THE VALUE OF COPRENEURSHIP, AN INVESTIGATION INTO SMES IN SOUTH WALES

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this paper is to investigate the value of copreneurs, from a study that focused on three areas; the value of women in copreneurial businesses, the value of copreneurial businesses to individuals and the value of copreneurial businesses to the start up, development and growth of small to medium-sized enterprises. The implications of this study suggest that value to the business may be lost due to the submissive role which the female spouse assumes. Issues also raised were instances that exhibited evidence of tension and concern regarding self-esteem, leadership and role stress. In addition, the implication of infidelity in one case suggested the pressures of maintaining a personal relationship alongside the business-partnership relationship. The findings would reinforce the views held by the authors that business in context is a social construct and like any social construct based around the emotions of individuals it is likely to display illogical and irrational behaviours at times, in contrast to normative theories of business creation.

INTRODUCTION
It is acknowledged that copreneurs are a sub-group of family businesses (Marshack 2004), although the term “copreneurs” was first coined by Barnett and Barnett (1988), and was defined as “couples engaged in business together,” it is widely agreed that copreneurs are couples sharing ownership, commitment and responsibility for a business (Barnett and Barnett 1988; Marshack 1994; Smith 2000; Massey and Lewis 2006). Exact statistics of the number of copreneurial businesses that exist are difficult to extract from overall business statistics, as it would appear that copreneurs are regarded as part of the family business entity (Marshack 2004). O’Connor et al, (2006) state that most OECD (Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development) countries do not collect gender-disaggregated data on business ownership. However, in 2006, US academic studies put the percentage of small businesses run by copreneurs at more than 30% and growing (Klimecka 2006). Millman and Martin (2007) suggest that copreneurship means that there is an equality of roles, efforts and rewards, which bridges both work and home boundaries. However, there are tensions borne out of the unequal sharing of labour and rewards – often based on traditional gendered roles, (Marshack 1994; Rowe and Hong 2000; Harris and Lewis 2005; Millman and Martin 2007).

In the UK, it is estimated that women-owned firms account for 26% of all businesses; however, this does not include an account of women’s entrepreneurial efforts within family owned businesses or those masked by co-ownership (Shaw et al, 2001; Carter et al, 2001; OECD 2004; O’Conner et al, 2006). This omission in research in the UK is significant because, while published studies have not reported the frequency of copreneurship as a form of business structure, it is generally agreed that many family businesses are or were managed by copreneurs at some point in their history (Tompson and Tompson 2000). Copreneurship is therefore not a new concept but one not widely researched or acknowledged (De Bruin and Lewis 2004).

The concept of a copreneurial business is also considered in terms of the value such an entity brings to the start-up, stages of a firm, as well as the economic, social, emotional and technical support that is evidenced particularly in the early stages. It is generally agreed that in the early stages of business set up, family and business finances are linked and, due to the economic bonds of marriage; a spouse automatically becomes a critical stakeholder in the family business (Haynes et al, 1999; Steier and Greenwood 2000; Ruef et al, 2003; Aldrich and Cliff 2003). Furthermore, there is an intrinsic value to the informal way that entrepreneurs often consult with and make decisions based on spousal opinions and influences as identified by Aldrich and Cliff (2003), which is further supported by the emotional
support (Puhakka 2002) and personal or temporal resources (Danes and Olsen 2003) that individuals within these types of firms experience. The study therefore sought to explore the impact of the female in copreneurial businesses; the motivations of copreneurial businesses to individuals (male and female); and the multiplier value of copreneurial relationships at the start up, development and growth stages of small to medium-sized enterprises.

BACKGROUND

Copreneurs

The limited research carried out into copreneurship makes it difficult to investigate this business entity; copreneurship and other family business forms are a much neglected area of research (Tompson and Tompson 2000; De Bruin and Lewis 2004). Most of the literature has not so much been published in academic journals but in the popular business press (Smith 2000). Moreover, the Annual Small Business Survey (BERR 2007/08) reports leadership of businesses by gender but not specifically on the relationships of business partners. It is therefore difficult to estimate the number of copreneurial businesses that exist in the UK. In America, it is estimated that the percentage of small businesses run by copreneurs is more than 30% (Klimecka 2006).

Although there has been research into the motivations for women to become entrepreneurs, there appears to be little research into what motivates women or men into becoming copreneurs (Smith 2000; Tompson and Tompson 2000). It could be assumed that the motivations for a woman to become a copreneur could be the same as if she were to become an entrepreneur. An Australian study confirms this suggesting that the major impetus for women entering business with her spouse is autonomy and flexibility and for men, the need for achievement (Smith 2000). Copreneurs face the unique challenge of pursuing two concurrent life goals that often make contradictory demands (Tompson and Tompson 2000). In marriage and business, copreneurs appear to have traditional and clearly defined roles (Marshack 1994; Tompson and Tompson 2000).

In the majority of copreneurial couples, it is the husband who is the leader and the wife who is the support role, Marschack (1994) describing this style of entrepreneurial couple as the solo-entrepreneur with a supportive spouse. A study of mixed gender founders of ICT companies in Ireland reaffirmed literature which indicated that in husband and wife teams the wives tended to handle the “woman’s” work i.e., administration, finance and HR, whilst men worked in sales, marketing and product development (O’Connor et al, 2006). Furthermore, over three quarters indicated that the lead founder was male. This can lead to a lack of recognition for the female role both at home and at work as perceived by husbands, other employees and the woman herself. Cole (1997) states that even when a woman’s credentials are equal or better than their husbands’, women find other businesspeople bypass them and look to their spouses for final decisions. Known as “ invisibility ” (Millman and Martin 2007), this could be because men generally spend more time working in the business, as the women undertake childcare responsibilities. Men therefore have greater customer contact or “visibility” and so are perceived as the boss (Smith 2000). It is often assumed that the only reason they hold their position is that they are married to the boss. As “the wife” they may be expected to play a subordinate role and the possible emotional struggle to cope with not being perceived in the same way their husbands are (Hollander and Bukowitz 1990). However, Marshack (1994) believes that even though wives would appear invisible in terms of leadership, they are nonetheless vital to the functioning of the business and the family.

However, conversely, a study exploring small copreneurial food companies in England has found this not always to be the case (Millman and Martin 2007). Five copreneurial food companies started by women were studied and, in each case the women were leading and managing the firm and their work roles were reflected in their home roles in that they took responsibility for organising the home and family. Therefore, when a woman is the lead in the company, she also still has responsibility for running the home, with the husband taking a support role in both cases (Millman and Martin 2007). Conflicting views on adopting traditional gender roles exist. Tompson and Tompson (2000) state that adopting traditional gender roles could be an adaptation that is more suitable to copreneurs than to dual-career couples, however, Marshack (1994), argues that the drawback of dividing work responsibilities along traditional gender roles is that the training and talents of each spouse could be overlooked. Marshack’s study of copreneurs and dual-career couples found that boundaries between home and work exist differently between copreneurs and dual-career couples. Marshack concluded that adhering to traditional models of masculinity and femininity is one of the ways of satisfying the demands of love and work.
It has been suggested that a boundary between home and work does not exist at all as business ownership is very intrusive and that the two domains cannot be separated (Tompson and Tompson 2000). In addition, copreneurship has been viewed as having created a perfect blend of work and family and the couple is anticipated to have a stronger marriage and business because of the intertwining (Muske and Fitzgerald 2006). Conversely managing work and family roles may be more difficult for copreneurs due to the permeability of boundaries between business and family as both partners will experience stressors from work or home simultaneously.

**Family Business**

It is important to consider the family business when looking at the value of copreneurs as it is generally agreed that family businesses are or were managed by copreneurs at some point in their history (Tompson and Tompson 2000). Statistics from the Annual Small Business Survey (BERR 2007/8) revealed that 69% of all SME employers are family businesses and the smaller the business, the more likely it is to be a family business. It is unknown how many of these are husband and wife run businesses. What sets family businesses apart from other enterprises is that they are primarily set up, not necessarily for growth or profit maximization, but with the needs of the owners and their families in mind (Getz et al., 2004), i.e., the motivations to start up a family business in the first place, are seen to be different than for non-family start-ups. It is recognised that little research exists on the motivations for women to enter a family business but acknowledge that it is seen as an advantage that flexible time schedules and working roles allow women to pursue several goals (Cromie and O’Sullivan 1999).

However, it has also been found that self-employed persons had higher levels of work-family conflict and lower levels of family satisfaction than did other employees (Lee et al., 2006). Empirical studies confirm that it is still one of the main reasons a woman joins a family business. A study by Cromie and O’Sullivan (1999) found that one third of women joined family firms to combine their career and family duties. The family business offers flexibility in work schedules to meet the needs of women who still assume major responsibility in the rearing of children (Salganicoff 1990). This could be further supported by Cromie and O’Sullivan (1999) who report that only 13% of women in a family business have no children compared to 32% in a non-family business. Also, 40% of women working in a family business compared to 10% of women within non-family business work part-time. This is significant data as it confirms that most women who work in family firms have children and almost half of these work part-time. A survey of 91 women who work in family businesses revealed that only 27% had expected to enter the business. The rest had not been groomed for the business or exposed to it. This would indicate that the majority of women do not plan for a career in the family business but do so to help the family, (Salganicoff 1990). Family businesses offer opportunities for women to hold positions and have incomes that are far better than those of women in other jobs (Salganicoff 1990).

However, Cole (1997) reports that Rosenblatt et al., believe female offspring do not receive the same encouragement or opportunity as male offspring and that this prevents women from moving towards an executive position in the business. Women tend towards loyalty to the business and family, concern for the needs of its members, sensitivity to individual needs and flexibility, all which are vital to the well-being and survival of the family business (Salganicoff 1990). Cole (1997) citing Jaffee, argues that women perceive their family business as a reservoir of great careers as they do not face the “glass ceiling” that many women working in non-family businesses may face. Conversely, women as managers in family firms found that several family members felt that working in the family firm actually restricted career progress and caused them to miss career opportunities. It also found that women often entered the firm for altruistic reasons, i.e. for the good of the business first and their own fulfilment second (Cromie and O’Sullivan 1999). Jiminez (2009) concluded that women who work in family businesses face issues similar to those that all businesswomen face, indicating that a family business benefits some women but disadvantages others depending upon what they seek for themselves.

However, evidence of role conflict does exist and refers to the two incompatible roles (business and family) contained in a family business relationship (Cole 1997), many women expressed doubts about their self-worth and the pressure of living up to the “superwoman” expectations imposed on them, feeling torn by the different messages they receive of the roles expected of them - to be a sound businesswoman and dedicated to the business and/or to take care of the family and behave like a mother (Salganicoff 1990). Cole (1997) concurs, describing this as a no-win choice for a female in a family business. Cromie and O’Sullivan 1999 found that working in the family business is not an unqualified attraction for family women and shades of exploitation are evident. Many women find however that they are “invisible” not viewed by others, whether within the business or outside, in the same way as male members of the business (Hollander and Bukowitz 1990). Factors attributed to

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women’s invisibility in the family business are stereotyping and discrimination, reflecting the family business system and women’s own limiting attitude towards their potential roles (Salganicoff 1990). Traditionally, women’s careers have taken second place to their family obligations, whilst men have organised their lives around the demands of their work. For daughters in the family business, invisibility means that they are typically passed over when their fathers consider suitable successors, and in order to overcome this, women have to emasculate themselves, by displaying “unwomanly” behaviour (Hollander and Bukowitz 1990).

Women in Business
Women offer diversity to entrepreneurship as they set up business in different sectors, develop different products and have a different management style (O’Connor et al., 2006). Furthermore, the Women’s Enterprise Task Force states “if women in the UK started businesses at the same rate as men, there would be 150,000 more businesses per annum creating many new jobs”. Even though male self employment still outnumbers female self employment by 2:1, the number of self employed women increased by 86% between 1991 and 1997 compared to an increase of 38% for men (Arad Consulting 2006). However, the number of women involved in family business or copreneurial businesses were not included when these statistics were compiled.

Many agree that men and women are motivated into business for different reasons - often referred to as the “pull and push” factors, women are considered to be “pulled” into business by personal ambition, and to achieve independence and flexibility whilst men are considered more likely to be “pushed” by redundancy or unemployment (Bruni et al., 2004; McClelland et al., 2005; Arad Consulting 2006). Barriers to female entrepreneurship are well documented and suggest that women entrepreneurs face different barriers to their male counterparts citing family responsibility, relative lack of relevant resources and deficits in social capital (Heilbrun 2004). It could be said that some women sacrifice their career for their family, often being employed part-time and in administrative roles – the lower the degree of employment, the higher the importance of family (Blattel-Mink et al., 2000). The jobs “involve little control or power, and these jobs are simultaneously labelled as “unskilled” work requiring feminine traits” (Marlow 2006). The arguments concerning the barriers against female entrepreneurship have contributed to the social reproduction of a gender subtext which represents women as “lacking in status, networks and credibility” (Bruni et al., 2004).

Despite living in a time when equality prevails, women are still perceived as being and generally wanting to be responsible for their family, “work for women goes hand-in-hand with life” and this lack of visibility early on in a person’s career affects what happens later in terms of advancement which is a particular risk for a woman seeking to juggle a career and family commitments requiring women to fight for a change in attitudes and workplace organisation (Powell 2006). The “family phase” is a hindrance to career advancement and female employment is often considered to be an additional source of income to the main male provider. Women have to reconcile family and employment over their life course. The “family phase” is therefore not as relevant to the male entrepreneur and thus flexibility not an issue (Blättel-Mink et al., 2000). Due to their role in familial responsibility, half of all self employed women, compared to only 13% of men operate their businesses from home and approximately a third of women owned firms compared to 12% of those owned by men are part-time enterprises (Marlow 2006). It could be concluded though that men view the barriers to women starting their own business to be sexual discrimination and lack of opportunity, the more traditional viewpoint, whilst women are concerned with not being taken seriously and confidence. Thus, it could be suggested that women are more concerned about the perception of a female’s ability in business than the practicalities of starting a business.

RESEARCH DESIGN
A multiple case study approach was selected, using semi-structured interviews and narrative as a key focus to explore the way spouses came to be running a business together; the impact having a family together has had on the individuals and/or business; the female spouse’s perception of the impact she has/had on the business; their views, perceptions and insights regarding the value added and challenges experienced through working together; the roles each spouse undertook both at home and in the workplace; and how boundaries were managed (personal and business). Access to copreneurs was difficult as no database of such businesses exists. A number of copreneurs were approached for interview by e-mail but did not respond. Of those who did respond, many placed emphasis on their time constraints. Therefore, initial personal contacts were used and subsequently a snowball methodology was employed. Half of the interviews conducted were with both spouses and half were with the female only. The reasons given for this were that the male partners were too busy or...
unavailable. Ideally, the researchers would have preferred to have undertaken more interviews had the opportunity been available both in terms of sample and timescale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Copreneurs Units Of Analysis</th>
<th>Business type</th>
<th>Number of years in business together</th>
<th>Live on business premises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (Andrew &amp; Fiona)</td>
<td>Building Company</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (Geoff &amp; Sally)</td>
<td>Monumental Masons</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (Richard &amp; Jane)</td>
<td>Veterinary Surgeons</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D (Chris &amp; Clare)</td>
<td>Car Auctions</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E (Gary &amp; Val)</td>
<td>Hydraulics Company</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (Mark &amp; Ceri)</td>
<td>Hairdressers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G (John &amp; Linda)</td>
<td>Limousine Company</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H (Jeremy &amp; Kath)</td>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.0 Units of analysis- overview

The copreneurs were all married, and all had children and half of them lived on their business premises and in order to ensure confidentiality all data has been anonymised. The interviews were analysed by identifying themes which were then compared to the issues identified in the review of background literature. The findings were derived through hermeneutic analysis and the iterative and continuous flow of analysis (Gilmore and Cavellio 1999).

**ANALYSIS**

Table 2.0 illustrates the themes identified within the data generated, the given definitions and the key areas of literature and domains of research which together form the basis for further discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme and sub-components</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Research domain(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Motivation</strong></td>
<td>To aid the male partner in the business on a day-to-day basis aligned with trust and shared vision, goals and independence.</td>
<td>Small business Family business Female entrepreneurship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>• “a helping hand”        </code></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>`• “trust”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>`• “ambition and autonomy”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Roles in the business</strong></td>
<td>Traditional and clearly defined roles in the marriage and business.</td>
<td>Female entrepreneurship Copreneurship Small business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>• Support within the business </code></td>
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<tr>
<td><code>• Support within the home </code></td>
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<tr>
<td><code>• Decision-making and leadership </code></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Advantages and disadvantages</strong></td>
<td>Empathy for issues faced and flexibility and togetherness (time spent) in the relationship.</td>
<td>Female entrepreneurship Copreneurship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>• Understanding            </code></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><code>• Flexibility              </code></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><code>• Togetherness             </code></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td><code>• Time management          </code></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Managing the boundaries between home and work</strong></td>
<td>Permeability of boundaries (physical) between family and business premises</td>
<td>Copreneurship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>• Living on the premises </code></td>
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<tr>
<td><code>• Living independently of the workplace </code></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5. Invisibility and perception</strong></td>
<td>The role of the woman in the business as seen by others and themselves as equal (or not).</td>
<td>Family business Copreneurship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Theme and sub-components | Definition | Research domain(s)
---|---|---
6. The value of copreneurship | Feelings of personal value, job satisfaction and self-esteem etc., and impact on the survival and success of the business. | Family business Female entrepreneurship Copreneurship

Table 2.0 Themes and sub-components defined and research domain(s) identified

**FINDINGS**

**Theme 1 - Motivation**

_A “helping hand”_ - Research on the motivations for women to enter into business suggested that women sought independence and flexibility (McClelland and Swail 2005). Similarly, one third of women joined family firms to combine their career and family duties. However, copreneurs reported the major impetus for women entering a business with their husband is autonomy and flexibility. During this study it was found the main reason given for women going into business with their husbands was not autonomy and flexibility but “to help them out.” In most cases, the business was already established or started by the husband and the wife joined in an administrative or support role to help him.

“I said I would help out. In the first six months the business grew by 400% so I decided I would stay working for him.”

“I started to work in the office part-time when my middle child was 3. I just worked in the office to help out with the books. I started part-time, then full-time and have been ever since.”

“Because I have always worked from home, Linda had given up work to look after the house and she started answering the phone and doing the books.”

_Trust_ - From the husbands point of view, their main motivation to work with their wife is trust.

“In the early days for sure, I couldn’t have had anybody who I could have trusted at that point.”

“We trust each other implicitly. In the business, I trust Sally with anything. Most stuff is in her name.”

_Ambition and autonomy_ - In one case, it was quite clear that the wife in the business was the driving force. She did not join the business to help her husband out. She had been employed by him initially and then married him. She describes herself as entrepreneurial and that flexibility (for childcare) is not important.

“Our job is not easy to be flexible with. We are not in a position to have time off in the day and catch up at night because our customers cannot come to our house at night to have their hair cut! Parents come into it more – our mums help out with the children.”

This concurs with Millman and Martin’s (2007) findings, that when women are the lead copreneurs ambition and autonomy are more important than flexibility.

**Theme 2 - Roles in the business**

_Support within the business_ - the literature largely agreed that in marriage and business, copreneurs appear to have traditional and clearly defined roles (Marshack 1994; Tompsoon and Tompsoon 2000). The generated data revealed the following. Within the business, in six out of eight of the couples, the women carry out the supportive role, undertaking the bookkeeping and administrative roles. The other two couples have split their businesses into two sides and their roles within each side are similar.

“I do everything with (salon “A”) and he does everything to do with (salon “B”), so our jobs are mirrored at each salon as we are both stylists.”
The farmer’s wife’s role is more different again. As previously discussed, in six of the eight couples, the husband is the professional or leader of the business and the wives have adopted the supportive role. The farmer’s wife has many roles. She supports by carrying out the administration and office work but she also becomes involved in farming itself.

“Everything really! I help outside, in the milking parlour, I run the office, I cater – at harvest time, I might have lots of men to feed. I do drive the tractor but not very often!”

Support within the home - At home, the wives run the household in every case. Most wives had cleaners and other help in the home, however, the wives organise childcare. Help came from husbands depending on the type of work they do

“The main reason is because he has a much more physical job and I do work shorter hours so I do have a bit more time.”

Couple F, whose roles at work are mirrored, and who therefore behave almost like a dual-career couple tend to share the domestic chores more equally. In fact, both husband and wife agreed that he did more at home than his wife.

“Gary generally does more things, but I still do the washing. Gary also does a lot with the children but I know what they are doing and organise them.”

Decision-making and leadership - When discussing making decisions, the responses were mixed. Most couples agreed that they made decisions equally, but that their husbands had the final say, mainly due to their expertise. It was noted during the course of the interviews that the wives were keen to promote their husband’s as leaders of the businesses, even if perhaps that was not the case.

“In work, he runs work and I follow him and at home, I run the house and he floats in.”

One wife considered her husband to be the leader and that he made all the business decisions.

“I just do the paperwork really.”

However, later in the interview she admitted.

“I do support him a lot. I am in the background picking him up but if he had a good manager, I think he would do just as well, I don’t think I am paramount to the business.”

Theme 3 - Advantages and disadvantages (of being in business together)

Understanding - of the couples interviewed, some felt that working together meant they were able to empathise with each other better.

“If your husband comes home and says he has had a bad day, if you have that insight, you know why he has had a bad day or you know he has had a bad day already before he gets in.”

“Now that Ceri has salon A to run, she understands more of the stresses that I have had over the years, whereas before she would say “get a grip” but now doing it for herself, she understands.”

Flexibility - Whilst flexibility was not a reason given for becoming a copreneur, it was considered by several of the couples as a distinct advantage.

“To work from home, is a big advantage with three children.”

“Flexibility was key.”

Togetherness - The main advantage, however, was considered to be being able to spend time together.

“In the beginning, he was working five days and five nights. If I hadn’t worked with him, I wouldn’t have seen him. We get on great. It really works for us.”
“We spend more time together. I think we have grown stronger in the business and as a couple.”

“There are very few people who spend as much time together as we do. We get on well, we enjoy the same things. We bounce off each other very well.”

“We considered each other.”

However, whilst working together was seen as an advantage in that the couples could spend time together; this in itself can also prove a disadvantage.

“If you have enough of each other, you can’t get away from it.”

“Being together too much!”

“We need a bit of space between us. We do have our blow ups every so often because it does get on top of you.”

Time Management - The disadvantages to copreneurship by several of the couples were said to be “none.” However, most couples agreed that it was difficult to have time off.

“Going away on holiday is a pain because both directors are out of the country at the same time.”

“We either have to shut the business or get somebody to answer the phone.”

“In farming, we work 365 days a year – weekends and bank holidays.”

Theme 4 - Managing the boundaries between home and work

Living on the business premises - Tompson and Tompson (2000) found that managing work and family roles may be more difficult for copreneurs due to the permeability of boundaries between business and family. The difficulty of separating family life from work life was reinforced during the interviews. It was found that those copreneurs who actually live on the business premises found it almost impossible to separate the two due to not being able to move out of the work situation. The couple who ran a veterinary practice lived on the premises and were on call 24 hours a day. The surgery could be open until 8 o’clock at night and on Saturdays. Time with the children and mealtimes fitted in around that. Similarly within farming...

“When you live on site, if anything goes on, you are the first to hear about it. You can’t get away from it unless you go away for a holiday. You haven’t got a home life and a work life, its all mixed in together.”

Living on the premises was seen as a distinct advantage for couple A when raising their children. Again, work life and home life was intertwined. The wife would work from 6am until 8am in her office. She would then divert the telephone to the house and take calls from there and then she worked again from 9pm until midnight in the evenings. Couple G also live on their business premises and feel it has both advantages and disadvantages.

“You never switch off. But, if I have a problem with one of the limos at night and have to work on it, at least I am at home working on it.”

But they also feel home and work lives are one and the same.

“They are both the same. Clare may be cooking tea and answering the phone. I can be here with people whilst she is cooking tea. That’s how we work.”

Living independently of the business - For those couples who live independently to their business premises, it is easier to separate home life and work life although most felt they could not entirely “switch off.”

“You can be out at dinner and you suddenly say “Oh, I forgot to tell you about so and so.”
Two of the four couples never bring work home.

“We have a rule that we never bring it home. After 6pm we do not talk about work.”

“In general, we manage them (work and home life) separately. Sometimes I might want to talk but Geoff will come in late and say I don’t want to talk about that now.”

Couple F have no choice but to bring work home.

“We haven’t got anywhere private where we can go within work time so we do tend to discuss some things at home rather than in work. Some times we have to make phone calls at home.”

**Theme 5 - Invisibility and perception**

It was felt important to this study to establish whether “invisibility” (Millman and Martin 2007) exists or whether this is a perception a woman has of herself in the copreneurial business. Where the husband has a profession e.g., the veterinary surgeon, it is natural that they are seen as the leader and their wives as the support role and these wives are accepting of this. In the majority of couples, it is the person who has most contact with others who is most recognised. Wife B has found that as her husband does the manual work he rarely has contact with clients or professionals. However, she has found:

“Generally, clients deal with me now without question, but it has taken time.”

She also feels that they are both equal and dependant upon one another so does not perceive herself as second to her husband.

Wife D also considers her husband is seen as the boss as he is more visible but that…

“Professional outsiders and friends of Chris have respect for me because they know how well we work together.”

In most cases, the wives felt that their husbands were perceived as the “boss” or leader and afforded the most respect from others. Wife F who is considered the lead in the business feels that their employees view her husband as their boss, even in the salon that she runs herself

“It is because I’m female. I am very fair with my staff and I can discipline them if I want to. The staff find me more approachable, they are more scared of Mark.”

Wife E has a very low opinion of herself and how she is perceived by her colleagues.

“I am nothing in the company. Employees do not listen to me. I have no authority at all.”

Probably the most interesting response was from wife A as their business (a building company) is in a male dominated industry. She found being female had its advantages and disadvantages.

“There have been times when people would bend over backwards because I was a woman and other instances where they don’t want to know or deal with you or talk to you as you are a woman or don’t think you are capable, which really annoys me.”

She has persevered and pushed herself forward and frequently represents the company. She feels it has taken time but that now she is recognised.

“People recognise me more and they can put a face to a name. If not, you just become the one who does the paperwork at home.”

Most of the wives felt it could be easy to be undermined by their husbands and they rely on their support when others go over their heads to their husbands.

“They come to me first, if they can’t get the answer they want, they go to Gary and still don’t get the answer they want! I trust people a lot more than Gary does but they hit the brick wall when they go to him.”
Theme 6 - The value of copreneurship
The couples were asked whether they felt valued, experienced job satisfaction, whether they would go into business with their husband again, and the impact it had on their relationship in order for the researchers to gain an overview of the “value” of their business on a personal level. Their responses were as follows:

Wife A has no regrets although she would insist on holidays if she did it again. Living on the premises worked well for her as it afforded her the flexibility to manage her children and her work. She feels that each partner needs to respect the other and have equal roles for it to work.

Wife B feels valued and feels satisfaction from her job as she considers they provide a good service and receive positive feedback. However, she is not sure whether she would want to run a business with her husband again, purely because they have very little time off and she feels her family life has suffered as a result.

Couple C enjoyed their work and would work together again but would not live on the business premises again.

Couple D enjoy their work and wife D feels valued. Her only regret is that she had to work so hard when her children were small. However, she feels:

“It has made us closer and we respect each other. I have a great husband. I think I am very lucky, we get on fab at work and at home.”

Wife E feels valued by her husband but does not experience any job satisfaction. She has worked in the business to help her husband out but does not enjoy what she does and if she could do something else she would. However she also states:

“I would do it again because we work well together and are a close unit… there is this bond between us now… but I would like to do something different.”

Couple F feel valued, experience job satisfaction and would work together again. Husband F feels being in business together has made them closer as a couple and affords them a mutual understanding. Wife F says:

“It does make you closer and it does make you appreciate the other person. We do know what the other one is going through.”

Couple G would work together again. They enjoy what they do and feel that as both their parents ran their own businesses they knew what to expect. The husband felt he would be lost without his wife as they do so much together, they are very happy and have a good life. Wife G feels valued most of the time and says:

“Working together gives you another interest, you have that in common, you always have something to talk about.”

Wife H works hard both in the office and is hands on but finds that very rewarding. She also feels valued by her husband who is considerate and encourages her to take time out. Having come from a farming background, it was not something she had hoped for herself as she knew how difficult it would be, however, she appreciates the fact that they are able to take holidays and is happy.

“I am happy with my lot! Well I am when the sun is shining. It’s a bit different in the winter, when it’s raining and the mornings are dark. It’s like anybody’s business – you get good days and bad days.”
DISCUSSION

Although this data represents a “snapshot” of cross sectoral copreneurial businesses, it was noted that, of these eight businesses, without exception, the wife had not been the driving force in setting up the business but had entered a business initiated by her husband. The idea behind the business had not been hers but had either been a family business which the husband had taken over or a business that had been started by the husband and was in its early stages. This does not mean to say that the wife is not instrumental in its growth or success. Although, flexibility was not significantly acknowledged as a motivator to becoming a copreneur, reference was frequently made to flexible working in every case and the researchers believe it was more of a motivator than the wives themselves realise.

During the interviews, it became apparent that the wife was not the major decision maker. Even with couple F, where it can be seen that the wife is the driving force behind the expansion of the business, the wife still feels that the husband is the major decision maker. Most of the husbands acknowledged that their wife is a major influence in the decision making process and that decisions are generally reached by mutual agreement. It could be considered that as she knows her husband so well, she is able to question and challenge him in a way that an unrelated business partner could not do. However, this study revealed that even though the couples considered themselves equal, in fact, the husband was the leader of the business with his wife supporting him. In addition, it was noticed by the researchers that most of the women were keen to emphasize that their husbands were the leaders in the business.

The researchers felt that this was so that their masculinity was not undermined, that is, in acknowledgement that they were head of the family and therefore head of the business. It was known that one wife, in particular, was perceived by others as a significant contributor to the running and leadership of the business yet she said during the interview “in work, he runs work and I follow him and at home, I run the house and he floats in” the use of such language demonstrating an almost subservient attitude by the wife, who is, in fact, a very strong personality.

Wife E considered her husband made all the business decisions and that all she did was the “paperwork.” Yet, this is just considered to be her perception of herself and her self-worth because later in the discussion she contradicts herself, “if I have a day off, you would think he had lost a leg!” this wife was clearly not enjoying working in the business, but is there purely to help her husband out. She is not motivated and her self worth is very low, this is being reflected in or could be as a result of difficult times in the business. It is considered that if a business is to be successful, both partners need to be motivated and share the same vision of their ultimate goal. This wife displayed underlying tensions, not directly between her husband and herself but between herself and the business.

A cross case analysis concluded that the women provide vital roles in each of the businesses. The roles are generally ones which men do not appear to be adept at. The wife in six of the eight cases, appears to be responsible for administrative roles, including bookkeeping, working behind the scenes and often not known to the clients or only known as a voice at the end of a telephone. The wife will provide the organisation and structure that allows the husband to carry on and run the business. It could be questioned as to whether the husband could work quite so successfully without this support from his wife.

Throughout the interviews, there was a common thread of trust and mutual respect where the husband and wife team plays a crucial part in the running of the business. For the most part, they were striving towards the same goal and valued one another’s contribution. Where both husband and wife were interviewed, it was evident that they understood each other and shared a special “bond.” It could be considered that the business would not be as successful if the husband did not have a totally reliable and dependable “partner.”

Four of the husbands were not available for interview. One was unwell, the other three were too busy to be interviewed and their wives were very protective towards them. All couples interviewed chose to be interviewed during the day so that there home life was undisturbed and taking their husband out of the work situation during the day was considered economically unfeasible to some wives. There is the impression that the wives had “time” where the husbands did not. Similarly, when discussing roles, wife B explained she carried out the household chores as she had more “time.” In fact, the researchers consider that wives fulfil so many different roles in a copreneurial business that they are able to react to change or perform additional roles as and when required, whilst their husbands would appear to perform similar roles all the time.

The wife was, without exception, responsible for the running or the management of the home. Based on the responses at interview and taking into account the absence of four of the husbands during interview, it was acknowledged that only one husband had any input in the running of the home. Nearly all the women had outside help in the house, by way of cleaners, but this particular husband helped with the shopping, cooking and helped to look after the children.
It could be concluded that for those copreneurs who live on their business premises their work and home life are interlinked and one and the same. For those copreneurs who have a separate business premises, even though they may work long hours, they are generally able to discipline themselves into a work and family situation. Following the interview, one wife, who was interviewed alone, revealed to the researcher that she had discovered her husband had been unfaithful to her for fifteen years. She had not known about it at the time and he had not sought to leave the marriage. This couple live and work on their business premises and the researchers wonder whether this was the husband’s way of escapism as there is no divide between the pressures of work and home life.

The researchers believe however, although it was not said, that some of the wives appeared to feel undervalued in the business side of the partnership, not by their husbands, but through not being acknowledged as a significant partner by others, i.e., “invisible.” The researchers consider that the wife provides the stability and foundation on which the business is built and similarly in the home but can remain the invisible half. Some wives have recognised that this perception is more to do with being physically seen and recognised and when they “push” themselves to the forefront they receive the recognition they deserve. The researchers also consider that the husband could be encouraged to publicly acknowledge his wife’s role to others and so relieve her of her feeling of invisibility.

The effect on the children was also discussed in several of the interviews. In general, women felt that the flexibility, whilst not the reason for entering a copreneurial business, was a distinct advantage. It gives the women the opportunity to ensure that the children receive the attention they require, e.g., when they are ill or home in the holidays. In some cases, the wife would work around the business to ensure that the children did not suffer as a result of the demands of running a business.

In other cases, i.e., in the case of the farming family, the children were able to become actively involved in helping around the farm themselves. In only one case, did the wife feel regret that she had been unable to devote more time to her children, but they had been born at a crucial “high growth” stage of the business.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data generated in the study, the value of copreneurship, which includes the value of women in business, could therefore be considered to be as follows. The wife is likely to have entered the business to help her husband out; she takes responsibility for running the household and organising the children but is able to do so due to the flexibility afforded to her in the copreneurial situation. Her responsibilities within the business are as an employee and she often undertakes numerous roles, which under any other circumstance may require multiple employees, she often has the added responsibility of being involved in the major business decisions and assisting the husband in making good business decisions. She will be dedicated and generally motivated in the interests of the business. In these cases, the wife has been involved more or less from the outset of the business and has been required to carry out numerous roles whilst being able to run a household and bring up the children. The husband, who is generally acknowledged to be the leader, has the support and trust from his business partner which could not be obtained from a partner who is not related to him. The couples share trust and mutual respect for one another. It is important for the husband to value his wife and acknowledge her significant role in the business to others to make her feel more “visible.” The findings of the study indicated that the value to the business was based upon its success due to mutual trust, respect and understanding and the flexibility it affords to balance work and home life successfully. Also implied by the study, was a commercialising in the business of domestic skills, for example the correlation between maintaining and caring for the family with those skills practised in HR; similarly budgeting domestic resources with those skills aligned in administrative, finance and accounting duties. The implications of this study suggest that value to the business may be lost due to the submissive role which the female spouse assumes. Issues also raised were instances that exhibited evidence of tension and concern regarding self-esteem, leadership and role stress. In addition, the implication of infidelity in one case suggested the pressures of maintaining a personal relationship alongside the business-partnership relationship. The findings would reinforce the views held by the authors that business in context is a social construct and like any social construct based around the emotions of individuals it is likely to display illogical and irrational behaviours at times, in contrast to normative theories of business creation.
REFERENCES


