

# WE ARE FAMILY: A FAMILY BUSINESS CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

*This research paper introduces the concept of family/non-family boundary work as a form of boundary work. This study focuses on family member and non-family member employees working in a family-owned business who are involved in top management positions within the company. Through an analysis of narratives and interactive practices within the work context, based on ethnographic interviews and observations, boundary negotiations were distinguishable; work and family, business and personal and family and non-family. The analysis shows that family members perform an ongoing boundary negotiation between work and family, business and pleasure and family and non-family. Drawing on the notion of work/family border theory it is suggested that the boundary work process is influenced by personal variations in trying to find ways to support the variety of 'roles' we construct and adopt throughout our day and in our lives. It is argued that family members who work together in a family firm perform ongoing boundary negotiations between family and non-family members and this can create a conflict within the domains and roles. Furthermore, the family/non-family boundary negotiations within a family-owned business can shed light on positive and negative aspects for the business relationships and professionalism.*

## Introduction

Although scholars have previously focused on boundary work and role conflicts and examined the context and experiences of work/home boundaries, there is limited empirical research that focuses on the work/family boundary within a family business, especially from a systems perspective (e.g. Distelberg & Blow, 2011; Glavin & Scheiman, 2012; Kanter, 1977; Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008; Winkel & Clayton, 2010).

The limited empirical studies on boundary work and role transitions within family businesses from a systems perspective has revealed a gap in the research field where work/family border theory and boundary theory can be used as a theoretical framework to understand the family business work/family dynamics. The present study will expand

on the literature on boundary theory, work/family border theory and the field of family business research by examining the boundary negotiations and role conflicts within a family business.

Previous research tends to look at these two systems independently and hasn't acknowledged how they interfere and overlap with one another in a family business context where 'work' and 'family' are so integrated that they are virtually functioning as one and the same. A consequence of highly integrated 'work' and 'family' domains is work/family role conflict which has been neglected from a social constructionist perspective within the context of a family business, representing an exciting opportunity for social science researchers to explore. The social constructionist approach is unique in that it allows researchers to examine dynamics and roles within social situations for example; family businesses (Puig, Koro-Ljungberg & Echevarria-Doan, 2008).

Quantitative studies have used work/family border theory to measure the flexibility and permeability of people's work and family lives but has overlooked the interdependencies between 'work' and 'family' within family businesses. Studies related to this topic are often derived from a static and scientific approach aiming to measure the amount of integration and segmentation between domain boundaries or looking at the antecedents of role conflict and firm performance in a cause or effect manner (e.g. Habbershon, Williams & Macmillan, 2003).

Thus, I have focused my study on the boundary negotiations between 'work' and 'family' domains and will be examining the unique boundary work and work/family role conflicts that can arise when these two domains overlap within a family business context where family member employees work closely together. For example; *How does the son of the CEO negotiate the boundaries between his role as the child and his role as a director within the work context? And How does the CEO enact his role as a boss towards his wife?*

Boundary work between highly integrated domains can increase levels of stress and conflict when individuals are required to constantly shift between domains and roles.

Thus, my central question is *How do family member employees balance the boundaries between their 'work' and 'family' roles within a family business context?*

This study focuses on the observable interactive practices that are at play daily and that are used to construct, maintain, defend and challenge the domain and role boundaries. Using the concepts of 'work/family role conflict' and 'boundary work' as a framework, I describe the new notion of 'family/non-family boundary work' as a form of boundary work where family members are constantly moving back and forth as they try to negotiate and organise these boundaries. So, the current study goes beyond the previous linear approach to research to examine the dynamic daily interactive practices of the work and family domains, how they overlap within a family owned business and how the family members negotiate boundaries between their different 'lives' and roles.

## Literature Review

My research departs from mainstream tradition of family-business literature, work-family integration research, systems theory and boundary/border theory. With my empirical research using boundary theory and work/family border theory, I aim to provide a greater understanding of the interrelated dynamics between two extremely significant social spheres in our lives; work and family.

Due to the complex nature of family businesses and the extent of research that has been covered it is not possible to examine all topics in detail. Thus, this literature review will explore the topics relevant to the research purpose, aiming to give recognition to the most influential theorist who have made significant contributions in these fields.

## Introduction to Family Business Research

Family businesses are a difficult concept to provide a clear-cut definition on due to its complex nature. Colli and Rose, describe a family business as intrinsically diverse, which makes an all-encompassing definition difficult to achieve (as cited in Pounder, 2015). Thus, the research field remained underdeveloped due to the inability of scholars to

reach a consensus regarding what constitutes a family business (Poutziouris, Smyrnios & Klein, 2006, pg. 1). Research shows that family businesses are diverse and varied in shape and size, between being young or old and they exist across contexts (Hamilton, Discua Cruz & Jack, 2017). So, although there is no 'one-size-fits-all' definition, the family's participation in the business is a precondition for defining a family-business (Kubica & Szarucki, 2016).

A broad definition of the term will be used for this research; Pounder's proposed definition of the family business states that it is one where a family owns enough of the equity to be able to exert control over strategy and is also involved in top management positions (Pounder, 2015). This definition is appropriate in the context of this research whereby the family business consists of six directors, where three out of the six are family members and primary shareholders.

The domain of family business research is still relatively new and has only been present for about two decades (Kubica & Szarucki, 2016). It was developed to gain awareness on the interrelation between family dynamics and business performance (Ainsworth & Cox, 2003). Academics identified that the involvement of the family in the implementation of the business strategy brought new dynamics, politics and opportunities for exploration (Sharma, Chrisman, & Chua, 1997).

The field of family business research gained traction in the late 1970's and due to the varying and diverse nature of the family business context, the literature began to try differentiate family from non-family businesses (Kubica & Szarucki, 2016). Ultimately, the involvement of family members was identified as a key differentiator due to the significant influence they can have on strategic decisions within a family business (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014).

In the new millennium family business research showed considerable advancements with developments of international bodies such as the Family Firm Institute (FFI), the Family Business Network (FBN) and the International Family Enterprise Research Academy (IFERA). These bodies aimed to establish close links between family business owner/managers and academics that were committed to the advancement of a science-based field and leading topic of business research. Various other journals focusing on

family business research were developed such as *The Family Business Review*, *The Journal of Business Venturing* and many more, which aimed at promoting family business and enhancing the development of theories and research within the field (Poutziouris, Smyrniotis & Klein, 2006, pg. 3).

In the late 1990's Family business literature mostly consisted of descriptive and comparative studies aligned with the family until the focus shifted from family relationships to the improvement of goals and performance in the businesses (Sharma, Chrisman, & Chua, 1997). Family firm studies focused on managerial activities and business performance, with the interests of family business owners and managers in mind (Ainsworth & Cox, 2003). The outcomes of this research were oriented towards improving business activities such as profitability and sustainability by looking at family and interpersonal relationships, leadership styles, succession planning and conflict (Ainsworth & Cox, 2003).

Sharma's comparative research expanded on the interrelated nature of family and business systems but failed to reveal specific variables that could separate family from non-family firms (Sharma, 2004). Rather, research showed that there were similarities in terms of their management processes where both pursued a strategy and a set of performance goals (Sharma, Chrisman, & Chua, 1997).

Although family businesses are like non-family business in terms of strategic activities and performance goals, their differences lie in what the specific goals are, the way processes are carried out and who participates in these processes (Sharma, Chrisman, & Chua, 1997). Through family member involvement in core business functions this makes them distinctly different from non-family businesses (Gagné, Sharma, & De Massis, 2014). The amount of family member leadership and management within a family business also differs between family firms and can significantly impact business practices and processes (Heidrich, Németh, & Chandler, 2016).

Family member employees have different influences, controls, interests and values from non-family member employees which makes this an interesting dynamic for social science researchers to gain a deeper understanding of in terms of how this can influence strategic decisions and the performance of family businesses (Sharma, Chrisman, &

Chua, 1997). Family traditions and legacies become extremely significant within family businesses and literature shows that this is a key differentiator of family businesses from non-family businesses. Family traditions and values play a crucial role in decision making and often inspire later generations to be involved in the family business (Pounder, 2015). However, the emotional attachment of family member employees can give rise to work/family role conflict and reveal unique boundary negotiating practices between the 'work' and 'family' systems. This paper will add to the literature on work/family border theory and border/boundary theory by providing an empirical analysis of the boundaries between domains and roles within a family owned business.

### Boundary Theory and Work/family Border Theory

As an extension on border theory which focuses on the 'work' and 'home' domains, work/family border theory, introduced by Clark, is dedicated to the 'work' and 'family' domains and has been selected as the theoretical framework to guide my research (Clark, 2000).

Previous literature has used the concepts of 'home' and 'family' interchangeably and has failed to acknowledge that these concepts do not imply the same meaning for everyone. Deriving from a social constructionist perspective looking at how society co-creates and defines reality, it is important to understand how individuals have socially constructed the meanings of these two domains and how the understanding of these concepts is highly variable (Howell, 2012). For example; one person may understand 'home' as a place they go to see their family whereas another person may see 'home' as a space where they enjoy their alone time.

Clark introduced the concept of work/family border theory acknowledging that people are constantly crossing between the borders of these two social domains i.e. work and family. In line with a social constructionist perspective Clark states that "...people shape these worlds, mould the borders between them... though people shape their environments, they are, in turn, shaped by them' (Clark, 2000, p.748). This is what makes the work/family balance one of the most interesting and complex phenomena for social science researchers to study.



Work/family Border theory, derived from border/boundary theory is particularly relevant in this case study due to the high level of integration between the 'work' and 'family' domains in a family business. This study aims to examine how work-related behaviours and family-related behaviours can become so integrated that they are almost undistinguishable from one another, blurring the borders between work life and family life (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004).

The work/family border theory can be defined as; 'A theory that explains how individuals manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance' (Clark, 2000., pg. 750). It is recognised that 'work' and 'family' spheres are often separated by physical and temporal boundaries however, within a family business this is not the case. So, not only do the 'work' and 'family' domains share physical and temporal space, the emotional, behavioural and psychological aspects of each domain also carry over from one domain to the other for example; if the CEO reprimands his son for not taking out the rubbish at home, this argument may carry over into the work context where they share a work space and involvement in business decisions (Clark, 2000). Thus, work interactions during working hours also become family interactions and family time (Marshack, 1994). Clark goes further to describe people who make daily transitions between the work and family domains as 'border-crossers' and these individuals are required to shift their attention and their roles to suit the pressures of each domain and by doing so seek to find a balance between the two (Clark, 2000).

### Work/Family Conflict

The work/family border theory is a framework proposed to predict when conflict will occur and to conceptualise how one can establish a balance between the two worlds (Clark, 2000). Work/family conflict was proposed as a form of role conflict where the pressures associated with 'work' and 'family' domains become incompatible and participation in the one role makes participation in the other role difficult (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Family members working together in a family business continuously juggle between the differing work and family role norms and requirements. Greenhaus and Beutell examined

work/family role conflict by looking at the different pressures that arise between 'work' and 'family' responsibilities such as; time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behaviour-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Chen, Powell, & Greenhaus, 2009).

Like boundaries around domains, there are also boundaries surrounding the roles we play in our lives. However, a role is associated with specific labels and behavioural expectations for members occupying them within social systems whereas a role boundary can be described as whatever creates restrictions surrounding a role (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000).

A role can be described as a set of behaviors, expectations, beliefs, rights and norms associated with a specific situation and is vital to the social constructionist and interactionists understanding of society. Role conflict can then be defined as the tension we experience trying to comply with the pressures and responsibilities of the various roles we play in our lives (Khan, 1964). This conflict occurs due to the somewhat incompatible pressures of different roles or when there is an excessive overlap between the boundaries of different roles and domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In a family owned business where family members are also employees and therefore occupying dual roles, the concept of role confusion and role conflict becomes relevant.

Greenhaus and Beutell recognised the role conflict a person may experience when caught between the work and non-work domains such as a case where family members work together in a family owned business. So, family members occupying dual roles that sometimes overlap, and clash may experience work/family role conflict; for example, the CEO of the company may find conflict between his role as a father and his role as the CEO when his son demands his time and attention as a parent which may distract him from the needs of the organization. Like role conflict, role confusion can arise when an individual has difficulty determining which role he or she should play however, the roles are not necessarily incompatible but bring the requirements and responsibilities from one role and one system to the context of another system (Hammer, Leslie & Cynthia Thompson, 2003). Desrochers, Hilton and Larwood, refer to this role confusion as work-

family blurring or work-family boundary ambiguity, where there is confusion and difficulty around separating one's work role from one's family role (as cited in Desrochers & Sargent, 2004).

More recent studies look at how people try to balance their work and non-work lives and how this struggle can result in work-life conflict (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). Clark referred to work-family balance as satisfactory functioning at work and at home, while minimising the amount of role conflict (as cited in Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). Studies have empirically examined roles on an 'integration-segmentation continuum' and found that people who identify highly with their roles are likely to integrate them into other domains increasing the role and domain boundary permeability and flexibility. As a result, strong role identification leads to increased permeability and integration between one's work and non-work lives and this may lead to greater work/family conflict (Oslo-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006).

### Boundary Work

The concept of 'boundary work' was first introduced by Nippert-Eng and can be defined as the practices that one uses to create and assign meaning to different social worlds by maintaining and negotiating different domain-specific activities, people and roles. The 'work' and 'family' domains provide two different social contexts that require one to organise matters and relationships differently and the amount of integration or segmentation between these two domains will be a consequence of the boundary work that is practiced (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Boundary work is described as an ongoing and visible process practiced by individuals to create meaning within different domains and by observing these behaviours social science researchers can gain valuable insights on how people in society construct and understand their everyday lives (Howell, 2012).

Nippert-Eng explored these domains by using an 'integration-segmentation continuum' as a way of looking at how the context of 'work' and 'home' are related to one another. Some people prefer these borders to remain 'segmented' while others prefer the borders to be 'integrated.' On the one extreme one can describe these realms as completely

'segmented' where there are clear divisions between 'work' and 'family' and no overlap between the two (Nippert-Eng, 1996). On the other hand, one can describe the domains as being fully 'integrated' where there is no separation between 'work' and 'family' and these domains are virtually one and the same. In most cases the domains lie somewhere between the two extremes however, similar to a study by Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, I have chosen this case specifically because it is an extreme case showing particularly challenging boundary work where the domains are highly integrated due to the family involvement in the business (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2009). This continuum guided my research by providing me with a conceptual framework to understand the highly integrated boundary relationship between 'work' and 'family' in this family business.

Research has suggested looking at roles on the same 'integration-segmentation continuum' and refers to the role transition activities between different social domains as boundary-crossing (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). High integration would mean high levels of role blurring and thus makes boundary negotiations more challenging. On the other hand, high segmentation decreases role blurring however, this makes boundary crossing more challenging due to the greater division between two role domains (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000).

The degree of integration between the domains or roles can be further described by two dimensions namely; flexibility and permeability where the former refers to the extent to which physical aspects may be changed whereas permeability refers to the degree of psychological aspects overlapping between the domains (Hall & Richter, 1988). When two or more domains or roles are highly flexible and permeable then Clark refers to this as 'blended' or Ashford refers to this as 'integrated' (as cited in Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). In addition, Sundaramurthy & Kreiner uncovered a concept called 'differential permeability' which describes 'a state of being both 'integrated' and 'segmented' on various aspects of identity...' (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008., p.415).

These dimensions affect the boundary work process and can serve to decrease or increase the amount of role conflict one experiences for example; the CEO may be unsure whether to approach his son as a supportive parent or as the CEO of the family

business (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). In line with Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, I assume that people have different preferences for integration versus segmentation and flexibility versus permeability between domains and roles which is aligned with the social constructionist perspective that my research derives from.

## Purpose of the current Study

The boundaries and role transitions between family member employees working within a family business has not been well researched. While there has been some research of dual-career couples and co-preneurs (e.g. Marshack, 1994), the phenomenon of nuclear family members working together within a highly integrated family owned business has been relatively ignored.

For the purpose of this study I have turned my attention to boundary work focusing on 'work' and 'family' domains by observing the daily interactions between family members and non-family members within a family business. Daily practices appear as boundary work; for example, observations of how physical space, time and roles are visibly negotiated by the research participants.

This paper revealed an opportunity to determine whether there is anything unique regarding boundary work within this context with regards to; 1. How family member employees construct, maintain and negotiate the boundaries between 'work' and 'family' and 2. How they use boundary work as a way to establish a balance between these two domains in order to minimize role conflict.

By using a social constructionist perspective, the way the research participants construct and make sense of their social worlds and social roles through their daily interactive practices is emphasized allowing for an opportunity to learn about the complex family dynamics that are at play within a highly integrated 'work/family' context.

## Methods

I have chosen to use a qualitative research design as this is a powerful approach that allows for a detailed, nuanced and in-depth understanding of the data being examined (Neuman, 2011; Silverman; 2013). I aim to gain a deeper understanding of how boundaries are negotiated specifically by family member employees who are constantly managing the boundaries between the business and the family.

Furthermore, there have been limited qualitative studies on work/family boundary work within a family business context and with the rare access to family members and key non-family employees within the family-owned business under analysis, where the work/family boundary negotiations and work/family role conflicts are most evident, this research paper can be a valuable contribution to the field. In addition, the qualitative studies in this field have mainly used small family business case studies to examine boundaries between 'work' and 'home' systems.' The advantage of my research paper is that it will explore similar boundaries within an extreme case where the 'work' and 'family' domains are highly integrated and form the context for a larger family business case study.

My study is in line with Hall and Richter who believed that studying actual work/home relationships through observing the behaviours of the people in these domains and how they manage the conflicts between the two was the best way to understand the interrelated nature of the two social spheres (Hall and Richter, 1988). Their proposed method was observing daily transitions that individuals make as they practice boundary work between the two domains either physically or psychologically. Physical boundaries can be observed by focusing on the time and location aspects of daily transitions whereas psychological boundaries are less visible and manifest within the different role activities.

This paper is based on two qualitative studies and by using this suggestion to guide my observations, I will observe how family members attempt to gain a balance between the 'work' and 'family' domains and roles.

## Sample

The population that is examined faces ongoing and particularly challenging boundary work; Family member and non-family member employees working together in a family-owned business. Family members in this context, meaning nuclear family members. Because of the high integration between the 'work' and 'family' systems this family-owned business represents an extreme case of work/family boundary work. Extreme cases such as this one can be particularly useful for building on and adding to existing theories since the work/family boundary negotiations tend to be highly visible, highlighting the nuances and complexities that exist. Yin, suggests that extreme cases can be used to elaborate and generalize theories (Yin, 1989). This sample has some typical characteristics that could make the research findings transferable for example; many fathers, sons and wives who are involved in retail are involved in the business together hence they may experience similar work/family boundary negotiations and work/family role conflicts.

The starting point for my research was gaining a full understanding of the background of the family business from when it was first founded in 1968. This provided me with a better understanding of how the organisation has grown and expanded, how and when family members became involved and how it transformed from being a small family run business with 50 employees to a large family business employing over 1000 employees. I also read numerous articles on family business research sensitizing myself and gaining a broader understanding of some of the challenges these organisations face.

This research was conducted using two qualitative research methods. The first research method used was semi-structured interviews with 2 family member employees; the mother (Director and shareholder) and the son (Director and shareholder), and 1 non-family member employee occupying a senior management position. These employees were purposively selected based on their role and status within the organisation. The sample group showed high levels of work and family involvement and potentially high conflict between the two domains and roles. The second method employed were participant observations whereby I adopted a participant observer role, I engaged in

participant observations during everyday office hours (i.e. 9am-5pm) including various management meetings, business conferences, training and induction sessions. These observations were ongoing from March 2017 to January 2018.

This background context, ongoing reading and observations, together with the semi-structured interviews yielded a multimethod approach to my research which helps to minimise the weaknesses that come from relying only on one source of data (as cited in Alvesson, 2003).

### Study 1: Semi-Structured Interviews

Study 1 was a preliminary study that guided study 2 (participant observations) by providing insight into the family member and non-family member employee's experiences working within a family business. For study 1, I analysed the verbal responses to approximately 15 open-ended questions dealing with general family and business dynamics for example; *What motivates you to work within a family business?* The interview protocol (See Appendix A) was compiled using insights gained from the previous literature on family businesses, with the motivations, advantages and disadvantages of working in a family owned business as a starting point. Each interview was approximately 1 hour, they were conversational and free to develop as interesting comments and themes emerged. Once the interviewees had given their consent, the interviews were audio-recorded, manually transcribed verbatim and anonymised (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2014).

I used a grounded theory technique to do my analysis which Strauss and Corbin suggests as a tool to reveal a new understanding of a phenomenon that is known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Furthermore, this approach allows the data to emerge from the ongoing data collection and analysis (as cited in Howell, 2012). By using this technique, I aimed to expand on what is already known about the work/family interface and uncover some new complexities and nuances that haven't been explored in detail (as cited in Voydanoff, 1988). I relied on a social constructionist approach as my orienting



perspective which guided my research and what I would focus on throughout my analysis (Locke, 2002). By using this grounded theory approach, I remained flexible and open to the emerging data, allowing for adjustments and iterations in my coding of the responses. The grounded theory method allows for the collection of, coding and analysis of data to be done simultaneously while constantly comparing data to theory (May 2011). When adopting a social constructionist perspective, I recognize that the coding of the data is co-created by myself (the researcher) and the respondent (the researched) (Charmaz, 2000).

The transcripts were analysed, and the interview responses were coded using an inductive coding system highlighting recurring words in the text that were used to create categories (Silverman, 2013). Many of these codes were identified as existing concepts studied in general organisational literature (e.g. conflict, boundaries, control). Many of the codes began to overlap conceptually and distinctive patterns began to emerge while being aware of how the data may relate and/or contribute to the existing literature (Silverman, 2013).

My primary goal with study 1 was to sensitize myself to the work/family dynamic faced by family and non-family member employees to better guide Study 2. The coding systems I used allowed me to find important themes regarding the work/family dynamics that were important to the respondents.

Thus, the responses from Study 1 provided a suitable foundation for which themes to zoom in on during Study 2. The observation protocol used in Study 2 was then compiled using the interesting themes that arose during the analysis of the responses in Study 1. For example; boundaries were a major theme to focus on because of how differently it is experienced from a family member and non-family member employee perspective. I coded this theme as *'boundary conflict'* where on the one hand the non-family member employee states; *'There are certain boundaries that you can't cross...anything to do with money and wages must be checked by the CEO, you know the line, everybody knows that line, and you can't cross it.'* And on the other hand the family member employee says *'... they don't respect the boundaries because the boundaries have always been*

*pushed the whole time. Like a kid pushing the boundaries of a parent.* From responses such as this, I became sensitized to the importance of one's role as a family member employee to the aspect of boundaries and boundary work.

## Study 2: Participant Observations

Study 2 started off consisting of participant observations where I took on the role as participant observer. However, as I became more involved in the business activities, the daily observations, interactions and conversations form autoethnographic data from my own experience of being a family member employee in a family business. As Bryman suggests, I immersed myself in this family business over an extended period, where the observations took place over 9-months from March 2017 until January 2018. Observations consisted of observing behaviours, listening to and engaging in daily informal interactions and conversations as well as formal interactions and conversations in management meetings and at conferences (Bryman, 2012). These observations provided me with empirical data that uncovered the complexities and nuances that the interviews touched on.

## Reflections and Limitations

May recognizes the observation process as one that involves the researcher establishing relationships with the research participants who serve as both respondents and informants for the research (May, 2011). The research participants in this study include both family and non-family member employees whose verbal and non-verbal behaviours may have been impacted due to my family membership and affiliation with the company.

However, this research was carried out in a context of discovery where I acknowledged myself as the researcher and as a social and subjective human being with a personal attachment and history with the company. I was aware that this would impact the reliability and validity of my research findings and influence the entire research process

from the formulating of my research topic, the research questions, the data collection and the interpretation and analysis of the emerging data. By critically reflecting on my own preconceived assumptions I was aware of the limitations it would bring to my research results where various topics may have been intentionally avoided or intentionally discussed during the data collection process thus having an impact on the reliability of the research results. It must be emphasized that I remained alert to these limitations throughout the research process by adopting a consciously reflective stance towards all aspects and remained aware of how my own presence may have interfered with the data gathering process during Study 1 (Semi-Structured Interviews) and Study 2 (Participant Observations) with both family and non-family employees.

## Discussion

My study contributes to and extends on boundary/border theory and work/family border theory by looking at the 'work' and 'family' interface within a family business. These findings suggest a new notion of family/non-family boundary work that aims to highlight the unique boundary negotiations that are practiced by family member employees within a family business. In an effort to expand on these theories I have focused on the interactive practices of family and non-family employees, their ongoing boundary work, the work/family domains and the work/family role conflicts that can arise.

When I walk into the office entrance hall it becomes evident that this is a family business where there are pictures of the family members on the walls all wearing the company uniform. This is a way of highlighting the 'family' aspect in the imagery of the company and reinforces the overlapping of the two domains and roles (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008).

While observing pictures on the walls, I noticed a large frame with an image of an old man who is the founder of the company and the father-in law of the current CEO. This shows how the founder's legacy remains with the company and is congruent with the son's explanation of his role in the company as not being '*just a job*' but rather an

*'heritage'* and one that he is proud of when he says *'...I enjoy doing what my grandpa enjoyed doing.'* Research shows that strong emotional values in family firms can have a positive impact on the sense of pride employees have within the organisation (Azoury, Daou & Sleiaty, 2013).

The company motto; *"We Are Family"* further reinforces the status as a family-owned business and family values being inherent to the organisation. This strong overlap between values integrates the psychological boundaries and identities within the 'work' and 'family' sphere and it is proposed that this strengthens the family commitment to the business.

#### Integration- Segmentation Continuum

The family business under analysis represents an extreme case where the 'work' and 'family' domains and roles are so highly integrated that they are one and the same. Nippert- Eng explains that total integration would mean there are almost no differences between these roles and suggests this as an 'all-purpose mentality, one way of being, one amorphous self' (as cited in Ashford, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). Involvement in the family business is described by the son and the wife as something they *'enjoy'* indicating the integration and overlap of the boundaries between business and pleasure where their roles in the family business are part of their lifestyles. The below interview response from the son of the CEO within the family business suggest this 'all-purpose mentality.'

*"I am not working to make someone else money, I am working to make the family money..."* With such a high level of integration between the 'work' and the 'family' domains the rewards and benefits from the one domain overlap and benefit the other domain as well. The shared working environment and physical proximity also strengthens the degree of integration between these domains. The son states *'...I enjoy working with my dad and being around my family everyday...'* showing how working hours are also seen and experienced as 'family time' (Marshack, 1994).

He drives into the office block and parks his car, he walks into the office to greet his father and a fellow director, he leans in towards his dad, gives him a hug and a kiss on the cheek; *“Hi D,”* he says, and continues to greet the other director with a firm and professional hand shake.

The above interaction is one that occurs every morning where family members and non-family members greet each other through physical contact. A similar interaction takes place again in the evenings when saying good-bye. Sometimes the evening interactions end with a; *“Will I see you this weekend?”* Or *“Are you coming for dinner tonight?”*

This is one of the unique work/family interactional practices I have observed within a family business where family members work closely together. This is an observable instance that reveals the high integration of the physical borders between the ‘work’ and ‘family’ domains.

### Work/Family Conflict

My observations drew my attention to the notion of work/family conflict. Research has shown that many of the challenges that family businesses face are due to the integration and overlap between the family and business systems (Zody et. Al, 2006).

During my observations of the wife and the CEO discussing work related topics, the CEO often allows his wife to make her own decisions about the staff that report to her directly. He tends to avoid getting involved in these decisions as it seems that disagreements on topics result in a conflict or argument. The below interview response touches on this observation showing that the son is aware of the conflict and arguments that occur when there are disagreements regarding work-related decisions. *“...everyone in the family matters and if you don’t come to some sort of conclusion then there are arguments and fighting.”* Furthermore, the observations and interview responses both show that work/family conflict occurs most often when family members need to make decisions

and agree about work-related matters. However, because there are many 'equally important' opinions to consider (family members), where everyone's viewpoint is valid, it makes it difficult to reach a decision that is agreed on. Barnett & Kellerman (2006) suggested that when there is an excess of family influence in a family firm this can lead to counterproductive interactions between 'work' and 'family' domains (Barnett & Kellermanns, 2006). This is an area where boundary work becomes particularly important for effective business operations where greater segmentation between the domains may be beneficial.

The son states that; *'There has to be that agreement and respect that this is the workplace, we have a job to get done, to make money and to reach that end goal, we just need to do that together.'* This response indicates his boundary work struggle and conflict where on the one hand he wants the decisions to be made 'together' but on the other hand there is an acknowledgement that the boundaries need to be separated for business goals to be achieved. This confirms the high integration between the 'work' and 'family' domains and roles where the overlap can lead to a clash or incompatibility.

The following interview response from the wife further illustrates the high integration and overlap of the 'work' and 'family' domain; *"a lot of work problems do get brought home...um... one tends to discuss business more than anything else and then of course there is friction and there are decisions that need to be made and there are arguments and things like that..."* This also reinforces the notion that the work/family conflict occurs most frequently when decisions need to be made on work-related matters. Through the way it was expressed she seems to view this as an inevitable consequence of being involved in a family business and her boundary work seeks to blur the boundaries rather than segment them.

In line with previous literature on role conflict and confusion the below is an illustration of the work/family role conflict experienced by the son. His statement, in contrast to his mother, shows a need for there to be a distinction between 'work' and 'family' where the goals at work do not interfere with family member relationships. *'...because we're a family and it's a family business it can be a lot harder because you try to make that*

*person, you try to please your boss, who is essentially your family member...*' This statement highlights the role overlap where he feels the pressure to meet the expectations of both (son and employee) simultaneously (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

The work/family border conflict that I have observed is expressed by the humorous description below that highlights the love/hate relationship that can arise from the excessive work/family overlap. '*... there is always that love and respect and that's how it should always be, even though you want to ring the person's neck off, that's how it should be.*' An observation below illustrates this conflict and the different boundary work practiced by the son and his mother.

The wife of the CEO walks into the office and greets her husband (the CEO) with a hug and a kiss. She is instantly offered a cup of coffee and made to feel comfortable. After speaking to her husband for a while about work-related matters she goes to her son's office, greets him with a hug and a kiss and sits down. She stays with him for a while as her son updates her on what is happening in his life until they start to discuss some work-related matters as well. Her son becomes very anxious and irritable and asks her to please leave, as she leaves his office with a look of confusion on her face, he stands up and proceeds to close the door behind her.

By the son closing the door this illustrates his boundary work struggle where he tries to create a physical border between the 'work' and 'family' domains. This is a form of boundary work where he is trying to manage the work/family border. When the boundaries and roles between 'work' and 'family' overlap it can lead to work/family conflict and this boundary work behaviour is a way to avoid this. Research suggests that when there is an overlap it can cause the activities and expectations in one domain to clash or conflict with those in the other domain and lead to undesirable and problematic consequences for the family and the business relationships.

Hall and Richter's research argues that family member employees make daily transitions that help to create space between their 'work role' and their 'family role' however, there

is often an overlap between the two due to the integrated aspects of the 'work' and 'family' domains (Hall & Richter, 1988). In line with their findings, my research shows that family members try to psychologically segment the 'work' and 'family' domains because physical segmentation is more difficult when they share an office space and working environments. When the overlap becomes excessive and the psychological boundaries also become integrated, the physical boundary becomes necessary as the only way to create the distinction between the two domains.

Sitting in the CEO's office observing his conversation with his son, he sits behind his desk while his son stands, speaking quickly, trying not to take up too much of his father's time, waiting to get the 'go ahead' on a few work-related decisions, then the phone rings. The CEO answers the phone and the receptionist tells him that his wife is on the line for him "*For fuck sakes!*" he says in a frustrated tone, shuffling in his chair, "*Tell her I'll call her back.*"

Beck attributes the conflict amongst family members in a family business to the fact that they must often wear at least two hypothetical hats and occupy at least two roles, each having their own set of requirements and expectations (Beck, 2009). Often these requirements and expectations are incompatible with one another and that is what leads to the conflict and confusion between the two.

Thus, the behaviour of the CEO represents a form of boundary work to defend the boundaries between domains and roles to avoid work/family conflict. The wife's interview response also illustrates this conflicting boundary work; '*...my husband asked me to please not involve him in everything and then an important issue came up that I didn't mention to him and then he was very upset with me when he found out I hadn't told him.*' So, what is interesting is that sometimes this boundary work is a catch-22 situation where the attempt to segment the domains can lead to work/family conflict when other family members haven't been included or consulted.



When the permeability between boundaries is high this can lead to an excess of role conflict and lead to a clash between the two different role expectations. Hall and Richter use the terms 'role overload' to describe this phenomenon. (Hall & Richter, 1988). The observations above are an example of how 'role overload' has manifested in this family business.

The CEO is required to wear multiple 'hats' throughout the day and he seems to experience the most extreme role conflict or 'role overload' having to act as a husband, father and CEO of the business where each role has unique pressures and responsibilities. This boundary struggle is illustrated in the quote below by Stew Leonard states; *"When there are children in the business, there is tremendous loyalty and trust and dependability and feeling of ownership and caring. The disadvantage is that it is very hard to wear two hats as a boss and as a parent."* (as cited in Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008).

My observations of the work/family conflict between family members show that on the one hand there is the love and respect drawing family members together physically and psychologically however, on the other hand there is conflict that occurs when the physical and psychological aspects become excessively integrated. This leads to disagreements, poor decision making for the business and work/family role conflict that can put a strain on the family member's relationships with one another.

#### [We Are Family... but you are not: Family/Non-Family Boundary Work](#)

The findings of this study introduces a new concept of family/non-family boundary work as an expansion on the work/family border theory proposed by Clark. (Clark, 2000). Family/non-family boundary work can be defined as 'ongoing border negotiations by family members within a family business that creates a border that segments family members from non-family members.' Based on my empirical data, I argue that this type of boundary work is unique to family members within highly integrated work/family domains who segment the borders between family members and non-family members

within the family business. On one hand the boundaries between family members is highly integrated whereas on the other hand the boundaries between family and non-family members are highly segmented. This example below illustrates the segmentation between family and non-family members.

The board of directors within the company consists of six people; the family members (the CEO, his son and his wife) and three non-family members however, the three family members are the only shareholders in the company. Their meetings usually only have four of the six directors present, and the CEO directs these meetings. However, the son of the CEO has inherited a lot of the control and decision-making power within the business. The son states *'I enjoy having control and being able to make decisions without having to ask somebody... with corporate guys there is always a board of directors, there is never that one person.'* This statement indicates that the son sees non-family member directors as having limited control and decision-making ability. So, even though there is a board of directors in this business, like a corporate company, he doesn't acknowledge the other directors as people he needs to approach because the ultimate control and decision still lies with his father (that one person) and the family members. Barnett & Kellermann suggest that excessive levels of family involvement in decision making processes can lead to bias decision making and impact the fairness of certain practices in a family business (Barnett & Kellermann, 2006).

The below interview response illustrates the different experience of boundaries from a non-family member employee perspective *"...just because it's a family business it doesn't mean that anything goes, it's very strict, you have heads of departments, you've got a board of directors..."* So, this shows the contrast where the son of the CEO doesn't even acknowledge that there is a board of directors, the non-family employee, even though he is a close family friend, acknowledges that there are rules and regulations that need to be followed like in a traditional corporate company. The wife's perception further reinforces this when she states *'... my son is one of the directors and even the other directors who are older than he is, and even in a slightly higher position, feel that he is given preferential treatment.'*

Based on an interview response from a non-family member it seems the boundaries between the family and non-family directors may become problematic when it comes to business related activities '*...sometimes the directors are all pulling in a different direction,*' indicating the separation between family and non-family employees within the 'work' domain. Even the son of the CEO, as much as he creates the division between family and non-family members states '*...we are all trying to go in the same direction but there is no game plan... my concern is that there is no synergy in the office.*' This sense of '*no synergy*' could be due to the segmentation between the family and non-family members occupying director positions where on the one hand the son wants to segment the boundaries between family and non-family members but on the other hand he is frustrated by the resultant lack of direction and synergy, and this can be detrimental to the business.

Another example of this family/non-family boundary work is illustrated in my observations below. Each director has their own office with an open-door policy, colleagues can greet or discuss matters with each other freely throughout the day. However, at the end of each day when everyone leaves the office to go home the CEO and the son of the CEO both lock their office doors whereas the non-family employees leave their office doors open and unlocked. This is an interesting observation of how family members use boundary work to physically create borders and segment family and non-family members within the business. This is a boundary practice that could also be linked to the concept of trust and future research could look deeper at the effect trust has on boundary work.

From other observations of interactions of the CEO with non-family members and family members, the CEO doesn't seem to create these boundaries where both family and non-family employees can walk into his office and discuss issues with him at any time. In contrast, the son of the CEO seems to segment the boundaries between family and non-family employees.

I observed the CEO's son walking into his office wanting to speak about family matters and non-work-related topics. The son got frustrated when a non-family member walked in to follow up on work-related matters that 'interrupted' the conversation with him and

his father. This observation, illustrated in the following interview response, reinforces the defensive boundary work by the CEO's son as he struggles to segment the borders between family and non-family members and the 'all-encompassing' work/family domain, '*...I was talking to my dad about something, and people think oh it's just his son and they'll just walk in, but if its someone else then they'll say hold on and close the door, they wouldn't just walk in, so people lose that barrier.*' These observations show how the CEO's son has a greater need to segment the boundaries between family and non-family members and because he seems to struggle to maintain these boundaries psychologically he often resorts to segmenting the borders physically by closing and/or locking his office door.

An observation of the CEO's son with a non-family employee, who is a close family friend, reveals a greater flexibility and permeability between the family/non-family border. I have often observed them sitting outside eating their lunch together and overheard them arranging to play squash and go for dinner after work. This shows that the borders between family and non-family employees become more integrated when the non-family employee has a close relationship with the family and is seen as 'extended family.' The interview response below, when talking about the family business, suggests a high integration between the 'work' and 'family' domains even for the non-family member employee '*...this is what I love, this is my family.*' So, even though this is not his biological family, he sees the family members and the family business as part of his 'extended family' however, he is still segmented in that it does not create work/family conflict. This family/non-family employee dynamic seems to create a healthier balance between the 'work' and 'family' domains.

The below interview response indicates this work/family dynamic with the family and non-family employee; '*I have to work twice as hard, um, because they've looked after me... I have to give my best to look after them, I want to show that I am valuable.*' This is in line with research by Stark and Falk that suggests that when non-family member employees are treated like family a sense of harmony and reciprocity is created (as cited in Memili & Barnett, 2008).

I observed how this non-family member is treated like family by family members for example; The CEO's wife arrives at the office and after greeting her son with a hug and a kiss, she goes upstairs to give the non-family member a hug and a kiss as well. The "We are family" motto and the family values are highlighted in the statement below where the close 'family-like' relationship he has with the family members seems to have increased his commitment to the business, "*I think of this as my own business... if I was the owner, I would love having my family working with me because I know that no one else would take care of the business as much as my flesh and blood...the dynamic is different in a family business, there is soul here... there is love.*" This statement creates a border between the non-family employee and the family members as he acknowledges that he is still not biologically family '*...flesh and blood...*'. This is boundary work on his part where he segments the boundaries slightly although they still remain more integrated than other non-family member employees. Furthermore, research by Bernhard & O'Driscoll suggests that this kind of ownership feeling towards the family business arises due to the leadership style exhibited by the CEO that fosters a sense of responsibility and stewardship for the organisation leading to greater integration within the family business (Bernhard & O'Driscoll, 2011).

This statement illustrated his acknowledgement that his relationship to the family members is different and he isn't seen the same as other non-family members; '*Working in a family business, you're not just a number and I'm not just saying that from me...*' He goes on to say '*... you're allowed to spread your wings here,*' which shows a paternalistic view of the CEO, and the family values in the company, where he has been given permission, like a parent would give to a child, to '*spread his wings.*'

### Gendered Borders of Work and Family in a Family-Business

Firstly, it must be noted that the wife/mother has only been actively involved in the family business for the past 4 years and she doesn't work in the shared office with her husband and son however, she seems to have fully integrated 'work' and 'family' and makes no clear distinction between her role as a wife, mother and key shareholder in the family business (Clark, 2000).

With reference to gendered borders and the gender-related division of labour in the family a noteworthy observation was made where the wife/mother does not experience the same work/family conflict when these two domains overlap (Marshack, 1994; Cederholm, 2015). This finding supports the research that suggests women and men may experience the work/home overlap differently where women may see the intrusions between the two domains as more acceptable (Scheiman & Gavin, 2008). This could be because as a wife/mother she identifies herself with these roles more than she identifies herself as a business owner/director.

In her interview response she states *'I have more in common with other family members...my husband and I have been married for 33 years and it gives us something in common apart from the children... I'm better company for him and we get excited about projects together... the business was a boring topic for me in the past but now that I am involved I love it and it's something we both enjoy.'* This indicates that she experiences the business as an extension of the family and now that her role as a mother is not as salient she has adopted the role of business owner to a greater extent to remain close to the other family members.

In contrast an interesting observation related to the gendered border between 'work' and 'family' was when there are social events at the office, the CEO often avoids inviting his wife. Based on this observation it seems that he may prefer to keep the borders between 'work' and 'family' segmented to avoid conflict however, when the wife finds out that she was not invited she becomes very upset and this leads to work/family conflict.

The following interview response from the wife when discussing work/family conflict illustrates how she has integrated the 'work' and 'family' domains and does not seek to segment these boundaries but rather to blur them. She explains the dynamics in a defensive tone, in a way to defend the 'all-encompassing' work/family domain. *"I don't understand why arguments should happen because everybody's strengths lie in a, um, slightly different parts and we can all contribute in our own way... so I think we could*

*come to decisions on an amicable basis.*' This response illustrates little desire on her part to separate the boundaries between the domains as she views each family member's contribution as equally important. However, this can have negative consequences as my observations have shown. Research suggests that when family involvement in businesses increases the complexity of interpersonal and group dynamics where the frequency and intensity of conflicts increases with the number of family members involved in the business (Gangne, Sharma & De Massis, 2014).

Another noteworthy observation is that because the wife doesn't work at the office, where all other directors work (both family and non-family) she is almost never present at director meetings, even though she is a director and key shareholder, which is consistent with Marshack that suggests women in family business are often 'invisible.' (Marshack, 1994). In line with Cederholm, this case reveals that within family businesses, boundary work can reinforce social norms related to gender roles where women are often working in the background and family business cultures foster these stereotypical gender roles (Cederholm, 2015). Although this research agrees that women are often absent in terms of leadership where the wife does not participate in director or manager meetings, they are however critical for the functioning of the family as well as the family business as the wife/mother in this case has a considerable amount of decision-making power and the business wouldn't exist if it weren't for her father who founded it.

## Concluding Discussion

Researchers had been interested in the 'work' and 'family' domains and roles for decades and recent conceptual and theoretical perspectives have tried to explain the unique dynamics that are at play. In this paper, I have sought to extend the knowledge on the topic of work/family border theory by zooming in on the boundary work and interactive practices within a family owned business. The main findings from my study are in line with early research by Hall & Richter that suggests a greater need for segmentation between the 'work' and 'home' domains (Hall & Richter 1988). However, although there is a need for segmentation, the amount of segmentation required for optimal functioning between the domains and roles is highly variable and unique for each

family member in this case study. For example; the son of the CEO seems to have a greater need for segmentation whereas the wife of the CEO has a much lesser need and seeks to blur these boundaries. This could be that the wife of the CEO is in a different phase of her life and has already fulfilled her role as a mother and sees her involvement in the business as a way to remain close to the family whereas the son of the CEO sees his involvement in the business as his career. So different motivations for staying in the family business seem to influence the amount of integration versus segmentation one needs to maintain a healthy balance between the two domains and to avoid work/family conflict.

Another key finding from this paper supports the notion of 'differential permeability' suggesting that aspects of segmentation and aspects of integration exist within and between aspects of family businesses. For example; this family firm manifests physical artefacts of the founding family in the business location (integrating) however, there is a distinct difference with regards to family and non-family employees within the firm (segmenting). Another example is the family business is highly integrated with their image as a family business yet highly segmented in their personnel policies (as cited in Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008).

Based on the findings of this study it can be concluded that family/non-family boundary work is a unique form of boundary work practiced by family employees within a highly integrated family business. However, the closer the non-family employee's relationship with the family members the more highly integrated the boundaries become. Findings reveal that highly integrated work/family domains within a family business foster high levels of commitment, trust and loyalty from family members and non-family members however, the risk of domain and role overlap is increased and can contribute to increased work/family role conflict which can negatively impact the relationships, professionalism and perceptions of fairness within the organisation.

My findings challenge researchers to examine how one's gender and motivations for being in a family business impact the boundary work negotiations of family member employees. Furthermore, an interesting study could look at how the trust relationships



between family and non-family members impact boundary integration versus segmentation.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

1. Could you tell me about the journey that led you to be a part of this company?
2. What would you say were your main motivations for joining the company?
3. What is your perception of family-owned businesses?
4. Could you tell me about the management structure and decisions making processes in the company?
5. Do you think your role as a family member/ non-family member influences the way these processes are carried out?
6. How do you think other family/non-family members experience working in a family business?
7. Who are the different people you engage with the most often?
8. Could you explain what sort of interactions these are?
9. How often do you have meetings when there are more than one family members present and involved?
10. Do you think these meetings have a different dynamic to the meetings where there are no family members or just one family members involved?
11. Do you feel comfortable to talk openly about your concerns in these meetings?
12. Could you describe some of the challenges you face working within a family business?
13. Can you tell me a story about a time when things didn't go well?
14. What aspects of a family business have a positive or negative impact on your motivation?
15. Is there anything that we have discussed or maybe haven't discussed that you think are important topic to bring up or that you would like to elaborate on a bit more?

