EMOTION WORK, CONFLICT, AND FAMILY BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Due to the inherent overlap of family and business, family members who work in family businesses (family co-workers) experience unique interactions and relationship dynamics. Such interactions and relationships among family co-workers are critical to the performance of the family business. By using the lens of emotion work and organizational conflict, this paper develops propositions exploring how emotion work and emotion regulation patterns influence the team dynamics in the family business. By extending the emotion work literature to the complex and understudied context of family businesses, this paper contributes to the emotion work and family business literatures. Further, this paper also identifies links between emotion work strategies and conflict patterns, contributing to the team literature.

BODY OF TEXT

Seventy percent of all Australian businesses are family businesses (KPMG 2009), while the number of family dominated businesses reaches 80%-90% in the US (Shepherd & Zacharakis 2000). The family business context offers an interesting overlap between business and family domains, creating a unique mix of communication and behavioural patterns among family co-workers. While an extensive and diverse body of research has focused on the study of emotion work in organisations, to our knowledge, emotion work between family co-workers has never been studied. Smooth interactions and functional relationships are critical for the success and survival of the family business and good relationships can give the family firm a strong strategic advantage, while emotional issues arising out of negative familial interactions and relationships can be highly detrimental (Cabrera-Suarez, Saa-Perez & Garcia-Almeida 2001; Danes et al. 1999; Eddleston & Kellermanns 2007; Schulze, Lubatkin & Dino 2003; Schulze et al. 2001; Sirmon & Hitt 2003). Thus there is a pressing need to understand the nature of family co-worker emotion work in the family business context and its impact that this may have on family firm performance.

With the overlap of different domains, conflict is an important issue in family firms (Davis & Harveston 1999; Davis & Harveston 2001; Harvey & Evans 1994; Kellermanns & Eddleston 2004). Danes et al. (2002) argue that given the ambiguities between the boundaries of family and business, conflict is inevitable in a family firm setting. For example, conflicts in the family sphere, such as marital conflict or sibling rivalry often spill over into the business domain (Kellermanns & Eddleston 2004). Conflict among family employees is known to play a role in business performance (Ensley, Pearson & Sardeshmukh 2007; Kellermanns & Eddleston 2004). We also know that the overlap of family and business can create intense emotion work demands for family co-workers (Perera, Sardeshmukh & Scott-Young 2010).

Conflict as a construct has been studied extensively in the organizational literature and we know that conflict is a multidimensional construct that has both cognitive and affective components (Amason 1996; Amason & Mooney. 1999; Amason & Sapienza 1997; Jehn 1997; Jehn, Chadwick & Thatcher 1997; Jehn & Chatman 2000; Jehn, Northcraft & Neale 1999; Jehn & Shah 1997). In this paper, we attempt to understand conflict among family co-workers through the emotion work perspective. We integrate the literature on emotion work, emotion regulation, and conflict with the family business literature to explore how emotion work performed by family co-workers may impact conflict, and consequently the family business performance. This paper makes a contribution to the family business literature by exploring the role of emotion work, emotion regulation strategies and their relationship to team dynamic variables such as conflict. It also contributes to the emotion work and conflict literatures by exploring the relationship between emotion work and team dynamics in the unique context of family businesses. We now offer a brief review of these three strands of literature and then combine them to develop a set of testable propositions.

Emotion work is known to influence workplace interactions, and subsequently team dynamics. For example, performing emotion work through the withholding of negative emotions is known to reduce workplace conflict (Cole, Walter & Bruch 2008). Similarly, Jordan and Troth (2004) found that team members were more effective when they regulated their own emotions. Family businesses offer a unique context for emotion work, where the overlap of family and business may create the need for intense and consistent emotion work (Perera, Sardeshmukh & Scott-Young 2010) as family co-workers interact with each other, during long frequent interactions, across multiple different contexts, and with greater intimacy than do normal co-workers. Effectively managing these relationships requires "special awareness, careful communication, and extreme effort" (Jaffe 2004). Thus, managing the dual relationships of being both a family member and a co-worker in the family business is not easy, and stress and conflict are common. This study explores the different emotion work and emotion regulation strategies and how they affect the composition of conflict in family businesses.

Emotion Work and Emotion Regulation

The academic literature acknowledges that working in the modern workplace involves interpersonally 'interacting, transacting and synchronising with others' (Boudens 2005: 1303), and that workplace interactions are critically shaped by the emotion displayed by employees interacting with each other (Pugliesi 1999).The emotion work literature originated from Hochschild's (1983) seminal work on 'emotional labour'. She defined emotional labour as the 'management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display' (Hochschild 1983: 7). Based on Hochschild's (1979, 1983) work, most subsequent studies specify emotional labour as the act of adherence to organisationally prescribed *display rules* during interactions with customers (Ashforth & Humphrey 1993; Brotheridge & Lee 2003; Cropanzano, Weiss & Elias 2004; Glomb & Tews 2004; Hartel, Ashkanasy & Zerbe 2005; Pugh 2001; Zapf 2002; Zapf & Holz 2006). Emotion work also includes adherence to display rules that emerge out of other sources such as peers or cultural norms (Bolton & Boyd 2003; Bono & Vey 2005; Glaso et al. 2006; Smollan 2006; Talwar 2002; Waldron 1994). Further, emotion work also encompasses emotion regulation and adherence to display rules during interactions with those internal to the organisation (Ashkanasy, Hartel & Daus 2002; Bono & Vey 2005; Brunton 2005). Thus, consistent with current conceptualization, we use emotion work as a broader concept (Bolton 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2005; Bolton & Boyd 2003) that encompasses interactions between co-workers. In particular, we focus on the work context interaction between family members who are also co-workers in the family business.

Display rules are defined as learned norms that outline expectations with regard to how emotion should be expressed during social interactions (Brotheridge & Grandey 2002a; Cropanzano, Weiss & Elias 2004; Diefendorff & Gosserand 2003; Morris & Feldman 1997; Rafaeli & Sutton 1989). These display rules may be formally prescribed by organisations (such as the case of display of pleasant emotion to customers) or emerge as norms (norms related to display of emotion when interacting with co-workers). Similar to most organisational norms, instead of being rigid rules, display rules are expectations with regard to display emotion during workplace interactions (see Conrad and Witte 1994; Sturdy and Fineman 2001 and Bolton 2005). The display rules may govern what is perceived as the 'appropriate' range and intensity emotion expression, which will vary based on the nature of the interaction and its context (See Lively 2000; Seymour & Sandiford 2005; Tschan, Rochat & Zapf 2005). During some interactions only a limited range of emotion is seen as 'appropriate' for display, for example interactions with customers, supervisors and subordinates. In contrast, during some interactions a wider range of emotion is perceived as 'appropriate' for display as in interactions with peers (Briner & Totterdell 2002; Cote ; Crawley 2004; Gabriel & Griffiths 2002; Tiedens, Sutton & Fong 2004; Tschan, Rochat & Zapf 2005; Turnbull 2000).

Consistent performance of emotion work requires individuals to be able to display 'appropriate' emotion to the relevant degree. This may involve suppression or toning-down 'inappropriate' emotion that is experienced (such as impatience or anger), while simultaneously expressing emotion perceived as 'appropriate'. In addition to managing one's own emotions, emotion work may also entail influencing the emotional state and behaviour of others (Adib & Guerrier 2001; Bolton & Boyd 2003; Crawley 2004; Turnbull 2000). Thus, performing emotion work requires that the individual frequently and skilfully regulates his/her own experience and expression of emotion, as well as attempting to influence the emotional state of others.

Emotional regulation is defined as "the manipulation in self or other of (a.) emotion antecedents or (b.) one or more of the physiological, subjective, or behavioural components of the emotional response" (Gross & Levenson 1993). The emotion work literature details two groups of emotion regulation strategies used by employees in performing emotion work: *surface acting* and *deep acting* (Hochschild, 1979; 1983). In her seminal work, Hochschild (1983) defined *surface acting* as the attempt to 'change how we outwardly appear' (p.35). She reiterated that by using surface acting, individuals regulate their expression of emotion—by controlling certain facial and bodily cues—without regulating the *actual* experience of the emotion. On the other hand, some employees also frequently regulate their actual experience of an emotion when performing emotion work. Hochschild (1983) specified this as *deep acting* or working on feeling, where these strategies result in a "real

feeling that has been self-induced" (p, 35). Hence, deep acting refers the act of influencing the actual experience of an emotion, in order to convincingly display the emotion required by the display rules.

A similar concept stems from the emotion regulation literature. Gross (1999) presents two groups of emotion regulation strategies : (a.) antecedent-focused and (b.) response-focused emotion regulation strategies. Antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategies attempt to regulate the experience of emotion prior to 'actual' experience of emotion. For example, one may choose to avoid a situation or person who might trigger unpleasant emotion. On the other hand response focused emotion regulation strategies are focused on regulating the expression of emotion and are used after the 'actual' experience of emotion, for example, the suppression of an emotion that may be considered 'inappropriate' for expression during a particular workplace interaction. These two groups of strategies correspond to (a.) surface acting and (b.) deep acting extensively discussed in the emotion work literature (Côté 2005; Liu et al, 2010). In this paper, we focus on the two groups of emotion regulation strategies surface and deep acting.

Organizational conflict and its dimensionality

Conflict in organizations has been studied extensively and is defined "an awareness on the part of the parties involved of discrepancies, incompatible wishes, or irreconcilable desires" (Jehn & Mannix 2001: 238). Organizational conflict is a tri-dimensional construct with cognitive, process and affective components (Amason 1996; Amason & Mooney. 1999; Amason & Sapienza 1997; Jehn 1997; Jehn, Chadwick & Thatcher 1997; Jehn & Chatman 2000; Jehn, Northcraft & Neale 1999; Jehn & Shah 1997).

Cognitive conflict, variously named task conflict (Jehn & Mannix 2001) and substantive conflict (Davis & Harveston 2001) is defined as "awareness of differences in viewpoints and opinions pertaining to a group task" (Jehn & Mannix 2001:238). Affective conflict, similarly termed relationship conflict (Jehn & Mannix 2001), interpersonal conflict or emotional conflict (Hinds & Mortensen 2005) in the literature, is defined as "an awareness of interpersonal incompatibilities, includes affective components such as feeling tension and friction" (Jehn & Mannix 2001: 238). Process conflict, defined as "conflicts not about the task itself, but about *how* the work should be done" (Hinds & Mortensen 2005) has received less examination in the literature (Jehn & Mannix 2001). High levels of process conflict negatively impacts performance (Jehn & Mannix 2001), while low-moderate levels can result in better performance (Kellermanns and Eddleston 2004).

We know that both task and affective conflict are often correlated (De Dreu & Weingart 2003). However, they have a differential impact on group processes and outcomes. In general, cognitive (task) conflict has a positive relationship with group decision making and performance (Amason 1996). Moderate amounts of cognitive conflict are associated with better team performance (De Dreu 2006). On the other hand, affective or relationship conflict has been associated with group process dysfunctions and lowered performance. Amason et al. (1996) found that affective conflict was significantly and negatively related to both decision quality and affective acceptance of decisions. Similarly, Jehn (1995) found that interpersonal conflict creates problems with decision-making and hence affects team performance. This paper primarily focuses on cognitive and affective conflict since those constructs and their measures are well developed and well established in the literature. In the next section, we develop propositions about how emotion work and emotion regulation affects conflict in family businesses.

DEVELOPMENT OF PROPOSITIONS

We know that emotional regulation and emotion work have considerable effect on the individual. Performing emotion work has been closely associated with burnout, psychological distress, reduced job satisfaction, physical illness, and employee turnover (Strazdins 2002; Zapf 2002; Dormann & Zapf 2004; Bono & Vey 2005; Eide 2005; Scott & Myers 2005).

Recall that such emotional regulation in performing emotion work may take place as surface acting or as deep acting. In the next few paragraphs, we develop propositions about how these

different strategies are related to different dimensions of conflict in family firms. Surface acting involves downplaying the behavioural component of felt emotion or regulating only the expression. Grandey, Dickter & Sin (2004) outlined that call centre employees who used surface acting found dealing with aggressive customers 'highly stressful' (p. 412). Even though surface acting reduces the behavioural manifestation of the emotion, it does not reduce the actual physiological experience of that emotion (Gross 1998). Previous work on emotion regulation attributes the effortful nature of suppression emotion-strategies to the fact that suppression *does not alter the experience* of the emotion, but only the expression of emotion. Consequently the physiological arousal associated with the experience of emotion is argued to increase activity of the autonomic nervous system increasing the effortful nature of emotion suppression (Schaubroeck & Jones 2000; Bonanno 2001; Lord and Harvey 2002; Gross and John 2002; Cropanzano, Weiss & Elias 2004; Giardini and Frese 2006). The effortful nature of suppression of emotion can also be explained by drawing on the work of Baumeister et al. (1998) and Muraven and Baumeister (2000). They argued that inhibition and control of emotion, similar to other efforts at self-control depletes a limited mental resource. Consequently inhibition of emotion is argued to impact the performance of other tasks that tap similar mental resources. In fact, surface acting requires a substantial effort on the part of the individual, and can inhibit cognitive processes such as memory for social information (Butler et al. 2003; Richards & Gross 2000), and can impair decision-making. Hence use of surface acting alone can lead to reduced responsiveness in social interactions, and can be disruptive to communication (Butler et al. 2003). Butler et al (2003) found that surface acting or suppression reduced the partners' motivation to better understand the suppressing individual. They further argue that such suppression can downgrade the quality of long term relationships by disrupting communication.

Communication is the key element in interactions. Family businesses operate in an entrepreneurial and uncertain environment, where at least part of the decision making is based on heuristics (Busenitz & Barney 1997) and on incomplete information and uncertainty. When the process of communication shuts down through surface acting, it may disrupt the natural flows of tacit information exchange characterized in the family business setting. Further, such suppression can create stress for both parties of the interaction (Butler et al. 2003). Stress can lead to a climate of negative affectivity in the interaction. We also know that, stress and anxiety, or negative affectivity, of even one person may impact a team's environment (Barrick et al. 1998). Under such circumstances, individuals are also more likely to respond to the situation by surface acting without expressing the divergent view points, thus suppressing any conflict. Such lack of expression of divergent points can lead to reduction in task conflict.

Suppression is known to be a less effective emotion regulation strategy. In fact, it has been found that surface actors tend to deviate from the prescribed emotion more frequently (Owings 2002). At such times, any deviation from suppression, or, any expression of divergent ideas may be misinterpreted as personal slights and politicking, triggering a cycle of affective conflict and negative affectivity.

Proposition 1a: Surface acting or suppression strategies in the family business setting will have a positive relationship with affective conflict and therefore will be negatively related to family firm performance.

Proposition 1b: Surface acting or suppression strategies in the family business setting will have a negative relationship with cognitive conflict and therefore will be negatively related to family firm performance.

Deep acting and strategies used in deep acting such as cognitive reappraisal involve changing a situation's meaning in a way that alters its emotional impact (Ashforth and Kreiner 2002; Gross & Thompson 2007; Hochschild 1983; Lord and Harvey 2002; Totterdell 2003; Schweingruber and Berns 2005). This may involve changing attributions on part of the family members. For example, a family employee may reinterpret verbal abuse by another family co-worker by reminding him/her self of a time he/she similarly 'lost it' due to the pressures of running a business, consequently being able to experience *empathy* instead of anger. Sorenson (1999) found that in particular, collaborative, rather than competitive strategies worked better for family businesses. On a related note, Weingart & Jehn

(2000) recommend an approach which requires mediation to change negative attribution about team members. This essentially involves emotion regulation through reappraisal on part of the team members. Such strategies will reduce the interpersonal conflict within a group of family co-workers in the family business, yet allow them to express divergent ideas without the conflict being attributed to personal agendas. Therefore, deep acting and related reappraisal strategies are more functional strategies for the individual and for family relationships.

> Proposition 2a: Deep acting or reappraisal strategies by family co-workers in the family business setting will exhibit a negative relationship with affective conflict and therefore will be positively related to family firm performance.

> Proposition 2b: Deep acting or reappraisal strategies by family co-workers in the family business setting will exhibit a positive relationship with cognitive conflict and therefore will be positively related to family firm performance.

A third option is that due to their dual roles as co-workers and family members, one, or all, family co-worker may decide that their family relatedness absolves them of the need to regulate their emotions in the business context. They feel free to express their emotions as candidly as they would be at home and therefore do not attempt to engage in emotion work. This may explain why some family businesses are riven with excessive damaging relational conflict which leads to lower business performance (Ket de Vries, 1993). In the family therapy literature, there is consistent evidence that relates high levels of negative emotional expression with the dysfunction of individual members and of the family unit as a whole (Butzlaff & Hooley 1998; Raune, Kuipers & Bebbington 2004). On the other hand, family members' freedom to express moderate levels of disquiet about work tasks and processes is likely to lead to more well-formed decision making and more innovative processes (Kellermanns & Eddleston 2004).

> Proposition 3a: Family co-workers' non-engagement in emotion work in the family business setting will exhibit a positive relationship with affective conflict, which will be negatively related to business performance.

> Proposition 3b: Family co-workers' non-engagement in emotion work in the family business setting will exhibit a positive relationship with cognitive conflict, which will be positively related to business performance when the level of conflict is low to moderate, but will be negatively related to performance when the level is high.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The effective management of conflict is important to family firms. We also know that cognitive conflict is positively related to performance, while relationship or affective conflict is detrimental to performance (Amason 1996; Kellermanns & Eddleston 2004). By exploring the relationship between emotion work and conflict in the family business setting, we extend the theory of emotion work and emotion regulation to previously unstudied areas. Family businesses constitute a majority of businesses, and identifying factors that can influence performance related variables such as conflict can have important implications for business performance in any country. Further, by understanding the effect of different emotional regulation strategies on team dynamic processes such as conflict, we also develop an understanding of how emotion work and emotion regulation strategies may affect conflict management.

This study has implications for practitioners as well. By understanding the effect of family member emotions on team processes and business performance, practitioners can uncover opportunities for interventions. By appropriate management of emotion work strategies, family member interactions may be improved leading to better performance of family businesses.

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