

Concept Paper – Hectic Times

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Very little research has been done on the mechanisms by which the competing demands of family business and the family are met. For many families, time is viewed as a scarce resource. The perception of time is influenced by lifecycle stage, needs of significant others, and the emotional or intellectual intensity of events (Owen, 1991). Although the literature related to the integration of work time and family time for those involved in a family business is sparse, there is some indication that a shifting does take place between the demands of home-based work and those of the family (Ahrentzen, 1990; Beach, 1987; Christiansen, 1988). The same is probably true for those families involved in a family business.

The hectic times scale in the family questionnaire is similar to that used in the NE-167 At-Home Income Generation Study. The scale was developed based on ethnographic interviews that Mary Winter did to ascertain the strategies used *within the family* when the home-based *work* was particularly demanding or “hectic.” The most notable addition in the present study with regard to hectic times is on the business questionnaire with the questions that address the strategies used *in the business* when the demands of the *family* are high.

Strategies

In a study by Winter, Puspitawati, Heck and Stafford (1993), the time management strategies used by families responding to the demands of hectic times in home-based work were emphasized. It is anticipated that some of the same strategies will be used by the members of family businesses to deal with hectic times. In the Winter et al. (1993) study, the researchers found that during hectic times, personal time is reallocated more than additional help is obtained for either home-based work or household production. Strategies of personal time reallocation include reducing time with family, reducing sleep, eating out or bringing food in, reducing household cleaning and cutting down on social activities, with reducing housecleaning time being the most popular strategy. Those respondents who are the household manager as well as the home-based worker reallocate personal time more often than those who are not the home-based worker. In contrast, household managers who are not the home-based worker are more likely to report obtaining additional help to meet the demands from the home-based work. Although hiring help for either home-based or household work is not a common

strategy for dealing with demands, almost half the respondents have friends and family help with the home-based work when times are hectic.

Boundaries

Boundary issues may also be important in the management of hectic times. It has been suggested that diffuse external boundaries between the family and the business may be problematic for business-operating families because of competing goals and inappropriate carryover from one system to the other (Rosenblatt, deMik, Anderson, & Johnson, 1985). If boundaries are diffuse, people not be able to "get away from work" and enjoy the experiences of the family. Likewise, family demands may spillover into business management. If demands are high in either or both realms, the carry-over could reach levels that affect business and/or family success. Although Ward (1987) did not address hectic times in his family-first vs. business-first conceptualization, a logical extension may be comparisons in the degree to which families are willing to prioritize business or family needs during demanding times and various measures of business and family success.

References

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