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**UNDERSTANDING FAMILY BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS:
PRESERVING THE FAMILY IN THE BUSINESS**

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ABSTRACT

This ideas of this article present an example of how the results of one qualitative study can be applied to a clinical case. The first part of the article contains a summary of a funded, qualitative study on family business. Families members were asked to discuss how combining business with family affects their work and personal lives. In this summary, a condensed literature review is followed by a brief discussion of the research methodology and the presentation of the results. The research findings offer three categories that emerged from the participants=responses. Next, the article presents a discussion of implications for practice with a family business case example. In this example, the author illustrates how she applied the three research categories to her clinical work with a business family.

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Family therapists and other mental health professionals are providing an increasing amount of consultation and therapy for family businesses. This emerging client base of business families provides a fascinating area for investigation, especially the study of family relationships. As individuals struggle to balance their interactions on both the business and family fronts, they often need help in managing these relationships. This article presents the results of a qualitative study on business families and what they have to say about juggling family and business. The main focus of the article is two part: presenting a summary of the research study, and applying the findings to clinical practice.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Understanding family business begins by examining what the term means. Rosenblatt, de Mik, Anderson, and Johnson (1985) state, "We define a family business as any business in which majority ownership or control lies within a single family and in which two or more family members are or at some time were directly involved in the business" (p. 4). With this definition, family empires like the Rockefellers and Fords sit side by side with the mom- and-pop grocery stores, and father-son business stereotypes expand to include husband-wife, mother-son, and sister-sister, etc. family firms.

Recently more attention has been directed toward family business (Dyer, Jr., 1986; Jaffee, 1990; Rosenblatt et al., 1985). As business owners prepare for retirement, their enterprises face extinction unless a smooth transition can be made from first generation to second. A typical transition involves a parent who has turned over the business to a child, but wishes to remain involved in the daily operations. This creates tension between the child and parent over the leadership position, and the child

may leave the business in frustration.

Such succession issues have highlighted the importance of family relationships in family firms. The interest in maintaining family harmony for company survival has captured the imagination of many, including family therapists, who have certain knowledge that matches the needs of family businesses (Kaslow, 1993). Most family therapists are capable of providing helpful consultation to family business because of their expertise with rules, roles, and dual relationships.

Rules

Rules have always been an important concept in family therapy literature. Don Jackson (1965) discusses the importance of family rules of interaction to make sense of family behavior. Some authors, including family therapists, introduce the concept of "rules" to explain typical family business problems (Cole, 1991; Flemons & Cole, 1992, 1994; Gillis-Donovan, & Moynihan-Bradt, 1990; Hollander & Bukowitz, 1990; Jaffee, 1990; Kaye, 1991; Rosenblatt et al., 1985). Rosenblatt et al. (1985) discuss verbalized or assumed rules as something all families have. The difficulty arises when family rules don't apply after they are transferred to the business system. For example, at home a parent may be nurturing, solicitous, and advice-giving to a child. Although not the best rules, these may be the accepted rules in the family context. In the business, these parenting style rules may be embarrassing to the offspring and disrupt a productive working relationship between parent and child. Flemons and Cole (1992, 1994) advise that family and business rules do not have to be kept rigidly separate and distinct. They conceptualize rules as relationship patterns and encourage both a connection and separation of the family and business rules according to what works to the families' advantage.

Roles

A common assumption exists that family business relationships pose many problems for family business members. Some believe that the potential for problems arise because family business encompasses business and family, two competing systems (Lansberg, 1983; Rosenblatt et al., 1985). The business context encourages productivity and profitability, while the family context encourages nurturing and acceptance.

Family business writers discuss problems regarding the different roles that family members must play. Terms such as "role conflict" (Salganicoff, 1990); "role carryover" (Rosenblatt et al., 1985) and "role confusion" (Freudenberger, Freedheim, & Kurtz, 1989) refer to the two incompatible roles (business and family) contained in family business relationships. For example, a husband and wife who are co-owners of a company may not be able to make business decisions without marital problems turning the discussion into an argument. They may confuse their roles of spouse and business partner.

Dual Relationships

Family business members share a bond--dealing with each other in both a work and family context--and this creates a dual relationship in which two people are managing two relationships simultaneously. For example, when a mother works with her son, she is a mother/boss working with her son/employee. Family therapists understand the complexities of dual relationships and avoid role confusion with clients, supervises, or students (AAMFT Ethics, 1991; Ryder & Hepworth, 1990). With this first hand knowledge of relationship confusion, family therapists become natural professionals for teasing apart family business relationship problems (Cole, 1991; Flemons & Cole, 1992; 1994).

METHOD

The qualitative methodology for this study was guided by the naturalistic or constructivist paradigm of Guba and Lincoln (1981, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They suggest purposeful sampling, and Patton's (1980) maximum variation sample was used to obtain diversity in: geographic location (3 different regions of the United States); family member relationship (mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter, sister-in-law, aunt, ect.); family member age (21 to 65); business type (manufacturing, production, fine arts, agricultural, etc); business size (2 employees to 5000); and business age (3 yrs. to 168.). Sampling size for qualitative research is small with the emphasis on depth instead of breadth. The researcher investigates the complexities and the meaning of the research question to each participant (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) rather than trying to prove or disprove an hypothesis. The research question was formed after the literature review indicated that combining business and family could be a challenge. The general research question became: "What is it like to work with family members in a family business?"

Families to interview were recommended by university directors of family business institutes throughout the United States. The semi structured interviews (Fetterman, 1989; Spradley, 1979) took place with the families at their business sites. Originally, the researcher planned to interview the family members separately as she thought individuals would not speak openly with other family members present. At the first two interviews, some of the family members arrived late, so the researcher interviewed the family member who showed up on time. When the rest of the family arrived, and she started the interview again, the first person did not change their answers. This encouraged the researcher to try interviewing the family together. In this way, she got to observe the family interactions and hear

their comments about each other's answers. Therefore, the interviews took on a more relationship focus rather than an individual perspective.

Data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was achieved through three sources: 1. The ability of the participants to comment on what the researcher thought she heard them say. This was done at the end of the interview. 2. The researcher spent time touring the work place and talking to other employees about the family. 3. The researcher recorded her post-interview observations of the family and their discussion.

The interviews ended after nine families had participated, and the areas of diversity and saturation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) had been achieved. The saturation point came when no new information was forthcoming in the interviews. The transcribed audiotaped interviews were analyzed by the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in that the researcher coded each incident in the data into as many categories of analysis as possible before delimiting and taking out nonrelevant properties. The categories emerged from the data according to the ideas of Constan (1992) who believes that categories are influenced by the literature review and the researcher's interpretation of what to emphasize.

Peer review was achieved by the dissertation chair reviewing all transcribed interviews, and an audit trail contained notes, journals, and post interview tapes recording the researcher's impressions. A important final step in the methodology involved *Anegotiated outcomes* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), whereby the research participants were given an opportunity to comment on a draft of the findings; this provided another check on reliability, validity, confidentiality, and anonymity. Throughout this study, confidentiality and anonymity remained a strong research ethic.

RESULTS

The findings of this study grouped into seven categories: four related to gender issues (1997), and three related to family relationships. The following section presents the three categories related to family relationships: connection, separation, and expectations. Although these themes cut across a diverse sample of participants, the information should not be generalized to all family businesses. Instead, these findings may be used to understand the complexity of family relationships in family business. In the tradition of research ethics, pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the research participants.

Connecting Family and Business

Connecting family and business means the ability to juggle two different relationships at once-- one as a family member and one as a business member. In family business, it is simultaneously acting as a family member and a business colleague. This working with relatives, according to the literature review, produces all sorts of problems (Jaffe, 1990; Rosenblatt et al., 1985; Salganicoff, 1990). Yet, most of the interviewees, except for some involved in parent-child relationships, did not complain about any major difficulties and considered the experience mostly a positive one with some difficulties. Some differences emerged in how the family businesses affects family relationships.

Wives and husbands. Married couples tended to see a complex yet rewarding connection between co-owner and spouse that carries over from the office to the home. Even though Carolyn Monte and her husband admitted problems over her confusing job title in their manufacturing company, their relationship as husband and wife in a family business flowed fairly smoothly. Difficult times did

arise for the couples. One spouse complained about handling the dual relationship. Kay Nelson, in the agriculture business with her husband, Jim, explained that sometimes it becomes difficult to wash Jim's shirts on the weekend if she is still angry with him about work.

Ariel and Brice Hellerman seemed the most at ease with their situation. Ariel described the blending of work and family in their art gallery business:

No, our relationship in or out of the office doesn't change. It doesn't matter where you are if the topic of discussion stays the same. It doesn't matter physically, because we could be anywhere, because we travel a lot, and we take different aspects of our business along with our personal lives all the time.

Sisters and brothers. Sisters and brothers reported a positive, yet sometimes difficult connection between their personal and professional relationships. All sets of siblings struggled with a word that described their relationship in the family business. "Brother" and "sister" or "co-worker" did not fit. The Shermans used "peer," while the Zeitlands and Dells chose "friend" as a way of talking about their sibling relationships at work.

Janet and Stephen Zeitland, who work together in their father's and uncle's large manufacturing business, admitted that it is difficult criticizing each other's departments, because they consider themselves such good friends. To handle this dilemma, they posited several solutions:

Janet: I think we just criticize each other. You know, you back off maybe a little bit if the other gets too defensive.

Stephen: Well, I can remember times, when we both got mad at each other. I got mad at her, but a couple of hours later, on the phone, we'd say, "I'm sorry, but this is the way I'm trying to

do it, and this is how I feel," and it all works out.

Parents and children. The parent-child relationship seemed the most difficult for family members to discuss. Many of the participants want their parents to view them less as children and more as employees, managers, or co-owners. Janet Zeitland remembered her father embarrassing her at work many times:

I guess I was 30, and my dad, when I walked into a meeting, would say to me, "Well, hello, child." And it got really embarrassing, because then it put, you know, this little sign around me, "Okay, well, the child's coming in the room," and I had to ask him to stop. And he never called me that again. But that was kind of an example, you know, of how it's hard for them to look at us as managers, not children.

Tammy Sherman and her mother, Eleanor, debated the parent-child issue. Tammy thought her mother discredits Tammy's authority with others by calling attention to the family relationship:

Tammy: It's frustrating. Yesterday, my mother said in front of customers, "Okay, girls."

Eleanor: Well, you know, it's difficult, because when I speak to someone else, you are my children. And I guess it will never change. I can't say "my employees." I haven't got another word to describe you.

Tammy: We could be sixty; you could be a hundred, and we'd still be children.

Mother: Yeah, because you're not . . . you're my employees, my staff? What are you?

In this study, one of the parent-child relationships that appeared to be particularly strained is the relationship between mother and son. More tension seems to occur when mothers and young adult sons work together. In describing her troubled relationship with her 23 year old son, Kay Nelson

contrasted her interactions with her son, Fred, to those with her nephew, Charles:

Well, I guess I treat him [nephew] differently, because he treats me differently. Charles [nephew] doesn't treat me as a mother. Fred [son] treats me as a mother, and I treat him as a son because Charles wouldn't come in and say, "Get such and such on the phone for me. I need to talk to him; I don't have the number," and Fred's doing this to me, because I'm his mother, and if it were anybody else, he would take care of it himself or ask somebody else.

Diane Hockman and her 21-year-old son, Mike, who work together in a small wholesale meat store, agreed that their working relationship is strained by her disciplining him at work in the same way she did when Mike lived at home. Carolyn Monte had a similar situation with her teenage son when she tried to supervise him in his past janitorial position in the family business and his lawn care work at home:

Yes, and I would constantly try to clarify it [when he worked as a janitor]. I said, "Brandon, please don't see me as the mother; I am the company." It was a constant struggle again even at home to ask him over and over again to do something. He does it when he feels like he can do it, and he'll do it when he's ready. There's no forcing Brandon. But even now, even at home, I hired him as to do lawn maintenance in my home, and I keep trying to clarify, "Brandon, I'm not playing the role of the mother; I'm your customer; I'm acting as a customer and not as your mother," and say that up front so he knows who is speaking. However, he just sees me as mother. Period.

Advantages. In spite of the problems, many families found advantages to working with their relatives. The Zeitland children believed their family business connection saves time in business

discussions. As Stephen explained:

You don't have to sell something to Janet, an idea or a problem; you don't have to be creative about how you're going to explain it because you know she'll understand, and you can get through all the fluff with her. You can get right to the point.

Eleanor Sherman, who works with her three children in a family business that has survived for seven generations, thought that working together adds a positive component to the family:

I would say probably our family lives--working together in the same area has enhanced our family lives. We probably enjoy each other more as adults than we would if they were living 200 miles away.

In discussing her business and family mix, Ariel Hellerman pointed out the importance of how work enhances her marriage:

But there's always this underlying thing that what we're doing financially for business has to do with us personally as people and a future. Because as the business grows stronger, we personally grow stronger.

In spite of all her problems with her son and defining her position within the company, Carolyn Monte said this about combining family and business:

Are family and business compatible? I definitely say yes. But everyone is unique, because any family is unique, and every business is unique. So you're going to take those two uniques and try to make them into a unique business in the family.

Comment. The literature review cites authors who warn against the confusing role of combining business and family relationships. The experts say that the dual relationship of family member/business

partner (or boss or employee) defeats most business families; it is too confusing to handle because the rules of one context are different from the other.

The research findings point to another side of that story. Most family members in this study found dual relationships rewarding in spite of the problems. Siblings and spouses seemed to enjoy combining business and family the most. The one relationship that did agree with the literature review was that of parent-child, particularly between a mother and young adult son. Perhaps those differences are based on the notion of generational hierarchy. In a parent-child relationship, the age difference introduces a more unequal set of circumstances. In many families, children remain children in their parents' eyes no matter how old they are. Most adult children and their parents face this conundrum only during visits with each other. Family business members, on the other hand, deal with the potential confusion every work day. On the other hand, a husband and wife as well as a brother and sister are often close in age; therefore, their relationship has a greater chance of operating within a context of equality.

Separating Family and Business

Separating family and business means the ability to draw boundaries if combining the two becomes confusing. Although the blending of business and family worked well for most of the respondents, all of them mentioned times when they need some separation or work and family life. They take a break to remind themselves that work can not continually spill over into the family context. As many men as women take the lead in creating the separation. This was somewhat unexpected as I assumed that women are more protective of family time than men.

Two of the men linked their behavior to working with fathers who never turned off the business

at home; they do not want to repeat this pattern. Randall Craft, who works in a retail store with his wife, remembered his father, who started the business, worrying about work all the time, and he wants to avoid this in his own family life. Robert Bella, who had a similar father-son business relationship, spoke of his work and family philosophy:

I made an iron clad rule. We shall not discuss business out of this facility unless we're at a business meeting or business luncheon or a dinner. That goes without exception. I don't want to discuss it at home. One of the things I learned in my first career when I was in business with my dad was, you know, he was mad at you at the office; he was mad at you at home. He was mad at you at home; he was mad at you at the office. And I vowed that I would never allow that to happen.

Not all families are as strict about the work and family separation. The Crafts allow some business talk at home, but Randall usually says a simple, "That's enough," when he wants it to end. The Montes do the same, but they have the help of their children to remind them. As Carolyn explained:

We have a mutual understanding that if the other one doesn't care to talk about it, we state it, and the other respects those wishes. Or even, if the children will say, you know, "Do we have to talk about business?" and we will cut it out. It is carried over to home a lot. It's a big part of our life, and the talk does go on at home about business. But, if we want a break from it, we just say, "Hey, I can't take it any more," or "I want to talk about something else.@"

Other families invented more dramatic signals for separation. Jim Nelson puts a newspaper in front of his face when his wife overdoes business discussions at home. Polly Dell moved out of her parent's home to escape talking about business after work. The Sherman family uses activities such as

family dinners, long walks, and bird watching to put their relationship back in the family context. Also, the Shermans spoke at length about the necessity of separating business and family from individual needs. Phillip has two children who pull him away from the family and the business, but Sarah and Tammy are unmarried with no children. Eleanor Sherman encourages her daughters to join community activities as an outlet for their individual expressions. They, along with their mother, work hard at creating separate lives outside of the family and the business.

The Hellermans, a married couple, created a variety of markers as reminders of their husband and wife relationship. One of these includes an unlisted home phone that is off limits to their business contacts. Also, Ariel insists on a simple courtesy at work when Brice calls her from another location. He must say, "Good-bye" at the end of the conversation, something he never does to other employees. This, according to Ariel, helps remind him that he is talking to his wife and not just another business associate. Brice described other ways for protecting their married relationship:

Well, because we have such a busy schedule, and it is so intense running three galleries, that we basically have a kind of unwritten rule that we don't talk about business when we get up; or we don't talk about business when we're in the shower; or we don't talk about business when we're getting dressed or while we're eating breakfast. And we almost don't start to talk about business until we've passed the Holiday Inn, and we know that we have three more minutes. And, she's going to do this; I'm going to do this, and, "Have you done this?" and "Has the mailing gone out?" and "What about this person? Did you call this person?"

But we do not talk about it in the morning, because it just begins to be too much of a treadmill, and that's really when things become uncomfortable in working with each other,

because you sense somehow that you don't have the personal life together without the common denominator of business.

The Hockman couple feel even more constraints on their relationship by working together. As they explained:

Larry: You get to--you need some time apart when you're so close.

Diane: Well, we do. Maybe not all couples are that way. I don't know. But I find it's better to be apart sometimes--have your own space, your own interests too.

Diane came up with a way to work with her husband yet provide some separation in their relationship; she decided to go back to school and open her own business. With this arrangement, she works in the mornings with her husband and son and then returns home in the afternoon to work on her new venture. Now, Diane said she feels as if she is greeting her husband instead of her boss at the end of the day.

The Zeitland siblings, Janet and Stephen, agreed that they both want to discuss business all the time no matter where they are. They gave the most recent example:

Stephen: I mean, last night I came over here to pick up some sleeping bags. I just wanted to be here two minutes, to get the sleeping bags and leave, and I was here about twenty minutes.

Janet: Talking about business.

Stephen: Talking about work. One of the kids was playing the piano; the other was in her arms screaming.

Janet: We were just talking away.

In spite of their reluctance to turn off the business context, they are sensitive to other family members feeling excluded. At family dinners, they and their father avoid business discussions out of

respect for their spouses' feelings.

Comment. In the previous comment section, it was explained that the research participants did not fit the literature review stereotype of dual relationship problems and role confusion. One of the reasons could be that these participants have found a way to clear up boundary problems between work and family. All of the participants mentioned times when they need to leave the business behind for the sake of the family. They created different ways of doing this, from making a simple, direct statement to offering dramatic signals. Husbands and wives seem particularly interested in preventing the work relationship from overwhelming their marriage. Two families mentioned a division that they feel is vital for a person within a family business. Carving out space for the individual within the family can be as important as carving out space for the family within the business.

Family Business Expectations

Family business expectations mean what family members expect from one another when they are in business together. In this research, a category of expectations associated with job performance emerged from the data. Over half of the participants mentioned an expectation difference between a family member and a regular employee. More is usually expected from a family member. Jim Nelson admitted that he personally criticizes his wife and sister-in-law in ways that he would never do to a regular employee. With an employee, he concentrates on solving the problem, but with his family business members, because he expects better performance, he is more likely to lose his temper and order them around. He elaborated:

So consequently, what I tend to do, which is really bad, is I deal with our employees differently than I do with Kay or Darlene. With someone you love and care about, you tend to criticize

personally, where with an employee, you tend to attack, find the problem, attack the problem, and see what you can do different. And I tend to say, "Darlene, damn it, how come you haven't got this done? If you really give a [expletive], you'd have had it done."

Suzanne Bella thought her father expects her to know more than the other employees, because she will inherit the business some day:

I know that he gets hot with me, and he sometimes gets more riled--I can see it--emotionally, because I think he gets more frustrated with me. He thinks I should have known better, or he can't believe that I would do something like that.

In the problems she has with her son, Diane Hockman thought she understood why she expects more from her son than other employees:

I think I am "on" him, and I wouldn't be so much that way on an employee. I'm harder on him, because I'm more concerned about the type of person he's going to become, and that's because I'm the mother.

The Zeitland siblings noted that high expectations do not always come from other family business members. The pressures they experience also come from other employees. Stephen said:

Being a family member, you're always under a microscope. Everybody's always looking at you as if you're not smart enough. Can you do the job? How are your interpersonal skills? They're always looking at you.

Eleanor Sherman stated the problem with expectations when working with family members, but her son, Phillip, turned it into a resource.

Eleanor: Being family, we are a lot more critical of each other because we're too close.

Phillip: Higher standards, too, I think. But on the flip side, this is real good; that's what makes the company successful. You've got people here who really care. So, it's a double edged sword. It makes it more difficult to be satisfied with your performance or the results, because you have such high standards for yourself and your family. But the other side is that you know you've got people who care and are involved in the business, because they want to be.

Comment.

The literature review did not emphasize expectations, but family members initiated discussions about this issue. Many participants expressed a feeling of high expectations of and from other family members. In spite of this, one family business member perceived expectations as an asset to the business. Higher expectations appear more productive than lower expectations that often demoralize the non-family employees who feel that the family member receives a free ride. No real conclusions can be drawn as to gender and age. In other words, men as well as women seem to impose as well as receive the expectations. And, peer relationships (family business members of a similar age) engender the expectations as much as hierarchical constellations of parent and child.

What the data does suggest is that differences in who participates in holding expectations may be linked in some way to the size of the company. A sister and brother in a large company felt expectations coming from some of the managers, rather than family members. In the smaller family businesses, this problem did not surface. This makes sense if one considers that larger companies have more managers competing for senior positions, and these managers may view the bosses= children as their main competition.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of families who work together in a family firm. I believe that goal was achieved. However, not all of the important issues could be covered. One of the limitations of this study involved the lack of ethnicity in the diversity sample. Other important questions that were not covered included: What happens when roles are reversed regarding power, e.g., parents employed by children? What are the power conflicts and how do you overcome them? How does communication vary (or not) in different contexts? These may be important topics to cover in future research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The research questions and results could not include all that the researcher thought was important. Nevertheless, some significant ideas evolved from the research results. The category of expectations started to include key employees. Expectations from and about outsiders, the name for non-family business members, seemed important to the participants. In consulting to business families, professionals may want to make sure they include questions about outsiders. The categories of combining and separating work and business also may assist in family business consultation. Experts in the literature review state that dual relationships cause family members to experience major problems in family business. The findings in this study point to another side. None of the participants considered the problems of dual relationships significant enough to contemplate working elsewhere. In fact, combining work with relatives seemed to be agreeable for almost all of the participants, except for the mother/boss and young adult son/employee. When difficulties arose in combining work and family, most participants created markers for handling the confusion. It seems as if the families have found a way to allow the

two opposites of connection and separation of family and business to co-exist; they have succeeded in dealing with the ambiguities instead of adhering to strict rules in the two different contexts (Cole, 1991; Cole, 1997; Flemons & Cole, 1992, 1994). The research findings also suggest that many families may have the ability to discover their own way of handling dual relationships. If not, therapists may assist them in finding ways to cope as illustrated by the following case example.

CASE EXAMPLE

Mary, a woman in a family business, contacted the therapist who is the author of this article. Mary complained that the family business and her marriage were in trouble. She and her husband owned and operated a small medical equipment business that they started 10 years earlier. The couple, in their early fifties, had been married for 12 years; it was the second marriage for both. They raised the children from their first marriages together, and all of the children were now young adults in their twenties.

The therapist met with the couple at their business site for five sessions. The first session was spent getting the problem definition from both husband and wife. Mary restated her concern that she was tired of assuming the responsibility of the business without her husband, Jim's, support. Jim stated that he was tired of Mary's nagging and making the business their whole life. During this session and the ones following, the therapist utilized the three research constructs of family business connection, separation, and expectations in working with this couple.

Family Business Connection

The research findings of the study talked about the difficulties that some couples experience if too much work overtakes their marriage and family time. Mary and Jim suffered from this common

problem. The business side of their relationship overwhelmed the family side, leaving them little room to relate as husband and wife. Jim was looking for a wife when they got home, but Mary wanted to rehash the work day, which meant criticizing Jim for his lack of partnership at work. It was difficult for Mary to understand why a true husband would not be more supportive at work and for Jim to see that a true wife would not let the work day go once they left the office. The spouse roles took second place to the business roles, and the connection between family and business became one sided. Once Jim and Mary learned that this is a common family business problem, they felt less defeated and more interested in finding a way to reclaim their marriage .

Family Business Separation

The research findings indicate that families experiencing confusion with dual relationships in family business can find ways to separate the two. Too much connection between family and business can be solved by introducing some separation of the two systems. The couple had not devised a way of separating the two when one overwhelmed the other. The therapist asked questions to lead them toward devising their own plan; one plan was needed at home and another at work, because Jim and Mary agreed that the team work they once felt both at home and at work had disappeared.

First, at home, Mary and Jim had been used to an active schedule with entertaining friends and participating in their children's activities. As their children left home and the entertaining subsided, the couple decreased their interactions around home projects. This allowed the resentments at work to follow them home and affect their time outside of the office. Mary had more time to review the injustices she felt at work and never felt enough emotional connection with Jim at home to allow her complaints time to relax. Jim felt that Mary never gave up her business role at home and missed the

wife that he used to have.

As the therapist reviewed the team work at home, she normalized the fact that Mary and Jim had pulled together as a team in order to fulfill a busy schedule that had disappeared as their children left home. She asked what new challenges would encourage a feeling of connection at home. Mary spoke of hosting a large dinner party but she did not know if they could pull it off given their conflict. Two weeks later Mary reported that she and Jim had not only given a successful dinner party, but also on the morning of the party when she started to panic, Jim put his arms around her and said, "Don't worry, we will get through this together." Mary beamed at feeling like a husband and wife team who did not fight about work over the weekend; they were too busy entertaining their friends.

Second, at work, there seemed to be confusion over roles of who did what. A lot of Mary's frustration seemed related to a working style between the two of them that may have worked at home raising their children but was causing problems at work. Their style centered around the formula, "Whoever is available can handle whatever comes up." That worked for them in deciding who would drive the kids to soccer practice or who would start dinner, but it only created confusion at work. Neither spouse had a clear job description of what he or she did. Jim had a somewhat clearer idea of his responsibilities and sometimes did not come forth to handle what he saw as Mary's work. Mary interpreted his uninvolved as lack of support and was deeply hurt by his reluctance to help her.

Job descriptions were something the couple had never talked about. Therefore, separating their work roles (job descriptions) from each other and separating their business roles from their spouse roles became increasingly confusing. At those times when Jim did not come forward to help Mary, she saw this as a withholding, unsupportive husband while Jim saw this as a business partner keeping within

his job description. Because they had never talked about the lack of clear work boundaries, they kept missing cues from one another. Once job descriptions were discussed, more clarity engendered a more harmonious working relationship. When the therapist asked them for more separation ideas at work, the couple came up with their own solution; they planned to divide their shared space into separate offices.

Family Business Expectations

The research findings indicate that expectations need to be explored by family members--not only with each other but also with non-family member employees. In the first session, it became obvious that this couple had very different expectations for each other at work. Mary continually felt that Jim was not working hard enough in the business while Jim felt that Mary obsessed too much about work. To add to the expectation confusion, Mary compared Jim's commitment to work with another employee, Harold, who had been with the company for five years. Harold became Mary's right-hand man, and she relied on him to help her out in areas when Jim let her down. The therapist asked the couple if Harold were Mary's office husband. That question startled them both, and they admitted that Harold was, indeed, Mary's office spouse. Then they both agreed that neither one of them wanted Harold to have that much power in the company, but he always seemed to be around when Mary needed him. As the couple talked with the therapist, Harold's status diminished from office husband to meddling child or someone who found ways to come between the couple. Mary and Jim planned a talk with Harold about his job description (which had been as undefined at both of theirs), and Mary started backing away from Harold by going to Jim when she needed help.

At the beginning of the fifth session the couple seemed more preoccupied with work and

planning the office Christmas party than a desire to talk about their relationship. They reported a more generous feeling for each other and were making plans to expand the business, then sell it and start a consulting practice. The therapist suggested taking a break from the sessions and contacting her if they needed more help. Four weeks later the therapist received a card from Mary saying that both her marriage and business seemed to be back on track.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The preceding case example illustrates how therapists can apply research concepts to practice. The study's three findings of family business connection, separation, and expectations were used to organize the therapy *Amap* in a case example. Thus, research can become more *Auser friendly* and helpful for clinical application. These ideas should not suggest that this will help family therapists know everything they need to know when working with business families. Instead, therapists may use these ideas as beginning concepts to orient them in their work. Asking questions about connection, separation, and expectations can guide the business family into coming up with their own ideas for problem solving.

Too many family therapists are reluctant to take on family business clients because they feel they do not know enough about the business world. This remains a healthy perspective and encourages family therapists : 1. To work in teams with business professionals to thoroughly cover the two components of *Afamily* and *Abusiness*. and 2. To continue learning about business issues and how they impact families who work together. However, many business families such as the case presented can be a reminder that not all family firm problems involve complicated financial and succession issues. While family therapists and other mental health professionals continue to learn more about the intricacies of family business consultation, they remain a valuable resource for preserving the *Afamily* in family

business.

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