concerned with the category building and generation of the theory.

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