AN EXPLORATION OF TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION AT A SMALL, MULTIFAMILY BUSINESS: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FAMILY AND NON-FAMILY MEMBERS

A Master’s Project
Presented to the Faculty in Communication and Leadership Studies
School of Professional Studies
Gonzaga University

Under the Direction of Nobuya Inagaki
Under the Mentorship of Dr. Heather Crandall

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership Studies

By Emily C. Gagel
May 2012
We the undersigned, certify that we read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree Master of Arts.

Thesis or Project Director

Faculty Mentor

Faculty Reader

Gonzaga University

MA Program in Communication and Leadership Studies
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

Abstract

This research investigates the training and socialization process at a small, family business where multiple families have worked over two generations. The research uses interviews with the workforce to determine how new employees are trained in this environment their socialization process. These interviews specifically addressed how preexisting relationships affect communication among the workforce. Additionally, this research explores the family business characteristics in the organization and how these characteristics influence how messages are presented and received. The exploration of socialization at this organization led to the realization that socialization occurs throughout an employee’s career. In organizations where long tenure is the norm, employees establish groups which reflect their developmental stage in the company. The social realities created by communication among the workforce, explained by the coordinated management of meaning (CMM), create and reinforce these developmental groups.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: Introduction 6  
  Goal of Study 6  
  Importance of Study 6  
  Definition of Terms Used 7  
  Organization of Remaining Chapters 8  
  Statement of Research Questions 8  

Chapter II: Review of the Literature 9  
  Theoretical Basis 9  
  Ethical Assumptions 12  
  Literature Review 13  
    Characteristics of Family Businesses 14  
    Managing Change in Family Businesses 15  
    Training in Family Businesses 18  
    Socialization and Commitment in Family Businesses 19  

Chapter III: Scope and Methodology 22  
  Scope 22  
  Methodology 22  
  Procedure 24  
    Data Collection 24  
    Sampling 24  
  Data Analysis 25  
  Validity and Reliability 25  

Chapter IV: The Study 27  
  Introduction 27
## TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Business Characteristics</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Process</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter V: Conclusion</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Study</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I: Introduction

Goal of this Study

This study is designed to gain insight into the training and socialization process at an organization where multiple families are employed. Specifically, this research hopes to determine how family relationships influence this process. Additionally, this research aims to address the saturation of family business culture characteristics present at a multifamily organization and how these influence communication norms among the workforce.

Importance of Study

Family businesses are a significant sector in the U.S. economy, employing more than 60% of the workforce and generating over 60% of the Gross Domestic Product (Avendano-Alcaraz, Gomez, Kelly & Trevinyo-Rodriguez, 2009). The culture at these organizations and how that culture influences human resource management are important to consider for the success of these organizations. The hiring of a new employee is a common event that affects virtually anyone who works in an organization. Understanding this event from multiple perspectives provides important practical insights (Gallagher & Sias, 2009). Family organizations need to regard the perspectives of non-family members as strongly as family members to ensure profitability and growth. Additionally, in an economic environment where people transition through multiple careers, organizations that harvest commitment, like family firms, are worth investigation. Family organizations display dedication from employees that non-family firms often desire for stability.

Each organization has a specific culture; through communicative acts, the workforce creates and perpetuates this unique culture. New employees are expected to observe the existing
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

culture and assimilate in order to be successful. Assimilation of new employees guarantees the
stability of the organization and the perpetration of its culture. In an organization with many
informal ties, such as friendships, family relationships and acquaintances, new employees that
have a preexisting relationship more easily acclimate to their new environment. It is vital for the
growth of small family firms to make the training and socialization process just as pleasant for
new employees that do not have previous relationships in the organization. By making the
socialization process welcoming for these employees, the company will develop a content, well-
adjusted workforce that is dedicated to the company and their coworkers.

Definition of Terms Used

Family Member: An employee who is related to another person within the organization through a
marital or lineage relationship

Non-Family Member: An employee who does not have any marital or lineage relationships
within the organization.

Socialization: The process new employees face when acquiring the customary knowledge and
skills vital to being competent in their new role (Schein & Van Maanen, 1979).

Coordinated Management of Meaning: The theory that people in conversations co-construct their
social realities. These realities are constantly changing and evolving based on what was said and
how (Pearce, 2004).

Organization of Remaining Chapters

This research begins with a look at coordinated management of meaning (CMM) and
socialization theory, specifically how these theories frame research on a small, multifamily
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

organization. It continues with a review of the literature concerning characteristics of family businesses. The research then probes more deeply into how training and the socialization process is conducted at these organizations. The methodology section explains the qualitative interview research design and why this method was chosen. The results of these interviews are presented and discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents and explores opportunities for further study.

Statement of Research Questions

Q1: What is the cultural effect of multiple families within an organization?

Q2: How does multi-family business culture influence the training and socialization process?
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Theoretical Basis

The strong culture within family enterprises influences day-to-day procedures and drives their success. The relationships between family members affect every aspect of the business. This is the strongest advantage for these enterprises and a very important aspect to carefully monitor.

When new employees enter an organization, they undergo a period of training and socialization. During this period, they find their place in the company culture. In family businesses, the unique culture influences these processes. It is important to investigate how training is perceived from the standpoint of new employees, management, the managing family, and the general workforce to better understand why these organizations breed commitment and longevity and how these organizations can grow beyond family relationships.

From a theoretical standpoint, consider coordinated management of meaning (CMM) and how this theory explains how organizational cultures are created and perpetuated. CMM asserts that people in conversations co-construct their social realities. The realities are constantly changing and evolving based on what was said and how. Future social realities are the afterlife of how we interact today (Pearce, 2004). “[This] communication perspective is grounded in the belief that what persons-in-conversation actually say and do in relation to each other is the ‘stuff’ that makes what otherwise might seem dominating realities such as class, gender, ideology, personalities and so forth” (Pearce & Pearce, 2000, p. 408). These constructed realities influence how a company’s culture develops.
The CMM process begins with raw sensory data. This data become *constructions* which are “the cognitive process by which individuals organize and interpret the world” (Cronen, Pearce and Harris 1979, p.25). Constructions become *construction systems* that shape how a person organizes and interprets sensory data from the world around them. Construction systems dictate a person’s *speech acts*, meaning how they communicate in their world. These speech acts develop into *episodes*; episodes become *life scripts* (Cronen et al., 1979). “Life scripts are patterns of episodes, comprising of the persons expectations for the kinds of communicative events which can and probably will occur” (Cronen et al., 1979, p.26).

Figure 1: Coordinated Management of Meaning Process

Family business culture, and the CMM that develops, is best explained by narrative paradigm theory:

In short, the narrative paradigm is a philosophical statement that is meant to offer an approach to interpretation and assessment of human communication – assuming that all forms of human communication can be seen fundamentally as stories, as interpretations
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

of aspects of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture and character.

(Fisher, 1989, p.57)

This theory assumes that humans are storytellers. We use stories to communicate and to develop a basis for beliefs and actions. Ultimately, our world acts as an entire set of stories upon which we base our reality (Barker, Rimler, Moreno & Kaplan, 2004). Almost all family owned businesses revolve around founders; their stories set the example and tone. The owner-manager’s words carry gospel-like weight (Welch & Welch, 2009). Thus, the founder, their immediate family, and the culture they develop depend upon the stories they express through their interactions with each other and non-family employees.

These stories comprise what an organization stands for. The values presented in a company’s narrative express what is important to non-family employees and the outside world. These values build a culture; a pattern of meanings, their enduring expressive aspects, the symbols that represent and guide the thinking, feeling, and behavior of its members (Barker et al., 2004). This culture is the basis of day-to-day life within an organization. It is the organizational reality for both the existing employees and new employees entering the business (Barker et al, 2004). The culture of the family business is important when considering how to implement change and training. The new generation cannot focus change in the typical direction, toward the workforce. Instead, the aim must go upward toward the founder, the constituent who holds their heart (Welch & Welch, 2009). When one wants to implement change in these businesses it is crucial for the owner-manager to show support.

This research also uses the framework of organizational socialization identified by Schein and Van Maanen (1979), which recognizes that when one enters an organization the process of
assimilation can be profound, for both the employee and the business. Organizational socialization is the process new employees face when acquiring the social knowledge and skills vital to being competent in their new role. Each organization has a distinct culture which consists of its own long standing rules, a special language, ideology, and standard of conduct that dictate how members relate to one another (Schein & Van Maanen, 1979). Once the new member can navigate through these guidelines, they are considered “part of the team”. Socialization gives the new employee an ordered view of their professional life that guides their actions and shapes their relationships (Schein & Van Maanen, 1979).

Organizational socialization theory includes assumptions about the new or transitioning employee. First, this person is in an anxiety-inducing situation. The employee is motivated to reduce this anxiety by quickly learning the social and functional aspects of their position. Second, socialization is a process influenced by everyone the new employee interacts with; including supervisors, coworkers, and subordinates. Third, the stability of an organization largely depends on successful socialization of new members (Schein & Van Maanen, 1979). “When the passing of positions from generation to generation of incumbents is accomplished smoothly with a minimum of disruption, the continuity of the organization’s mission is maintained, the predictability of the organizations performance is left intact” (Schein & Van Maanen, 1979, p.9).

**Ethical Assumptions**

Philosophically, the ethical framework used in this work reflects Martin Buber’s dialogic ethics. Buber asserts that dialogic, human interaction promotes development of self, personality, and knowledge (Buber, 1958). Human interactions are described as I-Thou or I-It relationships,
the type of relationship dictates whether the interaction is productive or destructive.

“Communicators in I-It relationships treat each other as objects and engage in monologue…Participants in I-Thou relationships, in contrast, treat others as unique human beings and engage in dialogue” (Johnson, 2012, p.287). This ethical approach focuses on the relationships between people, believing that true dialogue between people is the essence of ethics.

The essential aspect of dialogue is striving to understand the world from another’s perspective. A dialogic relationship is the best way to establish authenticity and trust with new members of an organization. This does not mean the communicator foregoes their own convictions or views, just that they attempt to understand opinions of others and avoids imposing their own (Johannesen, Valde & Whedbee, 2008). This is crucial when welcoming a new member into an organization. Working toward dialogue acknowledges the intrinsic value in each person and lays the foundation for enlightened communication (Johnson, 2012).

**Literature Review**

Family businesses are a vital part of American commerce. Producing 78% of new jobs, family businesses are an important area of study due to their economic contributions and creation of employment opportunities. While many Americans have purchased items from large family controlled businesses including Wal-Mart, HJ Heinz, and The Campbell Soup Company, many others have been, or will at some time, be employed at a family firm (Day, 2009). A great deal is known about the culture of family businesses. However, much less has been written about the training and human resource needs of management and their workforce. “The size, complexity and sectoral diversity that characterize the family business population appear to have hindered
efforts to develop an empirical basis for specific training and human resource strategies” (Matlay & Fletcher, 2002, p. 128). This chapter will present characteristics common to family businesses and how these characteristics influence these organizations’ approach training and socialization.

Characteristics of Family Businesses

Family businesses are defined as organizations where a family (or families) exercises control of, and involvement in, the management, decision-making and operational aspects of the business (Belak, Duh & Milfelner, 2010). Family relationships within an organization create a unique culture. Research on these businesses has produced a variety of advantages and disadvantages commonly present at these organizations.

Family organizations generally show outstanding commitment to employees and their day-to-day participation (Belak et al., 2010). Further strengths include a common language of values and history, comprehension, acceptance of authority, common goals, dedication, flexibility, agility in deciding and implementing, service attitudes and executive stability. Perhaps the most important strength is the ability to sacrifice and commit to long range objectives (Avendano-Alcaraz et al., 2009; Barker et al., 2004; Goldwasser, 1986). Avendano-Alcaraz et al. (2009) identify three competitive advantages that family organizations also hold; implicit contractual relationships among family members pre-exist business involvement, and many of them result in agency costs which are relatively lower than formal, explicit relationships (2.) competitive advantages ensue when the horizons of decision makers are broadened due to commitment to the long term support of the family, and (3.) firm value is enhanced due to the access to family resources, especially when access to other capital is limited. (p.195)
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

These cultural advantages are largely responsible for these firms’ success and longevity.

The marriage of work and family also comes with challenges. “It is obvious common sense that when managerial decisions are influenced by feelings about and responsibilities towards relatives in the business, when nepotism exerts a negative influence, and when a company is run more to honor a family tradition than for its own needs and purposes, there is likely to be trouble” (Levinson, 1971, p.378). Alvarez et al. identify “(1.) nepotism (2.) autocracy (3.) difficulty in delegation (4.) paternalism (5.) confusion in cash flows (6.) manipulation by family members and (7.) lack of definition of organizational structure”, as additional traits to be weary of when investigating family enterprises (Avendano-Alvarez et al., 2009, p.194).

Additionally, the relationship history present in family enterprises means relationships are often more complex than other businesses. These organizations require better planning and governance because the relationships within them require more attention (Carlock, 2009).

Much of the positive or negative influence family relationships have on business practices result from the culture established by the governing family. “The owning family has a strong influence on virtually all psychological and situational antecedents of organizational behavior” (Vallejo, 2009, p.379). A harmonious family, with congruent goals and similar vision, add to the vibrancy of the family firm while families in conflict dissolve the glue of family enterprise (Barker et al., 2004). The advantages available to family firms are quickly disintegrated by a family in turmoil or one with misaligned goals.

Managing Change in Family Businesses

The strong culture present in many family businesses is highly dependent on stability and familiarity, thus, implementing change can be difficult. This is most noticeable during periods of
transition, when new members enter the organization, and/or when training takes place. The founder and family members generally do not adequately plan for change, resist its eminence, and tend to misjudge the time necessary to plan and execute the process (Baker et al., 2004).

To examine the dynamics within a family businesses, the four vantage points proposed by Barnes and Hershon are an effective framework. Each person involved within a family business, and its evolution, has his or her own pressures and interests. First to consider are the family managers that work in the business, both the older and younger generations. When these powerful entities forget or ignore the other three perspectives presented, they can easily get boxed into their own concerns. These concerns include maintaining influence for the older generation and getting hold of it for the younger. To both generations, it implies the selection, inclusion, and perpetuation of family managers (Barnes & Hershon, 1976).

Secondly, and most importantly during training, one must consider the needs, thoughts, and perceptions of non-family employees. Both older and younger non-family employees face different pressures and concerns than family members in the business, even though many are treated as part of the larger corporate family. Older employees find value in security, strive to please their boss and want rewards for loyalty and sharing of equity. Younger employees seek opportunities for growth, professionalism, and equity. In essence, they are looking for reasons to stay. Both age groups worry about bridging family transitions (Barnes & Hershon, 1976). Not surprisingly, research shows that a linear relationship exists between age and organizational commitment. Older employees report more satisfaction and commitment to their firms than younger employees (Barker et al., 2004).
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

The third perspective for consideration is from family members not involved with the business. Older generations have concerns over their income from the business, family conflicts, and a place in the business for their children. Younger generations may feel pressure to join the business. Both generations’ interest in the company can be helpful or meddlesome. Finally, consider “the outsiders”. These are competitors, customers, government regulators, vendors, consultants, and others who are connected to the business and its practices from the outside. The “outsiders” have various private interests in the company; which range from constructive to destructive in intention and effect (Barnes & Hershon, 1976).

The mentioned actors must commit fully to change, socialization, and training to ensure its success. These processes are admittedly chaotic, as is often the case when melding personal relationships with business demands. Founders and entrepreneurs tend not to be skilled reorganizers and growth requires reorganization along with a shift in management styles (Barnes & Hershon, 1976). In order to be successful when implementing change, founders need to approach the change with enthusiasm and critical thought. To ease change within organizations it is vital for family and non-family members to consider how their messages are being communicated and interpreted.

One common problem that bedevils family businesses arises from the fact that all family members in the business have to wear at least two hats, the family hat and the business hat. The family hat requires unconditional acceptance based on membership in the family. The business hat requires conditional acceptance based on job performance. (Beck, 2009, p.37)
Human resource management in family businesses should see the narrative viewpoints listed as two separate organizations to manage. “One is the business, with an organization chart like any other business. The second is the family organization-the owners, tomorrow’s leaders and other emotional stakeholders who are not in the business but have great influence over it” (Beck, 2009, p. 33). The two predominate forces in these organizations, the business and the family, must be respected independently to work together gracefully.

**Training in Family Businesses**

The all-encompassing role that owner-managers occupy in small, family businesses often carries over into human resource management and training. In a study presented in Understanding the Small Family Business, 6,000 businesses in Great Britain were studied for their human resource practices. This study found that in approximately 93% of small businesses the owner-manager was identified as the main decision-maker, inclusive of issues related to training and human resource development. Most of these owner-managers used informal means for both recruitment and other human resource management practices. “Family ties and related informal networks appear to play an important role in these activities. Informal methods were used to induct, train and retain employees in the vast majority of family-owned small businesses in this sample” (Matlay & Fletcher, 2002, p.132). Additionally, less than 10% of small businesses, both family and non-family, delegate any budgeted funds to training (Matlay & Fletcher, 2002). This approach to training negatively influences the socialization of new members of an organization by affecting the formality and pace of the process.

Typically, training in family businesses tends to favor members of the governing family. They are coached and mentored more extensively than other employees (Matlay & Fletcher,
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

2002). This makes sense, considering the successful training of these individuals can ensure the company’s livelihood. The goal of any company’s training program is to teach vital skills and to foster good leaders. In family businesses, human resource management must consider two leadership pipelines:

First is the company pipeline, like that of any other organization. Second is the family leadership pipeline, unique to family businesses. The business leadership pipeline begins at time of hire, when the company can begin to assess and develop individuals for future roles in the company. The family leadership pipeline of assessment and development can and should begin much earlier—often in childhood. This provides greater development opportunities for the family, since many of both the ‘drivers’ and ‘derailers’ of leadership success begin to show up early in life, well before employable adulthood. (Beck, 2009, p. 34)

The knowledge of leadership roles in the eminent future for young family members affects how training takes place for family and non-family members. Training needs of family members are seen as an investment, with potential long term returns to the business and the family member. Conversely, training for non-family members is often reactive to a specific company need. This results in a training program that may be shortsighted. Owner-managers interviewed did not perceive training to be a crucial element in the overall business strategy. This means that in many cases, training is a reactive rather than proactive function in small, family businesses (Matlay & Fletcher, 2002).

Socialization and Commitment in Family Businesses
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

Although formal training programs tend to be less developed in small, family businesses, organizational commitment tends to be stronger than in comparable non-family organizations. The socialization process in family firms includes emotional mediation that leads to strong bonds between employee and employer that go beyond monetary rewards. This type of relationship can be described as familiness; a phenomenon that occurs when a family system interacts with a firm that leads to the firm possessing an array of unique resources (Vallejo & Langa, 2010).

Families are the initial reference group with which individuals first assimilate socially. This is where identities are formed and what subsequent learning and interaction will be based upon. In family firms, non-family employees face a second family socialization (Vallejo & Langa, 2010). “This does not happen to the family members who work in the business, because they have been socialized with the values, basic assumptions, and the rest of the family’s cultural elements since birth” (Vallejo & Langa, 2010, p.51).

To measure organizational commitment, one must consider an employee’s identification, involvement and loyalty. Because socialization in family firms tends to be tinged with a primary nature, these traits are more prominent in employees that work at family firms (Vallejo & Langa, 2010). To achieve even higher commitment from employees, family businesses must assure two factors: “employees’ sensation of physical and psychological comfort and feeling of being competent in their work; and employees’ perception of the level of congruence between their values and those of the firm” (Vallejo & Langa, 2010, p.58). To be comfortable in an organization with such a strong culture, employees must align themselves with the organization’s values.

Discussion
The culture at family businesses matters. These businesses often have strong dedication to care, commitment and longevity. These organizations also have a tendency to be more informal and training is usually a reactive process. By understanding how this culture influences the socialization and training process, one will be able to recognize how to best welcome new employees and how to present new processes to existing employees. The socialization process can be difficult for new employees and learning new processes can be frustrating to existing employees. Research that makes these processes more pleasant and effective for all parties involved is vital. To better understand these dynamics, this study investigates the following critical questions:

Do multiple families within an organization strengthen family business culture?

Does this culture influence the training and socialization process for new employees?
Chapter III: Scope and Methodology

Scope

“Within the growing body of knowledge pertaining to small family businesses there exists a paucity of empirically rigorous research on issues related to the training and human resource management strategies of this type of firm” (Matlay & Fletcher, 2002, p. 136). A void exists in research concerning training programs in small family businesses, particularly where multiple families have worked for at least two generations.

Colorado Industrial Hardware is a family owned and operated business employing 34 people. Within this workforce, multiple families have two generations working at the company. The family culture is a competitive advantage of the enterprise. There is a great deal of research specifically on the managerial structure, culture and marketing orientation of small family businesses; much less has been written about the training and human resource management needs of owner-managers and their workforce (Matlay & Fletcher, 2002). As the business grows, the need to recruit, hire and train both new family and non-family members will increase. In order to better understand how this process is currently taking place at CIH, and where opportunities for improvement lie in the future, participating employees shared their thoughts on training.

Methodology

A qualitative, phenomenological methodology was appropriate for this study. This approach is fitting because the study is an opportunity to focus on the complexity of this business-related phenomenon in its own context (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Additionally, the focus is on an interactive process that is situationally constrained to a unique case. The
researcher was personally involved during the process and built close relationships with participants over the course of the study. Most importantly, this methodology encourages authentic results (Neuman, 2006). Qualitative research allows the researcher to acquire a deep understanding and be able to offer a comprehensive, multi-faceted description of what is occurring during the training process at CIH; from the perspective of the new employee (both family and non-family members), their co-workers and management.

The study began with a series of semi-structured, guided interviews. Using a phenomenological approach, the interviews determined a close reflection of the participant’s authentic experience. The emphasis in each interview was placed on the participants’ interpretation of their own subjective experience (Griffin, 2009). As opposed to searching for factual information, this stage of research determined participant’s perceptions, conceptions, understandings, viewpoints and emotions. Formal interview questions were kept minimal to encourage a constructionist, or individually reflective, exchange (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Participants were meant to feel comfortable discussing their experience with training at CIH, how it compares to other companies they have worked for, what they think is successful, and what they think could make training programs at the company more successful in the future.

To encourage open discourse, participants must feel the three pillars that build a safe communication environment; congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathetic understanding (Griffin, 2009). The questions reflected these ideals. Throughout the entire process, ethnographic-like notes were kept about how people talked about training; paying particular attention to the types of words and phrases used when describing training at CIH. Words and phrases repeated multiple times by one employee or several were topics to consider for further investigation.
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

Procedure

Data Collection

Interviews took place at CIH over two days from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Interviews were scheduled by participants. The scripted questions acted as a general guide for the interviewer to follow. Mainly, the interviews were designed to reveal how each participant views the training process currently at CIH, their place in that training process, what they feel is good or bad about the current process and how they would improve upon the process. Also, the interviews indicated whether or not the participants feel the company has a strong family culture and if this culture affects the training and socialization process at the company.

Interviews began with general questions about the employee (tenure at the company and job responsibilities) which led to general questions about the training process then more specific questions concerning their opinion of this process. The interviews ended with discussing the culture of the company and the possible influence family relationships have on the socialization process.

Sampling

In order to compare the training experience of family and non-family members, both types of employee are represented in the sample. Initially, fourteen people agreed to be interviewed including three members of the management team. There was an adequate mixture of veteran and newer employees as well as family and non-family members. In November 2011 the initial invite to interview was sent out to all employees at CIH (Figure 1). In February 2012 follow-up emails (Figure 2), interview scheduling, and interviews took place. Before each
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

interview, participants were encouraged to sign a consent form (Figure 3). This form described the purpose of the study, its benefits, the methods being used, and their rights as a participant.

During the first day of interviews, three more employees volunteered to be interviewed for a total of seventeen participants. This final group consisted of nine people who have a family member who has worked or is working currently at CIH. Participants’ tenures at the company ranged from 5 months to 28 years. Of the five departments in the organization (sales, shipping and receiving, quality control, purchasing and accounting), four are represented in the sample.

Data Analysis

During each interview, the researcher recorded the exchange while taking notes about the interaction. Special attention was paid to the tone and emphasis used by the participant. Each interview was then transcribed. The transcribed interviews were then reviewed and coded. The coding process began by highlighting what participants said about their training process and the culture at the organization. These coded sections were then grouped in to overarching themes. Once the major themes were identified, the transcripts were reviewed again to ensure thematic material was thoroughly presented.

Validity and Reliability

Interviews that are successfully phenomenological produce valid results. The interviews captured an authentic view from the participant; meaning a fair, honest, and balanced account of the social world from the participant living within it (Neuman, 2006). In order to make the interviews beneficial to the company, it is important that participants felt comfortable with the process and the interviewer. Comfortable participants respond to question more honestly and this produces an accurate reflection of the training and socialization processes at the organization.
After the interviews, participants were able to confirm the message presented by “member checking”; main points brought up during the conversation were repeated and discussed for confirmation and clarification.

Reliability in this study is determined by the degree CIH can depend on the findings to reflect the current training and socialization situation at the company. To ensure reliable results, participants encompassed family members, non-family members, veteran employees and new employees. Participant’s views were respected and protected by keeping the interviews confidential.

For this research, bonded sequences of acts which include a beginning, middle, and end are classified as CMM episodes. The length of these episodes is dictated by the participants, although it is generally accepted that these are brief uninterrupted patterns of face-to-face interaction (Pearce & Pearce, 2000). For example, an employee’s orientation process, a conversation with their supervisor, or a small group meeting can be identified as a CMM episode to deconstruct. These episodes become the participants’ life script at the organization (Cronen et al., 1979). These life scripts dictate communication and communication patterns among the workforce.
Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

The focus of this study sought to understand the training and socialization process at Colorado Industrial Hardware. Interviews were transcribed and reviewed for common themes. Findings were collected into themes that were shared by the majority of participants. These interviews reveal that employees at CIH identify characteristics in their workplace common to many family businesses. These characteristics have created a unique culture that emphasizes care for coworkers and rewards commitment. Additionally, this culture has produced a special language and approach to training that reflects the organization’s ideals. Surprisingly, the generational groups established by employees working at CIH are a more prominent force dictating interaction than family ties. Interviews revealed that the socialization process at this organization occurs in three stages; novice (or the trainee), established, and veteran. Movement between each stage is marked by episodes dictated by the shared coordinated management of meaning (CMM) that exists amongst the workforce. The close, almost clique-like, relationships shared among the veteran employees are more threatening to novice and established employees than family relationships.

First, this chapter will discuss the elements of family business culture evident at CIH. Second, how training is conducted at CIH is discussed, followed by the main themes concerning training evident throughout the interviews; pace and formality. This section explores how the company culture is communicated to new employees by established and veteran members of the organization. Finally, the study’s most surprising finding will be discussed; that the special natures of the relationships within this business mean that significant socialization happens in
three stages throughout the employee’s career. Employees at CIH practice communication patterns that dictate and maintain developmental stages within the organization.

Results

Family Business Characteristics

Interviews with employees at CIH reveal that the organization possesses many traits common among small, family businesses. It is important to note that the managing family is not the only family that works at the company; three other families currently have two generations working at the company and a total of five families have had two generations spend time at the organization. Of the 34 employees, ten have family members that currently work at the organization. Most employees that did not have family relationships within the company had close friends working at CIH before being hired. As is the case with many family businesses, recruitment practices rely heavily on informal networks. As the business grew, the first few employees began to bring in family members and friends. As opposed to the managing family having the most influence on the culture, the collection of families (many of whom had two generations at the company before the owner-manager’s son began to work at CIH) have created a unique family business culture that is saturated with certain characteristics. These characteristics are created and perpetrated by the construction systems dictated by the shared CMM at CIH. As new employees enter an organization these family business characteristics will be the most noticeable. These influence how new employees see the organization, and their place in it, during the early socialization process.

Like many family businesses of this size, the owner-manager acts as the primary decision-maker in both recruitment and training. As noted, family ties and informal networks
play a role in these activities, particularly recruitment. Of the seventeen employees interviewed, eleven had relationships (family or close friends) with people that worked at the organization before being hired.

This results in a definite family business culture. As one employee notes, “There is an entrenched culture here, I mean it’s very, very, very entrenched” (P9). A veteran employee, and family member, explains:

It does feel more family than just coworkers. There’s a lot of links with other employees, whether it be somebody is a friend of this person, or they got them the job, or they recommended them, or father/daughter, there’s that kind of thing. There is a lot of family here but it continues to more than just family...it’s all kind of a close-knit group of people. (P16)

When discussing the culture at this organization, many participants reveal positive elements that result from these close relationships; these include loyalty to the organization, a culture of care and a special language.

Employee Loyalty: One of the most prominent characteristics of family businesses reflected in the interviews is employee loyalty. Almost every participant noted that employees stay at CIH for their entire career. One non-family member that has been with the company over 15 years explains:

I can say 100% yes. There’s definitely a huge family atmosphere...I’ve been here a long time and I think it’s pretty evident nobody ever leaves. Pretty much everybody here has been here for a long period of time, and it’s very seldom, I think in the time that I’ve

---

1 Interview participants are identified at P1-P17
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

worked here, as far as people leaving voluntarily...as far as somebody just like, “Oh well, I got a better job offer”, or “I see something better in my future”, I’ve never seen that happen. (P14)

Participants agree that their commitment to the company stems from it being a great place to work. Throughout the interviews, veteran employees expressed more dedication and passion regarding their commitment. Another veteran employee notes:

I was the twelfth employee and now, even now, being the twelfth employee then, I am seventh in seniority now, after 17 years. That says something really great about this company, [the owner-manager] and the way that everything was built up. (P7)

Culture of Care: The all-encompassing theme noticed throughout the interviews was the organization’s culture of care. Employees interviewed feel that the relationships they have formed at CIH are stronger than those they held at other organizations. Participants felt that there was a higher level of care displayed by the owner-manager and their co-workers. Many participants shared sentiments similar to this established employee, who feels, “Everyone treats you very good. It’s like a big family here” (P13). One veteran employee shared a story describing the moment she realized the level of care at this organization was above what she had experienced in the past:

I worked at a [large corporation] for 17 years, my husband got sick and they wouldn’t let me leave work to take him to the hospital. I had to call a girlfriend to have him taken to the hospital; they wouldn’t let me leave because we were in the middle of a big banquet celebration at one of the stores. Here, my husband just got sick again and it was complete understanding you know? You just take care of your family, you make up your work,
you get it done, do what you need to do, you’re family. [The owner-manager] loves people’s families, you know what I mean? He genuinely cares about your family. (P7)

In another interview, a veteran employee describes the instance she first realized how appreciated and cared for she is:

I was briefly engaged in a moment of insanity, and I was leaving to move to Maryland, I gave my notice here, I closed up shop. I was leaving. One week before I was supposed to physically move, he broke it off. That was on a Friday, and then the following Monday I went in to [the owner manager], and I was working in packaging still, and I, I had worked really hard to grow that department and be more than that. And I went in and talked to [the owner-manager] and told him what happened, and he said “Of course you can stay, but you’re not going to work in the back anymore, you’re gonna work in the front and I’m giving you a raise”. (P15)

One of the most veteran members of the organization, who has multiple family ties within it, reveals a poignant look at how he perceives his coworkers:

It is kind of like a family thing. Everybody looks out for everybody else and as we get older we’re all having medical problems or whatever, you know what I mean, it’s like “hey” we all worry about each other, and the families, and watching the kids grow up together and so it’s kind of like a family here, and not just, not just a place to come work, but talk about your weekend and you know, things like that. (P8)

Working with Family, Perception of Bias: In this type of organization, with multiple family relationships, nepotism is naturally a concern. Interviews were designed to determine whether preferential treatment was an issue in the socialization process. The results were varied.
Although some family members admit seeking out their family member when they had questions, some avoided interaction altogether.

A few family members in the organization admit going to their family members for guidance. An established employee, who works in a separate department from their family member, said “I ask him quite a few questions, like if I have an issue with a part, I’ll take it to him” (P1). Another established employee admits, “I probably talk to [my family member] more than I should. But at the same time, it’s hard for me to take anybody’s word as highly as his” (P9).

However, due to the preexisting ties shared by many employees, participants agree that nepotism does not seem to be an issue at CIH. An established, non-family employee explains this phenomenon clearly:

I don’t think [family ties] really are that big a deal. It’s like to be honest; I didn’t know [established employee] was [veteran’s] daughter. If she didn’t call him dad once in a while, you wouldn’t be able to tell. People have been here so long too, [veteran] has been here 25 years now, so everyone kind of knows each other. (P2)

A veteran family member agrees:

I don’t think [family relationships] affect the training. The people that have worked here in the past that were family and didn’t work out because they couldn’t be trained aren’t here anymore. There’s never been a clash of personalities, especially between family members. There’s been boyfriend/girlfriend that’s worked here before that hasn’t worked out, so we kind of steer clear of that, but family-wise, nah, I really haven’t seen any
issues you know on my side of the family, they work, one works in sales, one works for me, but you know we work together so well it’s really not an issue. (P8)

In a few instances, family members admit consciously making an effort to avoid the perception of favoritism. A veteran describes interacting with her family member:

Some days I don’t even talk to him. Seriously. I mean there have been days he’ll pop down to my office and go ‘poof’, and that means bye, and that’s the first time I’ve seen him all day. I guess, I never wanted it to be an issue, so I just try and, I’m not like purposefully avoiding him, but I’m not purposely going back to shoot the breeze several times a day either. (P15)

One established family member feels that her preexisting family relationship made her more dedicated to achievement:

I know I tried a lot harder when my mom was here. I didn’t want to let her down and so, I mean. I don’t really think it affects it at all. It almost helps because you know that there might be a little more reprimand on the backside of it when you get home. (P7)

Generally, participants’ views mirrored this statement from an established, non-family member:

With any business, you have to hire people that you think are going to be the most efficient and fit in with your company, whether it’s family, friends, people off the street, and what I know of [the owner-manager], he’s not gonna hire family just because they’re family. I believe that about him. I think that this business is what it is because he’s a tremendous businessman. I mean it’s the honest truth, I think that he knows how to run a business, his priorities are right, he’s been successful because of those decisions, and I
think that he’s does an amazing job of separating the friends, the family relationships and the dynamics between the families, and once they come into this door, it’s a business. And I think the people that he’s hired that have those family relationships, they’ve only been hired because of what they’re going to bring to the table and they can separate that when they walk through the door too. I think for some reason if he felt they couldn’t separate business from family when they walk through the door, they wouldn’t be working here, and I truly believe that. (P10)

Socialization and Special Language: The most noticeable characteristic of family business culture at CIH is the special language developed by the workforce. One veteran admits, “It’s the vocabulary, and once you understand the vocabulary of the company, I think it’s pretty easy” (P8). A key part of employees becoming socialized into this community is mastery of the company’s vocabulary. “Organizational members create and recreate organizational realities in their conversations with one another” (Gallagher & Sias, 2009, p.40). This special language acts as the building block of the CMM created at CIH. According to CMM theory, language is “the single most powerful tool that humans have ever invented for the creation of social worlds” (Pearce & Pearce, 1998, p.178). These special terms created at CIH show the close, dialogic nature of the relationship at the organization. Mastery of these terms and macro knowledge of what they mean to the community signify a novice employee becoming established. The two most prominent terms amongst employees’ interviews are gray area and tribal knowledge.

The type of business conducted at CIH is specialized, meaning no two customers are ever quite the same. This subsequently means no two roles in the company are exactly the same. To explain this phenomenon to new members of the organization, novice and veteran employees use the idea of operating within a vast gray area. A respected, established member of the workforce
and a family member said, “What makes it hard is that there’s not a black-and-white, but that goes with our territory” (P7). Another established employee agrees, “There are so many variables here that there’s a lot of gray area, and I’m black or white” (P6). One established employee describes how he found this concept difficult as a novice:

Everybody said this job is about black and white, they said 25% of it is black, 25% of it is white, and 50% of it is gray area. And it’s so true, and how am I going to go home feeling good about what I did, or feeling like I know where I’m at, if it’s always gray to me. If the business is gray, how am I ever going to feel like I did right or wrong by it? (P10)

In order to assist novice employees through this vast gray area, veteran and established employees use what they call tribal knowledge. This refers to a more senior employee mentoring a new employee, sharing what they have learned and bestowing knowledge about the nebulous nature of the business. When asked to describe what she learned from her most recent training experience, a family member employee on the cusp of established/veteran status states, “I learned a lot that it’s tribal knowledge, you can’t just say it’s always this way, there has to be some gray area in there” (P7). She continues, “I mean, a lot of it is supposed to be tribal knowledge, learn it by experience, there isn’t always a hard and fast rule for things, so a lot of times you can’t necessarily train for it” (P7).

Training Process

When discussing the training process at CIH, participants emphasized the pace and formality of the process. With the collection of close interpersonal relationships at the organization, members begin to assume that what they are communicating is being understood
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

by new employees as it is with established and veteran coworkers. However, new employees have yet to form construction systems similar to their coworkers, leaving them confused and unable to make sense of the information presented. These assumptions by older members of the workforce lead to a quick informal training process that lacks full disclosure of the new employees’ role in the organization.

_Pace:_ The first theme identified throughout the interviews centered around pace. The hiring process at C.I.H is reactive. Employees are brought in as they are needed. This means that employees are trained quickly and expected to start working as soon as possible. The owner-manager states:

This company’s always been a fly by the seat of your pants company, so that’s been the hardest part. It’s important every day for us to buy parts, it’s important for us to quote our customers, it’s important for us to keep an eye on our inventory, it’s important for us to keep an eye on our cash flow, it’s never been that important to have a training or continuous improvement plan but that’s just as important as selling. If you sell enough nuts and bolts everything else will take care of itself, you know what I mean? So, I still believe that but I also see the need, especially as you get larger, to put more of your resources into training and continuous improvement. As the company grows it becomes a larger part of the pie. It’s probably ignored the first 10 years and as you get bigger and you see that you you’re wasting money here or you’re wasting time here, if we were more organized, more structured, if we trained better, we wouldn’t be wasting a lot of our resources. (P17)
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

This fast and loose approach to training means that new employees sometimes feel confused and rushed through the first few weeks. The nature of the business carries over in to how the trainer and trainee communicate over the first few days. Due to the high volume and quick nature of the industry, members of this organization are more accustom to a fast pace. The beginning of a person’s career at the organization feels rapid, at times overwhelming. The accelerated approach to training can cause anxiety in the new employee as they struggle to make sense of the new environment around them. As one established employee remembers, “I was thrown to the wolves. It was kind of scary, it was very intimidating. I got through it though. There wasn’t a whole lot of training, you know, ‘training’ time involved” (P14).

The amount of information presented to new employees through this method can be distressing. The newest member of the team recalls just how anxious he was during the first few days:

Yes, it was really stressful. I felt like I knew how serious it was too. I mean the traceability, and I felt like with every click of the mouse like if I send out a request and I didn’t ask for certain things, it felt like I could just imagine some satellite coming out of, falling from the sky or something, or it just felt like I was going to be arrested every click of the mouse. (P4)

Other employees interviewed feel the rapid pace made them comfortable quickly. An established employee recalls his experience, “You acclimate quickly because, holy moly, you’re dealing with an actual customer and now you’re actually seeing it, you’re seeing it happen right before your very eyes. A learn-by-doing type of situation, which is very effective” (P9). Another employee agrees, “Hands-on is always good…show and tell is always better than the thick
Although some employees find the current training process effective, other members of the workforce had some frustrations with the system. The owner-manager admits, “Training has never been a strong point. It’s always been kind of a weak point in my opinion” (P17). Admittedly, the informal, friendly nature at CIH makes employees feel cared about and welcome, however, the lack of formality can make accountability and newcomer comfort difficult during training.

*Formality:* A common characteristic of small, family businesses identified at CIH is the informal nature of training new employees. The informal nature of training at CIH influences the accelerated pace. Because there is no structured training program, new employees move through their initial training process quickly. One established employee admits she does not identify this time as a training process as all, “There wasn’t really training [for me]. It was kind of quick instruction, ‘do this’. It was pretty much hands on, do this, you do it, somebody corrects you, and you just kind of learn by that, so it wasn’t really a training process” (P6). New employees are paired with an established employee for a few days, taught the basic of the computer system and their job duties then left on their own and encouraged to ask questions. A veteran employee in the warehouse describes the process simply, “Day one, show them how we do it. Day two, you drive and we’ll help, and that, that seems to work” (P16). Another employee reveals, “You don’t experience training for something here until you actually go out and do it. You know, it’s like a very much a trial-by-fire type situation” (P9).
An outcome of this process is that new employees expeditiously feel comfortable with their trainer (mentor). This person guides the new employee through the first phase of employee socialization at the company. A key element of this process is that new employees feel comfortable enough with their mentor and other senior members of the workforce to ask questions. A veteran describes the training process for the newest sales member, whose trainer was an established and respected member of the workforce:

She worked with him for a week or two and she’s cut him loose, slowly let the leash out more and more until she let him go. We always emphasize that if you have a question about something, you can go to your manager or to even an account manager with more experience, so if you don’t know something stop and ask a question. (P3)

One of the newest members of the team agrees “A huge part of this training process is the open door and the people being available all the time to] help out and give answers” (P 10). At CIH there is rarely more than one new employee at a time. In fact, years can pass before a new person is hired. The general pattern of new employee incorporation is one person at a time, paired with a trainer and encouraged to ask questions. A veteran employee in the warehouse states:

We have a group of people who have been there for so long; the turnaround’s low, so I think that really helps in the training process. I’ve been here 10 years and there’s people in our department who have been here longer than I have, so, I think collectively it works good and I don’t think there’s anything to change, and I think it’s pretty fine-tuned. (P16)

Each new member of the organization has a specialized, very personal, informal training relationship with a mentor-like figure. The process is described by a newer member of the organization:
The process was a lot of on the job type of training, there’s a learning curve there and it’s fly by the seat of your pants, but don’t be afraid to ask questions…everybody was real forthcoming with being able to provide information and answer questions…it got to the point where they made me feel comfortable about making decisions on my own, and not being afraid to make the mistakes because they’ve given me the tools to be able to move forward and make those decisions, so it was a very, for CIH it was a very good open door policy, come to me if you need help, come to anybody if you need help, and then you know, your questions were answered. (P10)

Unfortunately, if the mentor-mentee relationship is in anyway unsuccessful or lacks full disclosure communication, the new employee can yearn for a more formal, standardized training process. An established employee admits, “I think there needs to be like some kind of a training manual…I think there needs to be a dedicated person that can take the time and sit with somebody new and explain the way things go and why they go that way” (P14). Another, newer, established employee agrees, “The company is large enough now, and just because of the business that it is, I just really think that we should have policy and procedure” (P12). An established employee, and trainer, in the sales department also states, “It’s hard because we don’t have a defined training process here, manuals, work instructions, that’s all kind of in the works” (P6). An established employee agrees that a bit more formality would help improve the process:

In my opinion [training has] been relatively successful. The only problem is that in the type of industry we’re in, 99% really isn’t good because you know if something goes wrong or something like that and it’s because of a training issue, you can’t explain that to [Organization A] on why something’s messed up on a part. I mean, no matter how good you are at being a mentor you can never possibly address everything that can potentially
go on throughout the workflow with somebody day in and day out, so it would be nice to, I’m not saying that it’s 100% possible to get it written down either, but at least if it’s just a standardized way of doing it because now you have people saying, ‘Oh, well somebody told me how to do this, somebody told me how to do that’, you don’t have any proof that we had that happen. (P9)

When employees are taught something new on the job a more established employee will stop by to demonstrate the skill, an email will be sent out describing the procedure change to those it affects or a meeting will be held. This process is as informal as welcoming a new employee. There is no standardized method for implementing new processes. As a family-member veteran, who has been with the company over 20 years, describes:

We really don’t have a book because it changes all the time, we’re always adapting you know? It’s just a matter of saying these are the procedures to do this task and they learn it and then we just come out and retrain them to do it properly then. (P8)

A veteran admits, “Something that we’re probably not really good at is follow-up on the training. We’ll present it, but we don’t do the follow-up on it to see if it’s caught on” (P3). The owner-manager agrees:

Number one, we’re probably not very good at implementing across the whole company, I mean the [management team] will agree on what we’re going to do from right now, from this point on, but do we tell the rest of the company? Sometimes maybe we don’t do a very good job of that, and number two, six weeks later the same thing comes up; we go “how were we going to handle this?” The fact is that A, we didn’t really make it well known across the complete company, and B, the fact that we didn’t follow up. (P17)
CMM in close relationships leads to assumptions of mutual understanding. People in conversations base their interaction on mutual accord they have built over time, so in many cases assumptions are acceptable. However, when these assumptions of understanding carry over into conversations with members of the organization that have not developed CMM with their coworkers, communication lacks. Assumptions of understanding lead to rushed, informal instances of communication. The pace and formality of the training and socialization process at CIH must be considered as the organization grows. An established, family member states:

The bigger we get we’re not going to be able to have this trial-by-fire anymore because there will be so many people in so many different scenarios, that it just won’t be feasible to go through that type of training. Number one, and the biggest reason is, we’re not getting any smaller and our customers are getting more complicated. We’re growing and our customers are getting more complicated and more demanding. We’ve got customers that are essentially request higher quality goods, they need to be there with lower lead times, and if you can manage that, demands by the customer, they immediately give you more business and so we’re finding that we’re growing very quickly because we are able to do that. But, at the same time, in order to do that you have to have highly skilled employees there all the time and they need to be able to respond to that type of stuff. (P9)

These interviews reveal that there is a definite family business culture at this organization. These characteristics include; loyalty, a culture of care, and a special language. Because there are multiple family bonds shared among the workforce, nepotism does not seem to negatively influence training practices. The familiar nature of relationships at the organization and the reactive nature of the training process result in pace and formality as being the major themes to consider.
The pace of a new employee’s training program can be both intimidating and thrilling. The massive amount of information flung onto trainees can induce anxiety before they build an open relationship with their mentor and they feel comfortable asking questions. The informal nature at CIH makes these relationships easier, but the informal culture also means standardized training materials are not readily available.

The most poignant result of this study is that the socialization process occurs throughout someone’s career at CIH and the most difficult transition is not from novice to established, but from established to veteran. Through the lens of CMM, episodes (acts that subsequently become the stories of a person’s career) mark the movement between developmental stages and theses stages are shared construction systems.

**Novice**: Novice employees are those who have just joined the organization. This phase is categorized by feeling unsure about job responsibilities and role within the organization. For interview participants, this stage spanned a few weeks to a year. Being a novice employee in an environment filled with veterans can be intimidating. A veteran employee describes the first year at CIH:

> The first week you feel like you know everything, everything’s so simple. And then like a week after you start its like “I don’t know anything, everything’s confusing”, probably too much overload. Yeah, the first six months are pretty typical of feeling like you’re not belonging yet and then six months to a year you start feeling pretty secure. (P11)

Novice employees can feel too intimidated to approach veterans, and often choose to buffer these interactions by first communicating with established employees. As the newest member of the workforce reveals:
I feel like I just don’t want to bother [veteran account manager], because he’s always busy, everybody’s always so busy, and I always feel so dumb just standing there at his office. I don’t want to inconvenience him because I feel like everybody’s always in his office anyway; he never gets to do anything. (P4)

At times, veterans act as a guide and show novice employees the “big picture”. Veterans also step in when an established employee may be rushing through the training process a bit too quickly. Because of their knowledge of the company, veterans aid novice employees with difficult situations and display understanding regarding difficulty they may face during early socialization. The veteran warehouse manager said, “I don’t put a timeframe on people. Everybody trains differently. Some people get it right away, some people take a year” (P8). A novice employee discusses how he interacted with a veteran in the sales department, “She kind of came to the rescue as far as just one thing at a time and that was extremely helpful and relaxing” (P4).

A novice employee becomes established when he or she is first given responsibility in the organization. This moment acts as the episode, the owner-manager or the department manager and the new employee are creating a new reality during this act which results in the employee becoming established. One established member of the sales team describes this moment for her, “When I finally got my first customer that was all mine and I didn’t have to go to anybody to say ‘Hey, is it okay if I quote this?’ It was a pretty good feeling knowing that [the owner-manager] trusted me enough to let me loose (P14). A veteran employee remembers his movement from a novice to established status:
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

[The owner-manager] had offered me a full-time position after being here two or three months. He liked how I was and my work ethic and whatnot and offered me a full-time position. I guess once going full-time it was kind of that step, it kind of made me realize that yeah, I made it in. (P16)

This experience leads to the novice employee becoming more comfortable in his or her surroundings. An established member of the sales team remembers:

If you ask me I was training for a year. I mean because there’s so much and I think it gets easier when you get familiar with one customer and your own customers. Now I’m to the point where I’ve got my customers, I’ve got my [Company A], I’ve got my [Company B], I’ve got you know certain customers that I deal with on a regular basis and I know what those requirements are. (P10)

Established: Employees in this stage are comfortable with their basic job duties and possess an elemental understanding of their role within the organization. One established employee explains:

Certain times things click, it’s like oh, three years later, now I understand why it’s this way. So, I still have a lot of questions, I still bug [veterans] just kind of not knowing the industry I guess, but I mean I’m pretty comfortable with what I do day to day but it’s taken a good couple of years. (P6)

Some people stay in the established stage indefinitely, it is important to show mastery of many different facets of CIH before becoming a veteran, someone people go to for the “why” as oppose to the “how”. One veteran admits, “It’s funny because people really like their little niche and you try to go outside that niche and its wait a minute, I’m not comfortable in this” (P8).
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

**Veteran:** Organizational members in this phase include the owner-manager, members of the management team and a few senior members of the workforce. Employees in this phase have a clear view of their role in the company. Veteran’s life spans at the company range from 10 to 28 years. Some employees that have been with the organization 15 years have yet to reach veteran status. Similar to movement between the first two phases, movement from established to veteran status is not primarily dictated by time. However, veteran employees do have to be with the company a few years, to gain a basic knowledge of the organization, as one veteran states, “It’s very difficult to explain the big picture of what we do, I mean it wasn’t until years here that I really started to understand the bigger picture” (P15).

Displayed ability and desire to learn more are prominent factors dictating movement into this stage. People in this phase are leaders within the organization, highly skilled and knowledgeable. Veterans are well-informed about multiple processes within the organization. As one respected veteran reveals, “I’m kind of the problem solver around here. It keeps the challenge level up because there’s always, there’s something about every problem situation that makes it unique, so its change, you know? It adds some variety” (P15).

These employees are the most respected members of the organization. One established employee states:

[Veteran employee] is a great teacher because he’s knowledgeable but he’s not one to stroke your ego at all; so to hear positive reinforcement or a positive comment coming, that he’s acknowledging something that I was doing, makes me feel like, I feel good.

(P10)
Novice, and established, employees seek out veterans for advice and a greater understanding of the organization. One veteran states, “I’m probably involved with the decision of who’s going to do the training, but, I don’t do much of the training myself anymore. I’m a resource now to when they have an out of the ordinary type question” (P7). When asked about his role as a person people come to with questions this employee reveals:

I enjoy it, I feel blessed that I’ve been given the opportunity to gain all that knowledge over the years and be able to help people with it, and I think a lot of it comes through, you know, it’s just through experiencing things. (P3)

The episodes that dictate movement to this stage are more difficult to identify. For some veterans it was when others began coming to them for guidance, and for others it was when they began to take on multiple roles within the organization.

*Tension between developmental stages:* Tension was not noticeable between family and non-family members within the organization. Interestingly, there was some tension present between established and veteran employees. One established employee asserts:

There’s too much familiarity, too much history, and I think sometimes that there’s some, I don’t know if forgiveness is the right word, but there’s definitely like sometimes a double standard because of how long some of the people have been here and this is just the way they are and we have to accept that. But that’s kind of, you know, that can happen with small companies. Too, I guess emotion, there’s too much emotion. (P12)

The biggest point of contention between these two groups is how information is shared; a novice employee explains the issue:
It’s interesting because somewhere in this office somebody knows everything if you went around and found it, it’s just collecting all that information and synthesizing it into a central location. It is a huge, huge, huge task, but the benefits would be so great. You can take a midline salesperson, who may only be comfortable with one account. And that’s another thing you see people that have been here for 10 or 15 years, they can only handle one sales account. Now that’s not right. If you had something like this you could take a midlevel account manager and then merely give them the resources to become a high level sales manager because then at any point at any time, they would be able to access those quality codes that apply to that customer. (P9)

Some established employees feel that veterans are reluctant to share information because they fear it would make them less valuable. An established employee states:

I think some people that are in supervisor’s positions do not communicate very well and you know there’s kind of this, this old mentality that I don’t need to share everything because that lessens my value. (P12)

Other members of the workforce see the long careers at the organization make it more difficult to implement new procedures:

Nobody’s gonna sit down and tell somebody that’s been here for 20 years, on the edge of retirement, you need to have some training days to show you how to use the computer, it’s just never going to happen. (P15)

Another established employee also feels frustration when implementing new processes:
Everybody’s got a different approach to it and you can’t ever get all that stuff written because everybody’s got a different idea about what they do and what they do is the best way to do it and who are you to tell them different, you get; ‘You don’t know what I do, you haven’t been down here for the past 10 years, so back off me.’ And you see you get, you get a lot of pushback, and see it comes to a point finally where it’s like you know, if-it-ain’t-broke-don’t-fix-it type thing, which has got us into the environment we’re in today. (P9)

The different developmental stages share their own CMM within the larger CMM present at the company which makes communicating between the stages difficult. The members in the veteran stage share an entrenched culture and high amount of knowledge that they are uncomfortable sharing with other members of the organization, particularly those they deem unworthy of that knowledge and culture. This is frustrating to established employees, particularly those who strive to reach veteran status.

Discussion

This research has shed light on the training process at small, family businesses where multiple family relationships exist. First, family business culture at these organizations may be more concentrated than other family businesses, particularly characteristics that include an element of care (loyalty, commitment, and concern for coworkers’ well-being). Because this business grew through informal, personal relationships, employees throughout the organization, not just management, have played a role in developing the workforce. The bonds that brought members into the organization intensify throughout people’s careers at CIH. This is largely due to the long-term careers shared by much of the workforce. These long-term careers and
subsequent long-term relationships build collection of shared meaning that becomes their coordinated management of meaning (CMM) overtime. The people within the organization and their relationships with one another create the base of values and beliefs; in turn the culture of the organization also shapes the values and beliefs of the workforce.

Second, when employees enter an organization rich with family ties the organization should consider pace and formality throughout the training process. This will make the socialization process, especially that of non-family members, more comfortable and less anxiety-producing. At CIH, the reactive nature of hiring leads to a hurried approach to training. When the new employee has a family member or close friend at the organization they feel more comfortable going to them for clarification of job duties, to slow the influx of information down a bit, and to confirm that the stress they are feeling is normal. In other words, these informal links take the place of human resource personnel who would normally fill this role. However, when a person entering the company does not have strong preexisting relationships they are left unsure and anxious about their place in the company. As mentioned earlier, the newest member of the sales team, who had no previous relationships within the workforce, felt so unsure about his job responsibilities and repercussions of mistakes that he felt he may even be arrested, “…it felt like I could just imagine some satellite coming out of, falling from the sky or something, or it just felt like I was going to be arrested every click of the mouse” (P4).

In terms of socialization theory, which states that new members of an organization acquire social knowledge and skills vital to their new role in order to ease anxiety present when entering a unknown situation, this research suggests that in this instance the socialization process occurs as strongly in later stages of a person’s career as it does in the early stage. In organizations with a low turnover rate and steady growth, employees begin to form groups based
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

on their shared CMM construction systems. These developmental phases are the life scripts at the organization. These life scripts dictate what is expected of members in each phase. For established employees at CIH, becoming a member of the elite veteran circle is as mysterious as entering a new organization.

The meaning-making practices explained by the CMM at CIH maintain the boundaries between developmental stages. The workforce co-constructs these developmental stages through their interactions with one another, constantly reinforcing their existence through the messages they send and receive. The culture at this organization influences how the raw sensory data becomes constructions. For example, one construction at this organization is that longevity is important. This construction leads to a construction system that equates longevity to respect and success at this organization. This construction system is based on the meaning created by the exchanges between employees at CIH. The employees coordinate this idea through repeated communication acts. This construction system at CIH influences the speech acts of employees. These speech acts dictate how employees co-create meaning through their interactions at the organization. Emphasis on employee tenure was expressed by veteran, established and novice employees. Because of the coordination of meaning shared by both new and old employees, tenure will continue to be important in this culture. These speech acts then lead to episodes.

Episodes dictate movement between the developmental phases. Episodes that transform novice employees to established employees are easy to identify. These are instances when these members are given some sort of responsibility. In the sales department, the first episode is often when the employees’ mentor or a veteran account manager assigns a specific account to the employee. This act signifies trust in the new members’ ability and acts as the first step to the life script of an established member of the organization. These episodes were easily shared as stories
by every established member of the organization during their interview. Both the new employee and established and veteran members of the workforce co-construct these episodes equally; one cannot express these stories without mentioning the other actor(s). Specific episodes that transform established members to veterans are more difficult to detect. The negotiation of meaning that takes place between an established employee and the veteran team is mysterious. It is also unclear why some members of the organization become members of this class while others stay at the novice level indefinitely. Although it is clear that a combination of longevity and various skills that cross departmental boundaries are necessary in becoming a veteran.
Chapter V: Conclusions

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is the nature of one-on-one interview for data collection. Some participants may not feel completely comfortable sharing personal thoughts and feeling in this setting. Additionally, the researcher is the daughter of the company’s owner-manager. Although she does not currently work at CIH, she had a preexisting relationship with each participant that could influence some responses. Fortunately, the theoretical saturation expressed in the results indicates participants’ congruence and subsequent honesty about training and socialization at CIH.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study sparks interest into how small firms develop. Technically, CIH only become a family business 6 years ago when the owner manager’s son become an employee. However, family relationships were present at the company long before that. Perhaps family business research is too focused on the influence of the managing family without taking into account the influence of the close relationships shared by the workforce. What influence do these relationships have on the culture?

Future research should also consider the separation between employees at different developmental stages within organizations. Particularly, how the life scripts dictated by CMM specifically define these stages. Admittedly, this type of study would also have to be in an organization that has achieved long-term commitment form the majority of its workforce. Additionally, future research should explore what motivates certain employees to reach the highest level of development while others seem complacent in the established stage.
Conclusions

The most critical part of a successful training process is, as Buber would say, establishing an “I-Thou” relationship. At CIH, the organization’s caring, relationship-focused culture aids in this. The mentor-mentee (I-Thou) relationship during training in this type of culture makes employees feel welcome and results in long, committed careers. However, one aspect of this I-Thou relationship that may be slightly stunted is dialogue. A key aspect of dialogue is striving to see the world from the other’s perspective. In some instances, the training process at this organization is more focused on fulfilling a need than how the trainee is adjusting. The rapid pace and informal nature of the process at CIH can be intimidating. Small, family organizations need to consider the perceptions of new non-family members when considering the training process, in some cases a more formal system would be a welcome change.

This research shows that employees face socialization throughout their career. After a new employee becomes established in an organization with many long-term employees they continue to become comfortable with the long standing rules, special language, ideology, and standard code of conduct that dictates how members relate to one another. At CIH, mastery of these aspects occurs later on one’s career. It seems that the surface understanding of these elements occurs within the first year while full understanding and influence over these elements develops much later.
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

References

Cuadernos de Administracion, 22(39), 191-212.


Cronen, V. E., Pearce, W., & Harris, L. M. (1979). The logic of the coordinated management of meaning: A rules based approach to the first course in interpersonal communication. 

Communication Education, 28(1), 22-38.


TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

April, 378-387.


TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

Commitment of the Family Firms from the Moral Economy Perspective. *Journal Of Business Ethics*, 96(1), 49-62.

Hello CIH,

I am currently taking classes at Gonzaga University to achieve a Master’s degree in Communication and Leadership Studies. This past year I have been focusing my research on small (4-100 employees) family businesses. Particularly, I have been looking at how these businesses view and conduct training, both for new employees and new programs for existing employees. This spring, I will be starting my thesis work on training programs in family enterprises and would greatly appreciate the input and insight of people at CIH.

Sometime between February and April 2012, I will be visiting for a week to conduct interviews. These interviews are completely volunteer-based and participants are encouraged to talk about their training experience at CIH as well as other businesses where they have worked. Currently I plan on asking volunteers the following questions:

1. Tell me a little about your most recent training experience, either as the trainee or trainer.
2. What is your interaction with new employees in your department?
3. What is your primary method of communication with your direct supervisor?
4. How do you like to be taught new things at work?
The interviews should last about a half hour and I am happy to work around your schedule. Please let me know if you would be willing to take part in an interview or if you have any questions.

Figure 2

February 7, 2012

Hello Interview Volunteers,

Thank you for participating in my research on the training and socialization process at family businesses. I look forward to hearing about everyone’s experiences and feel fortunate to have such amazing people to learn from.

I will be visiting CIH on Monday, February 27 and Tuesday, February 28 from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. I would like to build a schedule for the interviews, so please let me know what time (or timeframe) would be most convenient to meet. If you are unable to meet during on these days, but would still like to be involved, please let me know and I am happy to schedule a phone interview at a more convenient time.

Figure 3

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, occurring February 27 to February 28, 2012. This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required, and your rights as a participant.

The purpose of this study is:
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

- To gain insight into the training and socialization process at CIH

The benefits of the research will be:

- To identify what elements are currently successful during training and socialization at CIH
- To identify significant components that could help develop an improved socialization and training process.

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose include:

- One-on-one interviews
- Context analysis of current training materials

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I am using. Please contact me at any time at the e-mail address or telephone number listed below.

Our discussion will be audio taped to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words. The tapes will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time.

You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide (including tapes) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.
TRAINING AND SOCIALIZATION

Insights gathered by you and other participants will be used in writing a qualitative research report. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the paper, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous.

By signing this consent form I certify that I ____________________________ (Print full name here) agree to the terms of this agreement.

____________________________  ____________
(Signature)                    (Date)