Labour of Love: an emotional tale of family business

Dr. Lorna Collins
Principal Lecturer (Enterprise and Creativity), Bristol Business School, University of the West of England, Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Road, Bristol, BS16 1QY, UK
T: 0117 328 3182 E: lorna.collins@uwe.ac.uk

Peter Thornton
Director, Thornton and Associates. E: peter@thornton-asc.co.uk

Dr. Louise Grisoni
Principal Lecturer, Organisation Studies, Bristol Business School, University of the West of England, Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Road, Bristol, BS16 1QY, UK
T: 0117 3283422 E: louise.grisoni@uwe.ac.uk

Abstract

The role that emotional labour plays in family business is relatively under-investigated. This paper illuminates the nature of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979) in a well-known UK family business. It draws on detailed narrative accounts from a member of the family business. Existing literature about emotions in family businesses has tended to focus on the emotions in relationships, the expression of negative emotions, and emotions and change in succession, transferring power, and decision making. The narrative presented in this paper points to evidence that emotional labour exists in a family business and that it may manifest in ways not previously considered.

Introduction

Understanding emotions in the workplace has been of interest to management scholars for more than a decade (Daus and Ashkanasy, 2005; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Research has examined a range of diverse issues such as the role of affective experience in work motivation (Seo et al., 2004), and the challenge of handling emotional interaction among members of multicultural teams (Von Glinow et al., 2004). Recently, empirical and theoretical studies of emotional intelligence, such as the empirical relationship between leader emotional intelligence (EI) and transformational leadership (Barbuto and Burbach, 2006; Brown and Moshavi, 2005; Leban and Zulauf, 2004), the impact of EI on organizational change (Huy, 2002), and the link between EI and job satisfaction (Sy et al., 2006) have been explored. However, emotions and emotional labour have received little attention in the context of family business.

Emotion has been hailed as the missing ingredient in understanding organizational life (Fineman, 2004). Hochschild’s elegant appeal makes the point:

‘At our best, we are not simply adding a new dependent variable to the traditional roster. Nor are we plowing up the terminological ground, using a new word for what used to be referred to as ‘values’ or ‘attitudes’. We are theorising all that becomes apparent when we make the simple assumption that what we feel is fully as important to the outcome of social affairs as what we think or do.’ (Hochschild, 1990: 117)
Hochschild suggests that emotion is embedded in the fabric of social practices. As she and others have indicated, extracting emotion, de-situationizing it, is problematic and ‘what we do, think and feel can be regarded as interpenetrative, context-bound and fluid’ (Fineman, 2004: 720). Emotion, in these terms, is a full array of voices – of the self, the brain, the body, upbringing and culture (Burkitt, 1997; Sturdy, 2003). For instance, our subjective feelings and their outward expression may sometimes correlate, but frequently they do not. We can struggle with the limitations of language to describe how we feel, whereas others – individuals, organizations, institutions – attempt to shape what we should feel and express (Mangham, 1998; Sarbin, 1986). Finally, some feelings, especially painful ones, are placed protectively out of awareness (Gabriel, 1999; Kets de Vries, 1991).

Emotional labour is achieved through two processes that Hochschild (1979) calls surface and deep acting, both of which involve a degree of deception between what the individual really feels and what they are supposed to feel. In ‘surface acting’ an individual pretends to feel what they are expected to feel simply by suppressing one emotion like anger, for example, and displaying another, like sympathy, in its place. In ‘deep acting’, an individual ‘works’ on their feelings in order to induce expected emotions so that rather than needing to suppress anger and display sympathy their emotion work results in them really feeling sympathy. Emotion work, such as surface and deep acting, can be done by the ‘self upon the self’, by the ‘self upon others’ or ‘by others upon oneself’ (Hochschild, 1979: 561–2). Consequently, Hochschild examines the relationship between emotional experience, feeling rules and ideology and through her notion of feeling rules social patterns of everyday acts of emotion management can be identified and understood in relation to social concerns and identity (Williams, 1998).

Responding to a recent call from researchers to investigate ‘family’ level phenomena this study has set out to examine how emotional labour might be manifest in a family-owned business taking the ‘family’ as the unit of study. The concept of emotional labour has seldom been considered in the family business context. Emotions in family business have generally been considered from a somewhat negative perspective. The starting point for the researchers in this study was to consider how it is that emotional labour might manifest in a family firm and in this case the firm is Thorntons Plc, a chocolate manufacturer and retailer founded in 1921. Our overarching proposition is that emotional labour may have a positive influence on family firms to the extent that it may partially account for the superior performance of family businesses. We felt we needed to begin the study by taking a purposefully individualistic perspective on the emotional labour construct within Thorntons. We approached Peter Thornton, former CEO of Thorntons and he agreed to participate in the study. It was a timely approach as he had just published his biography, ‘Thorntons: My Life in the Family Business.’ The first stage of the study was to deeply investigate Peter’s perspective. This paper describes our underpinning conceptual framework of emotional labour and the narrative inquiry approach we used to investigate the concept. The evidence uncovered so far is illuminating and has lead us to extend and develop the concept of emotional labour in a new way.

**Emotional Labour**

Hochschild (1979, 1983, 1998; Hochschild and Machung, 1990) draws from several different models of emotion, including Darwin and Freud’s more organismic models of emotion and C. Wright Mills, Gerth and Dewey and Goffman’s social interactionist approaches, in formulating her ‘new social theory of emotion’ (1983: 218). She begins by considering how the biological, psychological and social nature of emotion are linked. She writes:
Emotion ... is our experience of the body ready for imaginary action. Since the body readies itself for action in physiological ways, emotion involves biological processes. Thus when we manage an emotion we are partly managing a bodily preparation for a consciously or unconsciously anticipated deed. This is why emotion work is work ... Cognition is involved in the process by which emotions 'signal' messages to the individual ... But signaling is complex ... it involves a reality newly grasped on the template of prior expectation ... The idea of prior expectations implies the existence of a prior self ... Most of us maintain a prior expectation of a continuous self, but the character of self we expect to maintain is subject to profoundly social influence ... the way emotion signals messages to us is also influenced by social factors.’ (1983: 220–2, emphasis in original)

Accordingly to Fineman (2004: 721), Hochschild:

‘Acknowledges the centrality of the physiological experience and process of emotion and includes it in her notion of what emotion management is. Further, she identifies that physiological emotion elicitation occurs in response to conscious and unconscious anticipation. This anticipation has to be based on previous and remembered experience which is central to the idea and development of the ‘self’, a process which is inherently social. Hochschild links, therefore, how emotion signals messages to us through anticipated remembered conscious and unconscious processes built on the template of prior expectations formulated by social factors.’

As Fineman (2004) suggests, Hochschild’s approach considers that how feeling is managed can both affect and create emotion as well. Emotion management is influenced by what kind of emotion is experienced and how the norms and values concerning feeling, which she calls feeling rules, affect interpretations of that experience. Williams writes:

‘Through the concept of ‘emotion management’, Hochschild is able to inspect the relationship between emotional experience, feeling rules and ideology. As she explains, feeling rules are the side of ideology which deals with emotions: standards which determine what is ‘rightly owed and owing in the currency of feeling.’ (1998: 242)

The aim of this paper is to explore life within a family business by drawing on Hochschild’s (1975, 1979, 1983) work on emotional labour. Hochschild’s concept of emotion management has been immensely significant not least because it theoretically frames the social nature of emotion but also because it empirically demonstrates how emotion management is learnt through processes of socialization (private emotion work), performed within different social roles (surface and deep acting), and understood within social rules and norms (feeling rules). Hochschild also shows how emotion is open to manipulation within systems and structures of power through the transmutation of emotion work into emotional labour.

Understanding emotions in the workplace has been of interest to management scholars for more than a decade (Daus and Ashkanasy, 2005; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Research has examined a range of diverse issues such as the role of affective experience in work motivation (Seo et al., 2004), and the challenge of handling emotional interaction among members of multicultural teams (Von Glinow et al., 2004). Recently, empirical and theoretical studies of emotional intelligence, such as the empirical relationship between leader emotional intelligence (EI) and transformational leadership (Barbuto and
Burbach, 2006; Brown and Moshavi, 2005; Leban and Zulauf, 2004), the impact of EI on organizational change (Huy, 2002), and the link between EI and job satisfaction (Sy et al., 2006) have been explored. Emotional labour has received little attention in the context of family business.

Emotional labour is achieved through two processes that Hochschild (1979) calls surface and deep acting, both of which involve a degree of deception between what the individual really feels and what they are supposed to feel. In surface acting an individual pretends to feel what they are expected to feel simply by suppressing one emotion like anger, for example, and displaying another, like sympathy, in its place. In deep acting, an individual ‘works’ on their feelings in order to induce expected emotions so that rather than needing to suppress anger and display sympathy their emotion work results in them really feeling sympathy. Emotion work, such as surface and deep acting, can be done by the ‘self upon the self’, by the ‘self upon others’ or ‘by others upon oneself’ (Hochschild, 1979: 561–2). Consequently, Hochschild examines the relationship between emotional experience, feeling rules and ideology and through her notion of feeling rules, social patterns of everyday acts of emotion management can be identified and understood in relation to social concerns and identity (Williams, 1998).

It could be argued that emotional labour occurs whenever there is a cognitive dissonance between unexpressed feelings and emotions and those which are outwardly portrayed. It is a concept most usually spoken about in relation to front line service industry where prescribed feelings are identified in order to project an appropriate customer oriented front or image showing the organisation in its best light. Increasingly this is scripted (e.g. MacDonald’s, Disney) and staff are trained to behave in particular ways to induce buying behaviour from customers. This behaviour causes emotional damage (Hochschild 1983) and in order to reduce this impact some employees make emotional labour ‘a game’ or they ‘shift zones’ or ‘resist’ (Fineman, 2003:37).

‘To say that emotions and feelings are ubiquitous misses the point. They have specific roles and functions in relation to organizations e.g. as commodities where emotional labour is a common feature of the employment contract, they lie at the core of decision making and ethical conduct, leadership and followership in relation to how emotions and feelings impact on influence. The emotions of leadership reveal much about the way organizations provide precarious, but much sought after, psychological meaning to individuals.’ (Fineman, 2003:195)

In the context of family business the concept of emotion must be approached with care. Emotion penetrates and defines many of the processes and outcomes of organizing. According to Fineman (2004: 702) these include ‘the subjective meanings of work, leadership, decision making, negotiation, motivation, ethical conduct, communication, gender and ethnic relationships.’ Emotion also draws attention to the psychological aspects of working, for instance, stress, bullying and emotional labour (see Fineman, 2003a). It is clear that emotion’s potential multifacetedness means that any one way to understanding ‘it’ will be just that – one approach. Any approach is therefore necessarily ‘partial’ and meaningful only in terms of the philosophy that informs it, the medium through which it is conveyed and the receiving audience (Fineman, 2004).

This paper explores emotional through a narrative investigation of the autobiographic work of Peter Thornton (2009), ‘Thorntons: My Life in the Family Business’ and his narrated experiences of his life in the family business provided to the authors over the period of 6 months. The story told is from one person’s perspective and as such is bound to be partial and incomplete. However this story exemplifies a full range of emotions and family dynamics and the effects on the successes and challenges to the business over a significant span of time. Fineman (2003) positions emotions as part of organisational
language by putting people at the centre of the organization revealing emotion as the ‘prime medium through which people act and interact’ (2003:1). Our sense is that these emotions are magnified in significant ways when they are considered in relation to family business enterprises. We would support Fineman’s argument that:

‘Organizational procedures and processes are shaped, negotiated, rejected, reformed, fought over or celebrated, because of feelings. Careers blossom or crash through feelings. Offices and departments grow, compete and change around the feelings that frame preferences, politics and ambitions. Who works hard, seems not to care, or rarely takes the initiative, is based on emotion. Organizations change or stagnate because of the emotions that energize or freeze people. All organizations and events shape feelings.’ (Fineman, 2003:1)

In most, if not all, family businesses it is impossible to separate the business imperatives and decisions about strategy from the interpersonal dynamic, with the additional complexity that family dynamics are a central component of the relational dynamic. In many ways this makes a discussion of emotions clearer to track and more readily available for discussion. In other organisations family dynamics may be acted out between organisational members in ways that are much more difficult to name and work with.

Methodology
We adopted a narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2007) approach to explore the concept of emotional labour. Narrative is a powerful tool that helps to communicate meaning (Bruner, 1990). Definitions of narrative inquiry abound but for the purposes of this study we adopted the definition offered by Connelly and Clandinin (2006):

‘Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individual and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study.’ (p.477)

Narrative inquiry has been used in studies of community (Huber and Whelan, 2001), nursing (Barton, 2006), anthropology (Bateson, 1994), psychology, sociology, medicine, literature and cultural studies (Riessman, 1993; Mishler, 1995). It is a field that is still developing. Narrative inquiry may be considered to be a non-neutral rhetorical account that is an account that is inherently biased, that aims to communicate meaning about an incident or situation. Bruner (1990) argued that the mind structures its sense of reality using mediation through "cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems." He specifically focuses on the idea of narrative as one of these cultural products. The value of this narrative approach is that it captures the emotion of the moment described, making the event active rather than passive. This means that account is laden with the latent meaning being communicated by the storyteller and that they are situated in ‘time,’ both past and present in the reliving of the tale and ‘memory.’
Narrative method assumes that knowledge of any social phenomena may be held in stories which can be relayed, stored and retrieved. This method is ideally suited to investigations which seek to understand the ‘why’ behind human action as it allows the investigator to put data into their own words. Hence in this exploratory study of the subjective and emotional life of one family business, it was deemed useful as a way of seeking to understand this phenomenon by looking at it through the meanings that Peter Thornton had assigned to it.

The approach to the study was such that we conducted 2 in-depth interviews with Peter Thornton. We then read his biographical book and followed with many informal conversations and telephone conversations. We read the book and noted places in the biography where he spoke about emotions and emotional labour. We wrote up the findings into categories which were determined inductively. We then asked Peter Thornton to read the categories and he confirmed that he agreed with them. We also discussed the categories with him. While reading his book both researchers endeavoured to hold Hochschild’s framework for emotional labour ‘lightly in our minds’ so that reading the text invoked references to the framework.

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured. They began with open conversational devices and in so doing enabled the conversation to be open and broad ranging and for Peter to tell his own story. Mishler (1986) suggested the use of unstructured interviews because they allow interviewees to construct their understanding of experiences in narrative terms. Participant responses, he suggests, than can then be treated as stories or narratives and methods of narrative analysis applied to the data collected. Mishler suggests that these narratives become a form of self-presentation where a particular personal-social identity is being claimed.

Our analysis of the data was approached in a very particular way. Narrative analysis differs from thematic analysis in two ways. First, narrative analysis focuses more directly on the dynamic ‘in process’ nature of interpretation, that is, how interpretations might change with time, with new experiences, and with new and varied social interactions. Integration of time and context in the construction of meaning is a distinctly narrative characteristic (Simms, 2003). Ricoeur (1991) calls this the ‘threefold’ present where the past and the future co-exist with the present in the mind of the narrator, through memory in the first case and expectation in the second. Second, narrative analysis begins from the standpoint of the storyteller. Here we analyze how people, events, norms and values, organizations and past histories and future possibilities, are made sense of and incorporated into the storyteller’s interpretations and subsequent actions. Narrative analysis contextualizes the sensemaking process by focusing on the person, in this case Peter Thornton, rather than a set of themes. As situations, people and events change over time, our vantage point remains the same and in this way unique insights into how Peter interprets the world were gained (Riley and Hawe, 2005).

Peter Thornton’s insights and the frank way he has described them make his story an important contribution to the body of knowledge relating to emotions and family business. Fineman (2003:17) speaks of story narratives containing feelings and emotions which give ‘substance, nuance, purpose and legitimacy to our feelings. The story is not a measure of objective truth of an event, but is a fine indicator of our feelings and how we wish to present then – and influence different people’. For social constructionists ‘stories do more than represent individual emotions, they actually constitute the emotional form of work life. They are alive in social interactions, moulded by the cultural language and conventions of organization’ (Fineman, 2003:17).
This paper describes the first stage of a narrative study of the Thorntons family business which seeks to investigate the nature of emotional labour within the firm and its possible impact on the success and performance of the business. The broader study involves other members of the Thorntons family and Thorntons employees, some of whom have retired and some who still work for the company. The first stage of the study was to conduct a detailed analysis of the biography that Peter Thornton has written about his experiences in Thorntons and to conduct a series of ‘depth’ interviews with Peter.

Within Peter Thornton’s biography, ‘Thorntons: My Life in the Family Business’ we can see how his emotional labour developed from his personality and the impact his parents had on him, especially his father and how that continued to be played out in the family relationships in the business as more of his generation became company Directors with voting powers. Alongside this are questions of identity and the emotions felt around decisions made in the company. A spiralling and tangled dynamic developed between family members that to this day feels in large part unresolved. Missing stories from family members and the workforce can only be surmised in our analysis at this point. However, the next stage of the investigation is already underway and some interviews with other family members and former Thorntons employees have already been conducted.

Peter Thornton wrote ‘Thorntons: My Life in the Family Business’ some time after the events (22 years), when key family members were no longer with the company, and he was in a happy stable relationship and when the telling of his story could no longer substantially ‘impact’ (his word) on the business itself. For Peter writing the story that couldn’t be told at the time was experienced as an in-depth reading of relationships in family businesses and warning to others in similar family run enterprises.

There are different types of stories: epic, tragedy, comedy and romantic. Thornton’s (2009) contains all these elements and at times in the reading of it we were reminded of the story of Robin Hood – a wealthy son who fights to defend the rights and improve the lot of working people in the face of his co-directors who appeared disorganised and unable to manage people effectively. The heroic role that Peter chose to play was enacted at considerable cost to him, his family life and eventually it leads to his dismissal. However he has written the book and told his story so we could consider that he has triumphed in the end.

To derive meaning from stories we need to know something about the personal background of the individual, the meaning of situations to the individual and the cultural and organizational context that shapes the way emotion is expressed and controlled (Fineman, 2003). From a social constructionist perspective:

‘emotions are not all our own although we like to think they are. They are borrowed from our national and organizational culture, and we return them in sometimes modified form. This is how the norms of appropriate feelings and emotions change over time. The culture of the organization helps create and reinforce the dominant emotions of control in the workplace, such as guilt, fear, shame, anxiety or ‘looking happy’. We have to learn what emotional ‘face’ is appropriate, and when.’ (Fineman, 2003:23)

At this point we do need to consider who it was that Peter Thornton wanted to influence with his story, how and why, and why then. Fineman (2003:9) introduces four different emotional perspectives; biological (genetic), early childhood (psychoanalytic), cognitive appraisal (behavioural), and social (social constructivist) as ways of offering insights into the emotional dynamics at play in an organisation. The two particular forms that influenced and directed our analysis of Peter Thornton’s work are the social
perspective and the psychoanalytic perspective. These have been chosen as we have found ready reference to both forms in his book.

A social perspective emphasises the importance of context and the cultural settings in which emotions are learned and expressed. Social learning can overwrite and transform biological impulses and early childhood experiences and interpretations. It emphasizes:

- The effects of different cultural experiences and everyday social expectations
- Emotion roles and scripts
- Language and interpretation. The meaning of emotional language: love, hate, embarrassment differs according to the context and culture where they are used, e.g. To be described as highly emotional can be a pejorative term when used in managerial and professional settings’ (Fineman, 2003:15)

Criticism of narrative inquiry is that ‘story as method’ allows for a relaxation of ‘accuracy’ in order to allow the greater meaning of the narrative to come through, that is that the importance of the meaning is treated as being greater than the importance of the detail. To combat this criticism we adopted a reflexive approach suggested by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) to the analysis of data of the biography and interview data. ‘Interpretation does not take place in a neutral, apolitical, ideology-free space, nor is an autonomous, value-free researcher responsible for it’ (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000:9). The ‘object of study’ can usefully be regarded as a social construction; after all people construct their social reality. The point here is that this applies to the researcher as well. Von Glaserfeld (1991) speaks of trivial construction, when the researcher reserves the social construction for the object of study, while implying that the researcher herself or himself remains outside such constructing, and is able – in some sense objectively – to portray the social constructions. This objection, that the researcher’s ‘constructing’ is ignored in most qualitative research, appears to apply to much mainstream qualitative research’ (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000: 290).

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) advocate a process of moving between empirical material and different levels of interpretation drawing on a number of theoretical perspectives. This was the form of analysis adopted for this research and as such a serious effort was made to draw on a wider ‘repertoire of interpretation’. This reflexive approach requires the researcher to develop familiarity with dominant theory and frameworks of emotional labour and family business but not be constrained by them. Having gathered empirical data and developed some insight in the initial interpretation stage the investigative team broadened the interpretative repertoire by engaging with other theoretical perspectives while at the same time stimulating reflection by moving between different levels of interpretation.

**Thornton’s – A potted history**

In order to further understand the narrative which Peter Thornton tells it is necessary to put the story in context. What follows is a potted history of Thorntons Chocolates, the last remaining family owned chocolate manufacturer in the UK. The Thornton family lived in Leeds, England, for many years and had various occupations from shopkeeper to innkeeper until eventually Joseph Thornton, born 1832, moved south to become a railway shopkeeper in Sheffield. Joseph married in 1868 and two years later Joseph William Thornton was born. Young Joseph grew up to become a commercial traveler with the Don Confectionery Company and opened his first Thornton’s Chocolate Kabin shop in October 1911 on the corner of Norfolk Street and Howard Street in Sheffield, England. At that time the family was living in rented property in the nearby Derbyshire village of Hathersage.
In 1921 Joseph’s two sons, Stanley and Norman, formed a limited company called J.W. Thornton Ltd with themselves as the two shareholders. Here were two good partners working together, establishing a secure prospect for the future growth of the family business. In 1926 due to expansion of the business, the brothers split their management responsibilities: Norman managed the shops and did all the administration; Stanley oversaw all the manufacturing. They still took important decisions together following what were described by Stanley as “heated but friendly arguments”. Norman had three sons, Tony (born in 1927), Peter (Author of the biography was born in 1933) and John (1943). Stanley had one son, Michael (born 1936). These young men were, from the start, inculcated into the business and were set up to shoulder the responsibility of keeping Thornton’s at the forefront of the confectionery business. Tony Thornton joined the business in 1948 and initially worked at the factory in Belper, after about 5 years he began to take over retail management from his father, Norman. Peter joined in 1953 working also at the Belper factory in the vacations from the London Borough Polytechnic where he was studying Chocolate and Sugar Confectionery. He finished the course in 1954 and then joined the business full time.

In January 1957 Peter became manager of the Chocolate Department in Sheffield and Michael Thornton joined the business in the same year. By this time his brother Tony had started to take over responsibility for retail management from Norman and became fully responsible by 1960 as Retail Director. In 1962 Peter became Production Director and his brother Michael assumed responsibility for Company Secretarial duties, Administration and Finance. By 1967 the business had nearly 90 shops making a profit of almost £250k on a turnover of over £1.7m (this would translate in today’s terms as a profit of almost £3m). The manufacturing capacity of the Belper factory became a limitation on further expansion but it was very fortunate that Thornton’s were able to purchase adjacent land and property to continue the expansion with new buildings. Peter’s older brother John Thornton joined the business in 1967. In 1968 Norman Thornton finally gave up his Chairmanship of the company and Tony and Stanley became Joint Managing Directors.

In 1978 a management re-organisation took place when Peter moved to retail management and John took over as Production Director, this was changed again after another year when John became Joint Managing Director in charge of Operations and Peter, Joint Managing Director responsible for Sales and Marketing. Tony Thornton retired in January 1984 and Peter became Chairman, Phase 2 of the construction of the new factory started in the middle of that year. By the end of 1984 the company had six shops now trading in the USA but it was still failing to achieve that elusive profit. On the 3rd November 1984 Norman Thornton died. On the 15th March 1985 the new factory at Alfreton was opened by HM the Queen.

In late December 1986 the decision was taken by the Board to seek a public listing for the business to take place probably in October 1987. Peter Thornton resigned from the company in July 1987 and the public listing took place the following year, 1988 when the profit reached £15,045 million (in current terms), a margin of 14.37%. The Thornton family continued to play an active role in the business, and it was only in 1996 that a non-Thornton CEO (Roger Paffard) was appointed. The 2009 results show turnover increasing to £214.8 million, but operating profit decreasing to £7.94 million.

**Questions of Identity**

In surface acting an individual pretends to feel what they are expected to feel simply by suppressing one emotion like anger, for example, and displaying another, like sympathy, in its place. In deep acting, an
individual ‘works’ on their feelings in order to induce expected emotions so that rather than needing to suppress anger and display sympathy their emotion work results in them really feeling sympathy. Emotion work, such as surface and deep acting, can be done by the ‘self upon the self’, by the ‘self upon others’ or ‘by others upon oneself’ (Hochschild, 1979: 561–2).

Conceptualising the notions of the ‘self upon the self’, by the ‘self upon others’ or ‘by others upon oneself’ within our study was important. Examples and illustrations which explain ‘self upon the self’ actions are considered to be those where Peter pretends to feel what he is expected to feel by suppressing an emotion (e.g. anger) or displaying another (e.g. sympathy). These are, of course, only his interpretation of what he did, however they begin to set the scene regarding how the impact of the family dynamics influenced Peter’s emotional behavior within the firm. Examining the acting of ‘self upon others’ we took to mean situations where Peter pretends to feel what he is expected to feel by suppressing an emotion or displaying emotion in respect to others. Here the examples show where he has interacted with the workforce and other employees.

Examples of the acting ‘by others upon oneself’ are where other actors pretend to feel what they are expected to feel by suppressing one emotion (like anger) and displaying another in its place (like sympathy) with respect to Peter. In deep acting, other actors work on their feelings in order to induce expected emotions so that rather than needing to suppress anger and display sympathy their emotion work results in them really feeling sympathy toward Peter.

Peter’s biography provides many illustrations and examples of surface and deep acting to illustrate the emotion work taking place. The biography provides illustrates the ‘self upon the self’, by the ‘self upon others’ or ‘by others upon oneself’ (Hochschild, 1979: 561–2). At this stage in our analysis we are only able to report on the expressions of ‘self upon the self.’ Further analysis is underway and will be available shortly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptualising emotional labour in Thorntons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surface Acting – Pretending emotions (not really feeling them)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>‘Self upon the self’</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>‘Self upon others’</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To begin we set the scene regarding the relationship between Peter and his family. From an early age decisions about education were made by Peter’s father with the company interest in mind, in terms of choice of subject for Higher Education; ‘it was entirely my father’s decision’ (p64) and this dominance continued well into adult life and including an example of a decision to make Peter change jobs:

‘There was no happy Christmas at home for me that year. My father had removed me from the first job I had ever really enjoyed. I had no enthusiasm for taking over the Quality Control and I no longer had Alice to comfort me. I felt I couldn’t bear to live in this house much longer.’(p100).

The involvement of his brothers and cousins in the business was also a given:

‘Between them Norman and Stanley Thornton fathered four sons who, right from the start were set up to shoulder the responsibility of keeping Thorntons’ at the forefront of the confectionary business. There was never any other option for the boys, no other career choice. Yet at the same time the two fathers had no intention whatsoever in relinquishing any control to their successors...firmly in the belief that no one else could ever be trusted with their business empire.’(p38)

At 81 years old his father was still involved in the family business and was still questioning and in some cases overturning decisions. It is therefore no surprise that Peter experiences his father’s death as a relief.

‘Self upon the self’

This story resembles a common heroic tale. Peter, the champion of the people, works tirelessly and without thanks from his family to develop the business. He is ‘loved’ by employees and ‘reviled’ by his family because of this. In the eyes of employees is a hero. In the eyes of his family he is a rogue. His story plays out across the history of his experience in the firm.

We begin this story by describing some of the many ‘self upon the self’ actions where Peter pretends to feel what he is expected to feel simply by suppressing one emotion like anger and displaying another, like sympathy, in its place. From the beginning it is clear how early and unchallengeable expectations of involvement in the business combined with reluctance to hand over control had a very particular impact on Peter;

‘I was well aware that I was unusually shy and self-conscious. I was starting to work in a commercial business without any real confidence in my own abilities.’(p73)
So although Peter recognises his shyness he realises that he cannot embrace it because he would not have survived in the commercial business world if he had.

Peters efforts to suppress his lack of confidence at work do not change his fundamental feelings and he was not able to trust his judgement in his home life, for example his thinking on getting married seems to be more of an escape than a positive commitment to his wife:

‘A little voice inside pointed out that she would make a very good wife and, in going through with the marriage, I would be able to escape from my father’s bombastic ways and establish an independent home for myself, but somehow it didn’t feel right. I knew I had been utterly foolish.’(P105)

At work his confidence grew and increasingly he was ‘pretending’ a confident exterior. Whilst standing up to his father seemed out of the question as his confidence grew he was able to narrate examples of standing up to others and seeing the positive benefits of such actions. They all seemed to take considerable building up to. An example is given in the book of his encounter with Leslie who had not been treating him with respect. Peter writes; ‘I’ll treat you with respect when you start to treat me with respect” (p90). This seemed to change his attitude and he suddenly began to see me in a new light. After that things became much easier between us.’(p90) The situations where individuals stood up to managers are many and varied. It is clear that through standing up to others Peter’s confidence was able to grow until he was able to confront his father directly on the issue of ‘lack of respect.’

About this situation there is a trace of self recrimination: ‘Oh why did I always try and make such a good job of everything?’(p267) and disappointment in the face of failure:

‘This was hard for me as I’d routinely been a cheerful and optimistic person, always achieving some measure of success in whatever I did professionally. I wasn’t used to the idea of commercial failure and I was unsure of how to cope with it.’(p300)

It seems Peter had adopted his role of ‘champion’ early on and it seems fuelled by the necessity to ‘not fail.’ There are many examples of how Peter’s emotions develop over the course of his experience at Thorntons. Direct emotions are expressed at various points in the story including shame and fear (especially of his father). Speaking of his father’s angry outbursts: ‘I was really frightened by this display of intemperate rage, not for the first time and it would certainly not be the last.’(p40) He further explains how he viewed his father;

‘I grew up frightened of this tyrannical man. He seemed remote and distant. He frequently shouted at me, criticising my apparent ineptitude, such as not knowing my times tables. His values were typically late Victorian, embodying that particularly British attitude of ‘stiff upper -lip’.’(p46)

Peter demonstrates considerable personal insight in terms of his sibling relationships and the impact of his father:

‘I was beginning to understand a little about human behaviour and it suddenly dawned upon me that my sense of rejection and depression probably lay in the fact that my brother tended to dominate me, and that I allowed him to dominate me in the same way my father had. This could not go on, I suddenly said to myself. My life will be a misery unless I do something about it – soon.’(p139)
This extended to rivalry with younger, in his view, favoured brother John:

‘In fairness I suppose that John felt he would have to fight to make his mark in the family business as there were already three very well established family members in senior positions...As Production Manager I have to admit that, were John not my brother, he would not have lasted more than two weeks, behaving as he did.’(p161)

This rivalry continues through to the end of the book and possibly beyond and feels the most unresolved and problematic for Peter. The link between business decisions and family dynamics is captured:

‘All this seemed at once typical but also unnecessary, solely a manifestation of the tortuous dynamics that existed in our family. Where things should have been straightforward business matters, for us it was always personal and complicated.’ (p277).

This evidences that Peter’s own reflection on the situation gives strength to the notion that the family made hard work of the emotional business of managing the firm. Peter carried a sense of persecution as this insight demonstrates:

‘Now I was beginning to understand why I had been under attack for my performance. It was to punish me for not supporting a family member.’(p208)

This shows that Peter felt punished for taking the stance that he did with respect to employees.

Peter also explains how he felt when working with John and Tony; ‘John was very much his father’s son. He shared that same aggressive introspection, was always dogmatic in his thinking, and we found ourselves at constant loggerheads while I was Production Director. Tony too did not make things easier for me.’ (p169) This clearly shows that there was significant friction between the brothers and that Peter had to suppress his true character, namely the outgoing, go-getting and creative person full of ideas when interacting with John and Tony. He was clearly not like them in character.

Peter goes on to describe how competition and irreconcilable personalities manifest within the working environment. He writes, ‘now there were all these competing individuals, each with their own agendas and philosophies.’ (p176) A thread throughout the biographical account is the strong feeling of competition between Peter and his brothers, and Peter’s continuous efforts to determine the nature of this competition and the root of it. There are many instances of the inequality of treatment of the brothers, such as ‘(we were) treated differently with different voting shares.’ (p177)

To conclude this section it is clear that Peter Thornton’s identity was dramatically intertwined with the family business. ‘Thorntons’ was me and I was Thorntons’ he writes (p15). This strong statement shows that everything that Peter Thornton was, was co-aligned with the business. The overwhelming identification with the company was never felt more strongly than when Peter is removed as Chairman:

‘I had no overwhelming hobby to turn to. I had no yearning to go travelling round the world on a lengthy sabbatical. I simply wanted to work, to continue the activity that had given me so much personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement, with the opportunity to learn and develop, to work with good people and to help them to achieve their own goals.’ (p15)

It is difficult to imagine how Peter must feel these days when he reads accounts of the history of Thorntons and fails to see his name mentioned. To be a member of the family and a person who has given their ‘all’ in the pursuit of its success, we can surmise that there is ‘more to this story.’ We will seek to investigate this in our ongoing study.
The ‘family’ in family business

Family businesses (FBs) are important to the economy of all countries. In the UK family businesses comprise up to 65% or 3 million of the total 4.6 million private sector enterprises in the UK economy (IFB, 2008). The literature shows that FBs are distinctively different from non-FBs with different strategic approaches, management styles, decision making processes and differing investment timeframes (Tagiuri and Davis, 1996; Poza et al., 1997; Baskin, 2001). There is no consensus on the definition of FB. Some authors believe that FBs should self type themselves (Westhead, 1997; Gallo et al., 2000). Others seek to define FB in terms of governance (Chua et al., 1999:25):

‘...a business governed and/or managed with the intention to shape and pursue the vision of the business held by a dominant coalition controlled by members of the same family or a small number of families in a manner that is potentially sustainable across generations of the family or families’.

This paper has sought to address calls by academics to consider intractable family-level issues which plague family businesses and to consider the ‘family’ as the unit of study. Recognising the issues that family businesses face, understanding how to develop strategies to address them and creating family stories that explain the emotional dimension of these issues to family members is of prime importance to their business success (de Vries et al., 2007). According to de Vries et al., (2007: xix) ‘the most intractable family business issues are not the business problems the organisation faces, but the emotional issues that compound them.’ However there is a dearth of literature that seeks to understand how emotional management might interplay with these other important family business issues.

Family business research has focused primarily on the study of negative expressions and manifestations of emotions in the family business. Emotions such as anger, hatred, mistrust, conflict have been explored within three main themes:

1. Relationships
2. Expression of emotions
3. Emotions and Change: Succession, transferring power, decision making

The expression of emotions in terms of relationships has been examined in the following circumstances:

- Board of Directors (Lane, Astrachan, Keyt and McMillan, 2006);
- Father/son (Davis and Tagiuri, 1989);
- Father/daughter emotional triangles (Grote, 2003);
- Emotional kinship group, families divided (Ainsworth, Wolfram and Cox, 2003; Gabriel, 2003);
- Mentoring (Boyd, Upton and Wircenski, 1999);
- FB consultants (Upton, Vinton, Seaman and Moore, 1993; Vago, 1995; Alderfer, 1988);
- Women: invisible women, husbands and wives, co-entrepreneurial couples, prenuptial agreements (Danes and Olson, 2003; Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990; Galiano and Vinturella, 1995);
- Siblings (Friedman, 1991; Keyt and Cole, 2001)
- Functional Conflict (Cosier and Harvey, 1998)
- Sustaining Trust (Sundaramurthy, 2008)
- Employee loyalty (McCollom, 1988)
The expression of emotions within the family business has also been explored by Nicholson (2008) and in the context of family wars (Gordon and Nicholson 2008; Hubler, 2009). Finally academics have considered the impact of emotions and change in the context of succession, transferring power, decision making (Chirico and Salvato, 2008; Dyer, 1994); in terms of loss and continuity of the family business (Herz and Brown, 1993); and in terms of the death of the family business (Goldberg, 1997). Most research in this area has been on the negative expression of emotions within the family business. This paper has sought to broaden our understanding of emotions in the family business by considering them through the lens of emotional labour.

Discussion

Through the interrogation of Peter’s biography we discover the complex world he experienced within Thorntons. Conceptualising the notions of the ‘self upon the self’, by the ‘self upon others’ or ‘by others upon oneself’ within our study is important. In this paper we have reported in detail about the ‘self upon the self’ evidence. It is clear that Peter was forced into emotional labour within the firm. He was required to exercise emotional restraint in order to act to protect the workforce from the turmoil and strife that existed within the ‘brotherhood.’ He characterizes the ‘brotherhood’ in terms of negative and unfriendly relations which seem to have been the epitome of a ‘dysfunctional family.’ The ‘brotherhood’ did not seem to ‘care’ for each other in the way that the workforce was clearly ‘cared for’ by the ‘brotherhood.’ The ‘brotherhood’ was not supportive or understanding of each other’s weaknesses and faults in the way they were for their workforce. They were not forgiving of Peter’s mistakes and errors in the same way they were forgiving of worker errors. Neither were they emotionally available for Peter when he had personal problems and troubles. Throughout the story we see that the workforce received superior treatment from the Thornton brothers and that this same treatment was not extended to Peter.

The root of the role that Peter adopted, namely the ‘champion of the workforce’ could be perceived to have been adopted in an attempt by Peter to get his brothers to treat him like one of the workforce. Adopting this role caused Peter to act in a way that was not true to his character. Peter did a convincing and thorough job of conveying an ‘idealised’ view of a harmonious family leading its workforce in a paternalistic and kindly manner. This ideal view is highlighted throughout the biography. He tried desperately to make himself over in the image of his brothers. The cost to Peter of playing this role has been considerable and even now he may not be fully recognised.

We have yet to explore other examples of surface and deep acting between ‘self upon others’ and ‘by others upon oneself.’ While our impression from reading the narrative is that there are many examples of acting which is by the ‘self upon others’ or ‘by others upon oneself’ in the book we feel that there may be as yet an unexplored fourth manifestation of emotional labour that exists within the firm and that is ‘others acting on each other.’ What we mean by this notion at the surface level is where others pretend emotions but don’t really feel them with respect to others in the workforce. At the deep acting level others in the workforce really work on their emotions so that in respect to other members of the workforce they really feel them. This would express itself in situations where the ‘love’ of the Thorntons workforce may have influenced other members of the workforce more strongly than the management was able to influence. This notion will be explored in the continuing study.
Conclusions

There seems to be sufficient evidence in Peter Thornton’s biography to conclude that emotional labour existed within Thorntons. It has been seen that employees within the firm felt very positive emotions about the ‘family’ (Thornton management) and that there are relatively few examples of conflict between workers and managers. Our analysis has focused on the interpretation of the historical account of Peter’s time at Thorntons. We accept that this account is inherently bias as it is one persons narrative and so cannot be conclusive, however it’s clear that the significant conflict which Peter reports that he experienced with his family was not replicated in relationships between him and workers, and between workers and the ‘family,’ between workers and ‘the brotherhood’, and in deed between workers and each other. Overall, the ‘family,’ ‘the brotherhood’ and workers seemed to have experienced a harmonious relationship.

The workforce was a positive influence in Peter’s family business experience. It is clear that the workforce was ‘happy’ and they discussed the experience of working at Thorntons as ‘one big happy family.’ Peter’s experience was that the ‘family’ he was part of was ‘not happy’. It may yet be too early to conclude that emotional labour can be management oriented, and therefore not exclusively a phenomenon that only manifests in the workforce, but early indications are that this might be possible.

References


Institute for Family Business [http://www.ifb.org.uk/media/7404/uk_fb_sector_report.pdf](http://www.ifb.org.uk/media/7404/uk_fb_sector_report.pdf) date accessed 1 April 2010


