

ANNA ZANARDI CAPPON



Family and Business Clash
as Evolutionary Agents



In collaboration with
Arshad Moscogiuri

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MARRIED TO THEIR WORK

FAMILY AND BUSINESS CLASH
AS EVOLUTIONARY AGENTS

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Book Publishing Manager: Marco Aleotti
Paper, Printing and Binding Manager: Michele Ribatti
Cover Image: Shutterstock

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ISBN: 978-88-6895-800-8
eISBN: 978-88-6895-801-5

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Via G. Spadolini, 7
20141 Milano (MI)
Tel. +39 02 881841
www.edizionilswr.it

Printed in Italy by "Rotomail Italia" S.p.A., Vignate (MI)
March 2020

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FOREWORD

*M*arried to Their Work is a fascinating book about intervention in business families.

Most books about family business discuss and describe the tensions between family, business and ownership. Little about that at least formally, it is mostly assumed “between the lines” so to speak. Of course, the family business is present in Anna Zanardi’s book, but it is more background, context. Centre stage is a systemic model, the Reconciliation Model, and the healing and reconstruction process that leads to the reconciliation.

The content then is a journey that leads the reader to discover the model, and also the business family, its dark sides and its good sides. A lot of attention is paid to the professional leading the intervention and to the conditions that need to be met for the professional and the family to induce and achieve reconciliation.

In this journey in family business, one visits many places. One starts with two not so common observations: the monogamous family is fuelled by love, but is also a social construct whose goal is to protect the children. In return, destructive behaviour by children is often motivated by a desire for revenge on parents that have failed them.

Then Anna Zanardi sheds light on the darker sides of business families, notably on the multiple forms of oppression that inhabit these families. From there the journey resolutely embraces reconstruction and reconciliation, a bit like visiting the Stations of the Cross: the multiple forms of truth that exist in these complex settings, and especially the essential requirement for the courage needed to rethink oneself. Then one can envisage and finally embrace reconciliation and build a future very different from the barren place one started from.

The book is fascinating in multiple ways. Not that much is said explicitly, many of the hard facts are treated relatively softly and quickly, but the drama is just around the corner. There is ambiguity as to whom the book is directed: apparently, the counsellor who intervenes. But it does not take much effort to imagine that Anna Zanardi also addresses all the actors in the business family play: family members, “value adding” partners and also non-family managers and members of the “extended family.” As a loving mother, she does not wish to be too explicit on the difficulties and pains that will be met on the road travelled, committed as she is to convince us that reconciliation is the end station which we can all reach and from which we can start again, healthy, fulfilled and again energized.

Finally, the title is, for me, most revealing and subtle. It describes the professional trying to save the family like a doctor saves a patient. It also describes the founder who devotes too much of his life to the business he or she creates, at the detriment of his or her children, or the person marrying into the family not realising that she or he also married a business.

All will benefit from reading this book. It is light, refreshing, insightful and deep. And quite different from what exists.

Ludo Van der Heyden
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Flendruz, November 9, 2019

INTRODUCTION

*For every complex problem,
there is a simple solution.
That is wrong.*
George Bernard Shaw

A family that is healthy and solid in its affections and principles represents an invaluable resource for all of its members. This also applies to companies in that, when they are healthy, they provide support for every one of their members. Realistically, however, there are not that many healthy families out there; they are a model to aspire to rather than a statistic.

Although it is common to compare businesses and families, the similarities are actually rather limited and may generate a confusing vision. In reality, family relationships are more complex; they follow different rules and have different degrees of involvement characterised by much longer histories. This is why it is often more difficult to find healthy families than healthy business organisations.

This issue is exacerbated when a family is also involved in a business.

The complexities of family relationships grow up around the difficulties of managing the family business in a series of

links that, similar to a perfect spider web, ensure that no one thread may vibrate without the whole structure reverberating.

If the family, and thus the business, are healthy, each thread cooperates with equal importance in working for the common reward and the reward will be plentiful because the strength of the business adds to the strength of the family. On the other hand, it is enough for one thread to be broken, missing, too weak or out of place for there to be failure. The objective will find a way out and slip away, no matter how strong the centre of the web may feel.

Managing and being part of a family business is therefore an enterprise in the truest meaning of the word. Over many years of consulting for business groups and entrepreneurs, I have realised that family capital is often a burden, a weight that changes affective and emotional balances and destroys numerous lives. Of course, there is a common belief that people with wealth and abundant resources are lucky enough to have their lives made easier. Every privilege, however, carries with it the risk of creating distance between that person and others who lack such resources or have fewer of them, thereby giving rise to deleterious conflicts.

This is often the case. Or rather, it is always the case if instead of making the best of the conditions under which we are born we let ourselves be subjugated by them, becoming prisoners of ancient dynamics that ought to be buried rather than turning our gaze to the future. If instead of opening up a space of acceptance, inclusion and love, we exclude and hurt those around us.

The ideal of family is conditioned by a number of social, cultural and economic influences.

Increasingly, however, numerous studies and sources have shown that family is comparable to a cage. It might be

gold-plated or unadorned, but it remains a cage. That is, it is a container in which we are forged and which tends to limit our freedom of thought. The weight of this cage and of this forge affects the choices we make. Our education and the culture in which we grow up exert such strong conditioning and hypnosis that, for some people, it is practically impossible to break free of this condition. Furthermore, this cage is the reason that so many sons and daughters, in order to take revenge on fathers they consider to have failed as parents, dedicate their lives to systematically destroying family property. This is why fathers or mothers disinherit their children to take revenge on previous spouses and there are so many endless wars among heirs, among relatives who no longer speak to each other and attack each other without reason for misdeeds that may never even have taken place.

Of course, it can be argued that there are also welcoming families in which children survive thanks to their parents' or grandparents' unconditional love. It can be argued that love is always a positive value even if it sometimes manifests in a unilateral way. It can be argued that...

And yet families also function like the cage described above and this fact is eloquently evidenced by the history, sometimes decidedly dramatic and tragic, of successful companies passed down from one generation to the next only to end in ruin.

The intention here is not to question the intrinsic value of the family. Rather, I seek only to point out that we all too often think of family and marriage, one of the pillars that still stands to support our western society, as institutions based essentially on love.

From an anthropological point of view, the family and marriage are considered a device for social survival that has been structured over time to ensure that its members

are mutually protected from external threats and cooperate with each other in pursuing shared goals.

The myth of marriage as a monogamous couple procreating and forming their own family, the idea enshrined in ancient codes and sacred books, was actually the product of essentially utilitarian motivations. It appeared in Genesis with Adam and Eve as well as in the Dharma-Shastra, one of the oldest Hindu codes of law regarding the foundation, purpose and regulation of the family.

It was conceived in the fourth century B.C. when India was plagued by sexually transmitted disease and promiscuity therefore threatened the population and chances for healthy reproduction. The authorities took measures, drawing up strict rules to guarantee health and maintain public order. This is how the obligation of fidelity was born: as a measure for population health. The idea of the family as an instrument for ensuring the social defence of its descendants is a logical corollary. By strictly observing the Vishnu Code, people were able to guarantee their reproduction and survival.

In the more recent era from which we have not yet completely freed ourselves, the institution of the bourgeois family has been created. The fruit of the nineteenth-century Victorian culture, it was a model for affirming social and class prestige, the cornerstone of which lay in the defence of capital and the accumulation of wealth. It is not surprising that power roles and hypocrisy thrived in these families instead of intimacy and emotional spontaneity.

It is therefore inaccurate, to say the least, to imagine that marriage and family are based on love; in reality, the main reasons are quite different. People do not marry only for love, nor do they “start a family” for love alone. Fortunately, love takes on many other shapes. It is precisely in the narrow

dictates of family norms that love runs the risk of disappearing, of being lost and transformed into intolerance and hatred. This is why it is important to clarify the misunderstanding that family and marriage are synonymous with love and devotion. If we are not able to move beyond this abstract idealism, not only will separation and divorce continue to increase exponentially, but we will go on nurturing myths that have nothing to do with the reality of the family.

It is only by stepping outside of this illusion that we can examine family businesses: a specific socio-economic structure that sets off from the private sphere to extend into the wider arena of the world of work and the economy.

Almost all family businesses are created thanks to the initiative, personality and energy of the head of the family, someone who has also had the courage to nurture his or her vision and developed qualities of entrepreneurial leadership: the centre of the canvas.

From their very beginning and even more so with the passage of time and generational turnover, these companies must come to grips with the highly dense web of interrelationships and personal and emotional dynamics that flow within them. The patchwork of interpersonal irrationality and complexity that develops in a family business cannot be read simplistically in terms of love or lack of love, if the aim is to achieve a working model that promotes reconciliation and a sensible resolution to differences, wounds and conflicts.

The family has multiple levels, social, affective and also economic. In a marriage deserving of the name just as in a family business, the economic aspect cannot be ignored, underestimated or even demonised because it is this level that supports the conditions for most effectively developing peaceful, balanced coexistence. Maintaining harmonious re-

relationships is an act of generosity towards the other, and selfishness prevents such generosity. Such sick and omnivorous selfishness leads to a form of inability to engage in social life; this is what happens in dysfunctional families and, often, in family businesses, where it causes successful projects to fail.

The content of these pages is specifically focussed on family businesses but, at the same time, it can also be applied to any type of organisation. In fact, no matter the form of the association, we unconsciously re-propose the models we have experienced in our family nucleus. Indeed, people reproduce dynamics belonging to their families of origin in classical, that is, non-family companies as well, and the same is true of other systems of individuals.

Unlike all other types of enterprise or company, however, family businesses are characterised by a high degree of interdependence among the people acting in the family community. A whole lifetime of reciprocal knowledge and work flows among them and relations with the other family members converge there; individual interests motivate them and their shared history weighs on them.

In a healthy family business, energy, effort, imagination and commitment to a job done well are put at the service of the members' well-being, which also means the well-being of their relatives and the larger world. It is thus clear that relationships within the family are decisive in creating, promoting or destroying the company. They are the foundations of both its success and its failure.

Inevitably, some familial relationships crack, falter and fail; when relatives also share a job and are financially interdependent on each other, any personal issues, be they latent or overt, tend to grow and multiply, creating tension and resentment.

This critical point should not be taken too lightly. If nothing is done to solve the problem, if the situation is not tackled outright in search of a solution, if more or less hidden tensions are allowed to persist and worsen over time, the family business may suffer a severe blow.

This book is therefore addressed to those who are in a position to do something, to suggest solutions and address the critical issues together with the families that own enterprises. It has been written for all those professionals, such as professional and business consultants, accountants and lawyers, who take on the responsibility of managing the difficult business and interpersonal situations of the family units with whom they work. It is also for psychologists specialised in marriage and family issues whose work is focussed on solving relationship problems and who seek to expand their training to address the basic issues that family members may face in their business environment.

Besides professionals entrusted with the task of solving disputes or personal tensions and who have specific training in this area, this book is also aimed at managers of family businesses who, although not belonging to the familial circle, end up involved in family conflicts that have a detrimental operational impact on the company. By making good use of the information contained herein, they may be able to persuade family members to turn to specialists in conflict resolution, thus bringing about a breakthrough in the workplace as well. In so doing they might contribute, perhaps even significantly, to the success of the family business and the well-being of its members.

Whatever your position, working with families and their businesses is always extremely complex. It entails helping individual members to find their own level of serenity and

fairness even outside of the most predictable, commonplace or conflicting inter-family relationships.

The same is true of the multiple ramifications and complications that intersect in the workplace, board of directors and executive committees of any company. Hiding underneath everyday events and operations are the various conflicts festering among family members: deep-rooted or long-standing rivalry, resentment, frustration and disappointment. Many of these longstanding feelings originate from childhood while others stem from marriages on the breaking point or from parents' unrealistic and authoritarian expectations, from figures who do not agree about styles and values, business roles and their associated responsibilities.

It is clear that it takes patience, commitment and perseverance to successfully manage a family business. These qualities are also indispensable when consulting for these companies. The solution to most of the problems in a family business involves healing the wounds and difficult relationships within the family community. If family members work conscientiously and intentionally to resolve these conflicts, they are also able to develop solutions to the problems plaguing the company. This process can be enabled or accelerated by hiring an experienced consultant to guide the reconciliation process. Professionals offer an external, unbiased perspective that helps in identifying the actual or perceived origins of the problems. It helps to create the conditions for members to gain enough confidence in the family to be able to communicate openly and honestly with each other, even in the face of deep-seated resentment. It helps in identifying the right solutions, whether they are about decisions to be made, changes in attitudes and behaviour, or the need to propose organisational and financial solutions.

I have written this book because I admire family businesses and care about their existence. Working directly with companies and indirectly training other professionals for this job, I know that many companies already benefit greatly from this model of integrated business consulting.

My goal is to provide food for thought and reconciliation tools to professionals or family members themselves involved in conflicting dynamics, most often due to an ambivalent and blurry vision of what the family business should represent.

It is not always possible to live together on the basis of respecting roles and protecting common interests. And even when it is, the best thing is to decide while we are still alive what we would like to happen once we pass away, and how the inheritance of assets by our successors should be handled so that these assets do not become divisive, the instruments of unnecessary and hurtful demands among the people we love. Because yes, there is no doubt that love is also a responsibility, just like the capital that belongs to us. I believe that being able to develop solutions that harmoniously integrate these two responsibilities, love and capital, and take on a meaning of their own, even beyond the restricted personalism that they often represent is a good way of living in peace and giving the gift of peace to those who come after us.

Anna Zanardi Cappon
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