Application of family therapy in family businesses

A case study research on family business consulting

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The article introduces a research that examined the impact of family on the cooperation of individual family members in family-owned businesses by applying a theoretical framework based on family therapy, family business research and social value research. Firstly, it presents a model based on blending family therapy and social research on the individual's value preferences with the aim of exploring the internal structure of this family effect. It also shows a possible family business consulting method in order to observe and handle the dynamics of this internal structure. Then, testing of the described model and consulting method is conducted by multiple-embedded case study research. Based on the results, refining statements are formulated regarding the applicability of family therapy in family business consulting and social value research.

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1. Introduction

The general underlying issue of the research is the role of the family inside the economy. Since it is the family that plays an intermediary role, mediating between the societal macro-level and the micro-level of the individual. It transfers certain values and culture, production, managerial, consumption and political culture. The research concentrates on a rather small area of this vast set of problems, namely on the situation when family members work together in a family-owned business. Hence the focal point of the research can be formulated this way: how can this intermediary family effect be inspected when a family has its own company.

2. Research objectives and questions

2.1. The initial problem

There is no widely-accepted model in social sciences for describing the existence and operation of family-owned businesses stretching over disciplinary boundaries (Sharma 2004: 3-5). By using these theoretical frame of family therapy, the goal was to make both the structure of the impact of the family observable, and to explore its internal dynamic. The research aimed to realize these goals by banking on two pillars of research questions. On the one hand, the structure of the family effect was mapped through mixing social value research with family therapy. On the other hand, the dynamic of the items of this structure was explored by identifying and fixing a detailed consulting method based on family therapy, targeted at guiding the dual system of family and business.

2.2. Relationship to findings of previous researches

As far as consulting is concerned, no method purely based on family therapy (Strike 2012: 162-163) identifying a specific protocol (von Schlippe 2013: 211-214) for handling the duality of family and business had previously been applied. This consulting method is neither family therapy, nor management consulting process. It is not a family therapy because the consultant does not take the responsibility for the outcome of their cooperation, but for escorting the clients through the process of change. Furthermore, the relationship between consultant and family members is of a different quality than the one emerging between a therapist and family members in psychotherapy. It is neither a consulting process since the consultant does not give any advice regarding the operation of the family or in business issues of the family-owned company. It is a hybrid method, somewhere in-between family counseling and management consulting, with the goal of joint handling of the individual and dual systemic level concentrating primarily on the operation and structure of the common section of family and business.

The common section is a subsystem of both family and company systems, where factual occurences are the same, but the meaning either system attaches to the specific happening can be very different. In one of the examined case studies of the research, a change in ownership happened. The company itself was a medium-sized production company having its headquarter in Bács Kiskun County of Hungary, and the founder and CEO had decided on passing the torch to his son. This swap of possession and de facto retirement of the previous leader caused rather diverse consequences – from the point of view of the family, it was a turning point in the family life cycle. Both at the individual level and at the systemic level, they had to face the subsequent classic family crisis. From the point of view of the company, the successful formal succession process exerted maturing effects on organizational culture, and also meant a seemingly slight, but profound shift in the strategy of the organization and a corresponding realignment in the relationship between the company and its stakeholders. The common section is the subsystem of the whole dual structure where the interests of both systems should be represented with an equal weight. Henceforth, all the above mentioned meanings of the one and only factual happening, the formally closed succession, are equally important and valid in the duality of family and company, and should also be treated this way.

In practice, equal representation and treatment means that the protocol focuses on the enablement of the common section to operate in a functional way, where both the term ’enablement’ and ‘functional operation’ is applied in their meaning as used by structural family therapy (Minuchin 2006: 20). That is helping the system to fulfill its functions, to realize the needs of individuals and the system as a whole by family therapy interventions targeted at shaping and developing the quality of its boundaries and internal rules, and at making it install its own operation. As the procedure is conveyed in a common subsection of both systems, its effect will wave through the subsystemic boundaries and change the operation of the two original systems as well. Thus, instead of working with two large systems of family and its business, where the multitude of different factors that should be taken into account can hinder the planning of the interventions, this method applies a rather smaller, targeted focus. Nevertheless, the impact, the healing will appear both in the family and in the business (Schlippe 2014: 245-248; Minuchin 2006: 54-57).

The specific outcome of the consulting method can be grouped into four categories. Firstly, as mentioned above, it causes common sections to operate in a functional way. Secondly, as a process based on family therapy, it enhances both the systemic integration of the new operational ways developed by the family members within the common section. Additionally, it also supports the personal, internal integration in each and every possible role (family member, manager, owner) (Davis-Tagiuri 1989) an individual can play in these systems. Thirdly, it consists of two parts: a phase of separation and a phase of integration. In the first part, family members and consultants meet in two different rooms: in a so-called 'family room', where members are to design the space of the room and living sculptures (Satir et al. 1991: 283) according to the family relationships perceived by them. In the so-called 'business room', both space and living sculptures are created based on the personal relationship between family members as employers/managers in the company. This artificial and emphasized separation offers the opportunity for the participants to identify those operational patterns in their relationship that stem from the other system and to make new decisions about them (Satir et al. 1991: 114-118). Once both family and business systems (through the work with the subsystem of the common section) reviewed and refreshed their boundaries in regard to the other system, the phase of integration comes: participants establish (or re-establish) the common section, virtually unifying the family and the company system in the consulting process. This second phase is initiated in a third room called the 'common room' by answering the following questions (Carlock – Ward 2001). Firstly, does the family want to continue the business, and secondly, if yes, then to what extent is it able and has the willingness to take the responsibility for this ownership. Thirdly, as subsequence of the second question, what are the rules for employment of a family member in the company, what are the rules for participating in strategical decision-making, what are the rules of succession, and finally, what are the rules for handling shares and ownership in a fair and effective way (Carlock – Ward 2001). Answering these tough questions, or at least making a decision on the process that results in finding answers is the third specific outcome of the method. Establishment (or again, re-establishment) of the Family Council should be considered as the fourth, final outcome, where this Council counts as the formal representative body of the common section with the strictly fixed mandate of representing and guarding the application of the rules mentioned in the previous point and also of developing and reinventing these rules from time to time as the business and the family evolves. Its decisions certainly have a huge impact on both family and business systems (since its territory covers a common subsystem of both), but the Council should not intervene in any other issues beyond the scope of the above questions (because it automatically would mean the manipulation of either system in the other). All in all, it is not above the dual systems, it is a conscious representative of their common section.

As far as the social value research is concerned, family dynamics in individual's social value preferences have already been statistically detected and showed (Dolan 1995; Jennings – Niemi 1968), but the internal structure and dynamic of this family effect is a scarcely researched area.

2.3. Theoretical grounding of the research

Since the whole research is connected to a triadic intersection of social disciplines, the theoretical background of the research was supplied by three fields of social sciences.

First, family therapy should be mentioned with a system theory that permeates it and provides a unique systemic point of view for this research (Goldenberg 2004: 78). Inside family therapy theory, the consulting method is strongly banked on the theoretical frames, interventions and results of the structural family therapy (Minuchin 2006), the experience-based or systemic transformational therapy of Satir (Satir et al. 1991) and the solution-centered school of de Shazer and Kim Berg (de Jong – Kim Berg 2013). An emphasis should be put on the fact that although the consulting method tested throughout the research is referred to sometimes in this article as 'new', its building blocks and theory are not new at all: it applies the heritage of some of the great pioneers of family therapy by fitting them together for a very specific situation: when a family has its own business.

The second theoretical pole is constituted by family business research. Although it is a vast and very varied discipline in terms of theoretical orientation, one can make a distinction among theoretical directions based on the perceived relationship of family and business. The research presented in this article accepts and follows the model in which family and its business forms a coherent and organic unity (Sharma 2004: 3; Kadis – McClendon 2006: 96-98). Neither of them is the subsystem of the other. They are separate systems, with different identities. Representing different aspects of human life, they are equally important. In specific issues, they should be strictly separated, however, on the other hand, there are family, managerment and ownership issues that can be understood and handled only by examining them together. The research directly used one element of the family business mediation model of Carlock and Ward (2001), the framing questions as central topics for the Family Council, but these are applied in a slightly different meaning than in the original model, and in a primarily different manner, as part of a family therapy intervention at the start of the integration phase of the consulting process.

Third, social value research was conducted by applying a specific concept of culture. According to this concept, culture is not merely a large set of patterns of values, corresponding norms, attitudes, beliefs and subsequent behavior in social life. There is a vivid, two-way relationship between the individual and the community level, by which the individual decides on the acceptance and absorption of these patterns and he may also constantly create new patterns that can get to the larger set of the community culture (Adams – Markus 2004; Inglehart – Norris 2009: 30-32). Applying this concept, the research worked with a special model, which tried to describe the mechanism of how the family exerts an impact on the individual's value choice. According to this model, the individual value preference originates from three sources: the first, 'external' source refers to the community's culture, the second, 'internal' is the result of individuals' own decisions based on personal experiences independently from – or perhaps even to the contrary to – the culture. The third one is the family effect that was labeled in the research as adding further layers of meaning beyond the original meaning. This further meaning will not change the factual and cognitive content of the values from the external or internal source, it just complements them: the values are used by the family dynamics to fulfill its functions, thus it colours them up with new submeanings regarding their secondary emotional, perceptional or expectational application in human relations. My second assumption was that this family effect can be grabbed by the given family's characteristics as described by the family therapy theory. My third assumption was that the contents of the values from the second source are independent from the family effect as defined in the above, second assumption. According to my fourth assumption, family characteristics both mediate and moderate the living of the values originating from the external and internal, that is living our life according to our values.

2.4. Research questions

The first question relates to the problem whether it is worth applying family therapy at all to handling the relationship between businesses and the ownership of families. Family therapy, organizational sciences, the consulting literature and family business studies do not even consider this issue a question, everyone accepts the correctness of this statement.

Yet, one should be concerned with it because certain parts of the consulting literature, specifically the one on entrepreneurship studies are based on the axiom that the family and the firm are working against each other, thus they should be strictly separated in their operations. This axiom contradicts the theoretical starting point of this research. Formulating this issue as a research question and as a hypothesis, I aimed to inspect the correctness of this starting point through the analysis of the data collected throughout this research.

Thus the first statement (hypothesis) was put in the following way: family therapy (the application both of its theory and interventions) is needed in handling problems of family businesses stemming from the families themselves.

The second research question relates to the practical application of the first question: it deals with whether common dynamics of family and the operations of business systems can be grabbed and handled by family therapy theory and interventions or not.

The family business consulting and family therapy literatures consider this as an axiom, that family therapy is designed to be able to treat the dynamics of human communities, systems constituted by humans – as a first remark, one should add this to the formulation of the second hypothesis. Beyond that, considering the first hypothesis as true, all in all one can make a straight summary that family therapy theory and its instruments are capable of handling the common section. The process of proving this could thus be ended.

However, since a specific consulting method is recorded in the research, the second statement had been tested through the application of the method. The question should be formulated in the following way: how can the duality of the family and the firm be handled by the family business consulting method? What is the process of this method? Does the process really take place throughout the testing that had been described in the theoretical introduction? Thus the aim of formulating the second hypothesis is to put the designed new family business consulting method to a process-centered test.

The second statement (hypothesis) is thus as follows: the common section of the operation of the family and the business can be handled by family therapy (by the application of both its theory and interventions).

While the previous statement concentrates on the process, there was a need to formulate further research questions as well that focus on the outcome of treating family businesses with a family business consulting method: considering all of the circumstances of the method, do we really get what we wanted? Since the specific goal of the consulting method is to start up the common section of the family and business systems, or, in other words, it aims at enabling the common section to operate in a functional way (Minuchin 2006: 20), and – being connected to both larger systems – to fulfill the needs of both systems. Thus the outcome-based testing should observe to what extent can one speak about the functional operation of the common section.

The third statement (hypothesis) had been recorded as the following: the consulting method described in the research is effective (operationalizing the concept of effectiveness by analysing the extent of functional operation of the common section of the two systems).

Finally, the fourth, and last research question relates to the role of the family in the relationship between the individual and the culture of the community. Referring to the theoretical models and the underlying assumptions described in section 2.3, the assumptions deliver further explanation of the first one. The second assumption itself is not a hypothesis, but a descriptive statement. The third assumption is a statement as well, but not a descriptive one, hence it should be tested.

The possible proof of the assumptions could be a test on a large sample. However, some problematic points can be mentioned in connection with this testing process. First, it is both a theoretical problem and an issue of research design of how one can make a clear difference between basic human values and 'applied' values in a specific culture. Second, the core of the assumptions is the hypothesized model of the dynamics and structure of the relationship between the triad of personal values, family effects and community culture. Although this structure and dynamics are based on 'common sense' and logic, it is merely a mental construction. Statistical testing should only be applied if we knew much more about it, that is, if we already had results from explorative and descriptive research, which we are lacking. Third, a thorough survey would not merely need a large sample. If the work starts, the strongest results can only be delivered if the survey is filled out by all family members of the involved families – this would increase the organizational-financial needs of the data collection.

Thinking through all of these arguments, instead of testing all of the assumptions, I preferred to step back and to focus the research efforts on the central element of the statements, namely on the relationship between personal values and the family effect. Thus, the fourth, final statement (hypothesis) was formulated as follows: the characteristics of the individual's family have an impact on his or her personal value preference.

3. Research method and design

3.1. Multiple-embedded case study research

The chosen method of testing the research questions (and hypotheses) is case study research. The content of the research and the nature of the research questions directed unequivocally to this methodological instrument.

Research questions ask 'why?' and 'how?'. The goal is to observe a consulting method in work that had not been tested before – there are no data from previous researches, thus historical analysis could not be applied. Furthermore, it is not possible to realize the total control of the participants, participant characteristics and the behavior of the researchers. Contextual factors of the consulting process stemming from the family, family firm and their social and natural environment can not be controlled either. Thus, experimental design could not have been applied as well. Case study research should be applied exactly under these circumstances (Yin 2014: 14; Gerring 2007: 37-38).

As case study research professionals highlight, lots of misunderstandings emerge in connection with this research method inside the social sciences. According to one of these beliefs, there is a hierarchy among the different research methods: case study research is rather useful in generating hypotheses, while one should apply other, more adequate methods for testing those hypotheses and constructing new models and theories (Yin 2014: 15; Gerring 2007: 17). On the contrary, no hierarchy could be built on methods based on either their origin, quality or logic. Furthermore, the case study itself can be both explorative, descriptive and explanative. The next misunderstanding relates to the belief that a research can not draw general conclusions from one case (or small number of cases), henceforth case study research can not contribute authentically to scientific research work. The truth is that one can draw general conclusions even from one case. In these cases, our hypotheses can be accepted or refused based on logical inference instead of statistical inference. Certainly, logical inference can only be applied if the entire research, and the phases of data collection and analysis fulfill special, concrete requirements. The third misunderstanding is that case study research is automatically biased by nature: the researcher will write the case study in a way that makes it lean toward the acceptance of the hypotheses. Personal biasedness is evidently a characteristic risk of the case study research. But it can be avoided by following well-defined methods and working on it with adequate procedures. Making it clearly visible and understandable for the readers how research questions connect with data collection, research protocol, the collected evidence, the previously fixed methods of analysis and the interpretation of the results is the key factor to carrying out robust and valid case study research. By this, the researcher can also show how the data can be reproduced by future research. All in all, it is quite a misconception that bias would belong to the core nature of this methodology (Yin 2014: 19-22, Flyvbjerg 2006).

The four hypotheses are tested through multiple-embedded case study research. Multiple, since the dynamics of the operation of the common section is observed in several cases. Embedded, since inside each case, it inspects the level of individuals both as family members and as colleagues in the firm, the upper systemic level of the family and the company system, and finally the subsystemic level of their common section at the same time. The primal analytical units are the duality of family and their company, and the common section. The research dealt with Hungarian family businesses.

Entrepreneurs pursuing business in the legal form of 'individual entrepreneurship' (micro entrepreneurs) were not involved in the research. On one hand – as Judit Filep states – it is not worth appraising their rate among Hungarian economic enterprises since there are a lot of not operating individual entrepreneurships established legally only under pressure (Csákné 2013: 24.). On the other hand, even in the case of the operating individual entrepreneurs, since other family members are not involved in the business, the family effect as conceptualized by the research cannot be observed.

Participation in the data collection, either in the direct testing of the consulting method or in the control group was free of charge for families and their businesses. I followed three basic criterion when chosing from the applicants. The first criteria was that they should apply with an unequivocal and definite intent for active participation. Secondly, I always observed whether the consulting process was really considered by them as a chance for change and not as a manipulative instrument for strengthening their old way of functioning and attempting to hinder the start up of the common section. The third criteria was that the chosen company should have been the characteristic representative of the group of Hungarian family businesses both regarding their size, their structure and their industry. Family business, as a separate category is not recorded in the surveys of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. However, one can apply the data on SMEs featuring the population of family firms, since the vast majority of the SMEs can be considered as family-owned businesses (Málovics – Vajda 2012: 379).

Before the testing phase I decided that if a firm applied under the above circumstances for participation in the testing phase, the testing process would be applied without any further investigation or consideration. If I had the opportunity to choose from the firms, which one I prefer, then – based on the statistical characteristics of this population (KSH 2011 5; 10-11) – one third of the firms drawn into the data and case analysis will be medium enterprises and the other two thirds will be small-sized enterprises, who preferably have a legal form of limited partnership or limited liability company and who – also preferably – work primarily in the service sector, and secondly in the industrial sector.

3.2. Relationship of the research questions, data collection and data analysis – steps of hypotheses testing

The data collection had eight resources: (1) the review and processing of family business study and family therapy literature, (2) the interviews conducted with other family therapists on similar cases, (3) semi-structured interviews recorded from families participating in the direct testing, (4) the Session Rating Scales filled out by family members involved in the testing, (5) the FACES IV survey filled out by the families involved in the testing twice (before and after the testing process), (6) direct observations of researchers during the testing process of both the families and each others work, (7) the FACES IV survey used in the control group of family businesses, and finally (8) a separate family consulting-like semi-structured interview on one's personal value preferences. Considering the second source: other therapists were asked about their cases where the problem brought by the family emerged in the context of the family's business as well. These interviews were structured ones, I asked the same questions from all of the therapists and recorded my own answers to the same questions about my experiences before, after and during the particular interview. Considering the fourth source, it is a tested and verified battery elaborated by Miller (Miller et al. 2003). Regarding the FACES survey, or in its long form the Family Adaptibility and Cohesion Evaluation Scale, both participants from the testing group and the control group filled out its fourth generational version (Olson 2008), but not on the family system as the aim and target of the original test, but rather on the common section of the family and the family-owned firm.

Since there are no specific, but general standards for enhancing the quality of the design of a case study research, a specific research protocol had been created well before the data collection phase, which linked the research questions and hypotheses with the matching data collection source, methods of data collection and methods of analysis in order to show how data are connected directly to research problems, how they become information and how this information is used in testing, with the aim of increasing both conceptual, internal, external validity and reliability of the research.

3.3. Description of the research

The data collection was thus supported beyond the review of the literature by three large sources: cases of other family therapists, separate cases where the entire process had been tested with the participants and data collected from the cases of the control group.

As far as the cases of other family therapists concerned, I sent out a letter to the main mailing list of the Hungarian Association of Family Therapy. Two therapists wrote back to me, I conducted a structured interview with both of them, they talked about one of their characteristic matching cases.

Considering direct testing, preparation and organization of the testing itself, this delivered a lot of valuable information and instructive experience. Although I started to seek participants in January 2014 till the beginning of June 2014, which was the end of the data collection, only three families and their businesses decided on initiating the consulting method. Finally, two processes started and I followed one case until its formal end, the follow-up meeting.

Regarding the control group, six families and their companies participated in this area of data collection. The structured interviews and surveys were recorded between April and October 2014.

4. The results of the research - Hypothesis testing based on the data

4.1. Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis is accepted by the literature of the family business study, the matching part of organizational development and family therapy. They all agree that family therapy is perfectly adequate to inspect and handle the relational patterns of family members in other systems constituted by them – due to the grounds of family therapy in system theory. Henceforth evidences from the literature unambiguously verify the correctness of the first hypothesis.

One should mention two important notes here. Firstly, this statement is only accepted in general form. This means that the agreement is not about the concrete usage of given interventions, nor the application of specific family therapy schools in their wholeness, but rather they accept the rightness of family therapy approach in these situations. This also means that nobody states that family therapy methods could have been applied without any modification or further consideration of the environment of family businesses and also nobody has delivered clean-cut evidence so far.

The other point refers to the fact that the statement behind the hypothesis should still be inspected, since another part of the entrepreneurial literature emphasizes the opposition of the family and the firm, and thus also their separation. Because of this I formulated further sub-hypotheses. One can clearly see based on the information gained throughout the data collection that, on the one hand, the overlap in the operation of both systems (substitution and complementation of each other) appeared in each and every inspected cases without any exception. On the other hand, these overlaps can be positively treated by family therapy interventions. Both families from the control group and participants from direct testing put an emphasis that they found the idea of this method very useful. Participants of the testing based on their personal experience added to this that without this consulting method they would not have been able to find out what kind of problems hindered them, nor would they have been able to find their solutions.

All in all, I accepted the first hypothesis.

4.2. Hypothesis 2

On the one hand, it has already been established that family therapy literature considers this as an axiom: family therapy is adequate to handle the dynamics of human communities, systems constituted by human beings. Besides, having the first hypothesis accepted, the data that have been used in the process of its proof regarding the usefulness of family therapy are still valid in the case of the second hypothesis and can also be applied. Putting these two statements together, one can determine: family therapy theory and interventions are adequate for treating the common section. The proof would reach an end here.

However, the testing of the second hypothesis is not only about its general validity, but also about the process-based testing of the consulting process outlined in the dissertation.

Referring to that, one can state that the process of the consulting is of family therapy by nature. Not only because obviously even the process is brimful of family therapy interventions at its surface because it's theoretical and formal framing is based in family therapy. Beyond that, I also compared the data with the steps of change (family therapy process) described by Satir et al. (1991), structural and solution-focused schools: as a result, I realized that the phases formulated by the theory of the schools appeared in all of the observed cases, again without any exception. Firstly, it had been shown that the assumptions behind the logic model can be held independently from the particular characteristic of the specific cases. Furthermore, the steps of the logic model behind the consulting method are the following:

1. Helper joins the systems – both at an individual level and at a systemic level

2. Decision on the common work

3. Contracting

4. Separation of the family and company system

5. Decision of the family on the (responsibility of) ownership of the company

6. Living in the common section and making it operate – re-integration of the family and company system

7. Follow-up, control of the outcome, closing of the process

I found that the steps of the process followed each other according to the described way with one exception. Here the steps occurred not because I followed a certain protocol, quite the contrary. The first three steps really belong to the basic steps of a helping process, they definitely appear. But from that point on, I followed the change process of the client – without any constraint or prescribed protocol. The process experienced and led by them followed the steps of the logic model on the whole: I experienced that the integration of the 6th step evolved fully only at the follow-up session, that is at the 7th step – this was the meeting when the individual level and systemic level integrations became harmonious with each other.

The consultant can only offer the possibility and the frames of the integration. Formal integration might even occur between the two systems, but real integration depends on personal decisions of the individual family members. Integration can take place when it is time for it – one cannot be more specific on the certainty of the emergence of the integrative processes. Integration definitely happened in the inspected cases – but it could not give any direct orientation when the process in other families would conclude.

All in all, the logic model in its wholeness can certainly be generalized – the dynamic described by the model is independent from specific cases. However, it is only valid with this addition: the 6th and 7th steps may overlap each other.

Based on the above points I accepted the second hypothesis.

4.3. Hypothesis 3

While the second hypothesis targeted the testing of the consulting method based on its process, the third hypothesis inspects its effectiveness by focusing on its outcome.

First, I observed whether those so called 'common factors' occurred throughout the process of consulting, from which it was shown that they always appear when the outcome of the helping session is effective (Sprenkle et al. 1999; Goldenberg – Goldenberg 2004: 425). I found that these elements emerged almost without exception in each session.

Second, I also inspected whether the functionally operating common section really existed or not, since that was one of the most important goals of the procedure. I was not able to draw a clear conclusion on that point. Several occurrences, data, patterns and the results of surveys showed that the common section became more open and more autonomous: its boundaries got on the one hand stronger, and more flexible regarding the functionally needed areas. However, a certain smaller circle of decisional mechanisms had not evolved throughout the process of integration that would be needed by the common section in order to fulfill its functions.

Along the consulting process in the case of a medium-sized company operating in the light industry in Fehér County of Hungary, a significant boundary had been reestablished/drawn between the owner-managing director son and the founder-co-owner mother. This process had been observable on the sessions of the integrational part. It was not only me who realized it, but the assistant had similar experiences whose work was to observe me and the whole process from an external point of view. Establishing healthy boundaries could be seen from happenings occurring between sessions, like mother and son could finally reach an agreement on regulations of cash-management, or they could finally close issues regarding shares of ownership of family members that were open for years or even a decade. However, it was only the last session, at the middle of the integrational part, when both the managing director and his wife, the sales director reported sadly that they had never received a compliment from the founding mother/mother-in-law – it reflects that the detachment from the mother took place only partially. This latter observation is data against the effectiveness of the process. All in all, the hypothesis regarding the operational effectiveness of the common section could neither be accepted, nor rejected.

Third, because of the difficulties of the proof of this hypothesis, I formulated more counter-hypotheses with the aim that the inspection of these counter-statements will deliver further experiences and evidences regarding the effectiveness of the method. Based on the data, all counter-hypotheses were rejected, not only regarding the inspected case, but in general as well.

All in all, despite the various direct and indirect evidences I did not accept the third hypothesis based on maximum caution – it is also true that I could not reject it either.

4.4. Hypothesis 4

Honestly speaking, based on the gained experience in my work as a professional helper, I was absolutely sure that the external values would be connected to the family rules just as the fourth hypothesis stated. The acceptance of the hypothesis is certainly not backed by statistical inference since I worked with the data of three interviews, but on logical inference.

Yet, I have been interested whether one can identify a pattern regarding the occurrence of the family effect. My observations concerning the previous point will be presented in the concluding section. Besides, the aim of the hypothesis testing was to underline the significance of the application of family therapy in the value research in social sciences.

All in all, the fourth hypothesis was accepted.

5. Conclusions – Summary of findings and further results

I accepted the hypothesis concerning the application of family therapy, the hypothesis concerning the focus and the process of the consulting method, and the hypothesis concerning the family effect having an impact on how individuals absorb community-level values based on the data analysis. I could neither accept nor reject the third hypothesis regarding the effectiveness of the consulting method.

It became obvious that there is a need for family therapy and the outlined consulting method in the case of family businesses. However, it is also very important that direct application of family therapy can not deliver an effective solution in each and every case.

Before the research, I personally thought that no matter what the perceived problem is in the company, it surely can be handled by family therapy since its treatment methods are taking the bull by the horns, touching the core dynamics and reaching to and healing the roots of problems both in the individual intrapsychic world and – by this also – in the operation of the family system. I proved to be wrong. I realized that there are specific levels of application of family therapy and the effective level depends naturally only on the expressed needs of the clients. From this point of view, level zero should be when clients merely want to acquire a special skill, e.g. communication, or want to purchase a special consulting package on portfolio management or on estate planning. The family dynamics will certainly influence the realization of this process, at the same time, clients do not need any specialist with family therapy or systemic orientation, but an experienced trainer or professional consultant. Level one of the application would mean a situation when family members want to make important decisions having an impact both on family and company life. They do not have major relational issues that could hinder an open and honest discussion, so they hire a professional, a family mediator who is experienced in guiding family meetings on fixed issues in a mediative way. Hence level one means that consultants do apply the systemic approach of family therapy, on which complex techniques of family mediation could be based on, but there is no need for using direct interventions from family therapy. The next step, level two is about the situation when clients are aware of relational problems in the workplace, and they want to solve them for the best interest of the company. It would mean the direct application of family therapy interventions on the personal relationships of family members both inside the family-owned business, as employees, managers and owners, and inside the family. A lot of consulting models offer possible solutions for this kind of framing (Strike 2012: 156-157), I presented one possible consulting model and method in this article. Finally, if emotional entanglement, years of disagreement, vicious quarrels or, on the contrary, deep relational rigidity arise in the company between family members, or in other words, constraining, hindering family dynamics are in constant presence for a long time in the firm, then level three, classic family therapy is advisable rather than a sheer mediation or family business consulting process. Clients will definitely tell what they want and what their needs are. Their expressed preference for the above mentioned levels will depend not only on how deep their issue is rooted to personal interactions, but also from the company size, involved number of generations, type of ownership, complexity of ownership and business organization, furthermore the organizational and market life cycle, and their community culture.

As an additional result of the research, a further pattern also emerged that had not been expected before the data collection: it seemed that in all cases involved in the research (it was obvious at the tested family and their business and at the cases delivered by other family therapists; I was able to collect only indirect evidences at the cases of participants in the control group), the business system complemented the family system in a very special way. Transactional patterns leading to tension and quarrel between family members appear in the company and the members play them again and again with the aim of resolving them in the business system. This process is augmented on one hand by the fact that the physical and mental environment in the firm is different than that of the family, thus it is easier for the members to re-play those transactional patterns in a way that lead to new, unexpected solutions. On the other hand, the profit-orientation in the company and the rational cognitive decisional framework formed by core managerial and economic issues also modifies the emotional charge of those same family interactions: they might play the same relational process, but they can disregard the emotions or alter them, and these emotions can be projected onto and lived through a very specific managerial problem.

A clear relationship had unfolded between the individual application of the external, community values and the family effect. This relationship is certainly not built on statistical inference, since I have used the data of three interviews, but on logical inference. Further patterns regarding the relationship between values and family effects also emerged that had not been previously expected.

First, I found that value dimensions that are different based on their content (for instance the extent of rejection of corruption or the significance of the maintenance of equal opportunities for all) can be tightly linked by the family effect: the same family rule can be applied to them. Mentioning these values, the same intrapsychic experience was activated in the given participant. Naturally, decrypting backwards, based on the content of the specific family rules we can elucidate why the given rule can be applied to more than one value dimension. For instance, the same family rule activated in the case of the managing director/husband regarding values of 'equal opportunities for all' and 'corruption' at the company level: 'There's a war out there: either I tread on the others or I will be trodden on.' Behind the family rule, his subjective experience was that his mother does not love him enough and he had to fight with his younger sister for the maternal love. What is interesting here is that values based on different rational, cognitive content can be based on the same deep longing of the individual, and the matching of personal yearning – external value can characterize the specific family.

The second observation regards the way how the community value structure is absorbed by the individual from his or her parents, and how this structure descends as a heritage from one generation to the other. Thus the internal experience regarding the given value is coloured up by family and community happenings overarching generations. The husband highlighted that uttering the words 'There's no truth!' sounded to him as if it had been a statement from his grandparents whose large estates were collectivized in 1950. He knew that it traumatized the family, but he did not suspect that their complaint lived so much on the surface in him. The wife mentioned the same ('As if I had heard my parents and grandparents.') when thinking of the family rule of 'The rules should always be maintained! Shame on you!' and the tragedy came to mind when the grandparents lost their land properties in the 1950s due to collectivization. Thus, they both had the same, universal yearning for security as a core of their personal subjective experience. They both have it as a family heritage, based on happenings two generations ago.

As a third remark, I'd like to put an emphasis on one of the consequences of the tightly interlocking external value and its intrapsychic representation. Applying again the example of the managing director husband, from the three subquestions belonging to the same value dimension 'corruption', it was only two cases in which the same intrapsychic experience was activated. Concealment of personal income and concealment of real company revenues from the tax authority belonged for him to the family rule of 'There's war outside.' However, the second question of the corruption part, which was about the concealment of personal income for gaining more benefit and aid from the state activated the internal experience of 'There's no truth!' Henceforth, certain questions may belong to one value category based on the rational content of the value dimension, but if the subquestions activate different internal experiences inside the individual, the participant in a survey will answer two different question – quite contrary to the original intent of the organizers of the research.

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