



# WIFU\_compact\_29: Working with the Extended Tetralemma

Systematic and systemic – this is ideally how business families enact their special nature as somewhat different families. *Systematic* here means planned – not by chance on the fringes of a family summer party – but regularly, guided and supported by a concept and its methods. Systemic, on the other hand, means that behaviours, developments and phenomena of any kind are understood as part of a system: as interrelated and interacting elements – in this case, individuals – connected through relationships. If one element of the system changes, the other elements are also affected.

## In our family, we have many individualists; there is no system.

This is not a contradiction. Even individualists cannot avoid belonging to a family system. Even if they were to break away from the family altogether, this would affect the system as a whole. In the case of business families, there is also the social system of the business.

## If everything can be understood as a system, why is it important to address it at all?

A basic understanding of this interconnectedness forms the basis for making decisions, adapting behaviour, understanding the expectations of others, dealing with conflict and much more. As each person experiences only their own feelings and thinks only their own thoughts, a systemic understanding sheds light on the inner life of others and the system of relationships between individuals.

## What is the best method for this?

There are several tried and tested methods for promoting and using systemic thinking and action. Which method is best depends on the individual family. Perhaps the best-known method is the classic structural *constellation*: the concrete spatial representation of behavioural patterns and relationships. In contrast, structural *reflections* that use mental and communicative methods have also proven to be useful. These include the tetralemma, problem and solution structures, mentor resonance, expectation carousel, succession and polarity reflection. Here we will look at the tetralemma.

## With five positions, it looks more like a pentalemma!

Strictly speaking, this five-position scheme should be called the pentalemma. However, based on the proven model of the tetralemma, the term “extended tetralemma” has become established. It is precisely the extension of the model to include the position “not all this and not even that” that helps to resolve deadlocked conflicts, because it frees the parties involved from any requirement to reach an agreement within the given framework.

		QUESTION	PERSPECTIVE	EXTENSION
1	Either	A choice, an option, a side in a conflict	The family	Established traditions
2	Other	The other choice, option or side in a conflict	The business	Possible innovations
3	Both	Perhaps overlooked opportunities for connections or compatibility between one and the other	The connection between family and business and becoming aware of this connection	How can tradition and innovation be combined?
4	Neither of the two	Possibly overlooked relevant contexts or issues that are truly at stake	Relevant contexts (e. g. people and their needs), environments, relationships and frameworks (e. g. legal or political)	Which personal and social aspects of the family and the business need to be considered?
5	Not all this – and not even that	Something completely different; new options or unexpected changes in the overall situation	Unforeseen developments and the adaptability of family and business	What changes or disruptions in family, business or society do we need to be prepared for?



### Can it also be used to deal with factual issues?

Of course – although many supposedly ‘factual’ issues prove to be emotionally charged on closer inspection. Especially in business families, where family and business are so closely intertwined, there is no such thing as a “clean” separation. Using the example of succession, we will now briefly outline how the tetralemma can have a clarifying effect. This reflection practice can be used in both group and individual work.

**Position 1 – either:** This is about looking at the positive, strengthening sides of the family tradition. What has made the family and the business successful in the past; what should be retained? What energy or resources are available that could strengthen the potential successor? What makes us proud of what already exists?

**Position 2 – other:** What traditions of the business family are perceived as inhibiting? Are there supporters of innovative projects? How does it feel to abandon what has been created in the past and go your own way?

**Position 3 – both:** How can we preserve what is valuable and eliminate that which has become obsolete? Can the relationship be balanced or does one side – tradition or innovation – carry more weight? In what situations does one aspect dominate? Which individuals are more likely to represent one side or the other?

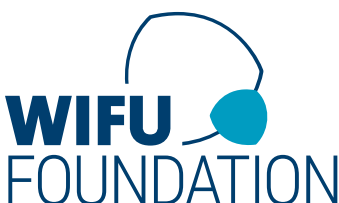
**Position 4 – neither of the two:** What else is the succession process concerned with besides tradition and innovation? Are there other personal goals that have not yet been considered but are important for personal decisions?

**Position 5 – not all this and not even that:** Are there any changes or surprises that could influence succession considerations? What would be the effect of openness and serenity in the face of the unexpected? Could I influence the decision?

### Does the extended tetralemma not contain too many options?

Many, but not too many. Starting from the classical dilemma – the predicament – the extensions offer space for considerations that may show a way out of an (apparently) insoluble situation. The great potential of the (extended) tetralemma lies in the fact that it accommodates the incompatibilities and ambivalences that are part of life and uses them to find a constructive solution. Thus, a decision is not forced within the narrow framework of either/or; rather, the field of the conceivable is expanded, because a solution to the problem may be found beyond the parameters of binary decisions.

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#### Reference:

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