

**A Tale of Everyday Business Folk: the role of culture and personality in the practice
and study of business management**

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Abstract

*“Listen, sir, it’s fine telling us how the atom works. But what we really want to know is how
the atom **should** work!” (Mintzberg et al, 1998)*

The study is derived from consultancy involvement that polarises practice and scholastic thought, pragmatic action and theoretical discourse, and serves to demonstrate the link between academic observation and real-world environments. An ethnographic method exposes emergent patterns and themes that contribute to a theoretical foundation and conceptualization by means of longitudinal observation of a business over a four year period. Cameo scenes of observed principal actors are paralleled with academic thinking as a means of building a foundation for a proposed framework highlighting the role of culture and personality in business strategy. The research demonstrates the value of longitudinal observation, participation and storytelling in the identification of management problems and solutions and the need for engagement, involvement and participation in order to have impact on practitioner management in business. The principal questions posed using this heuristic approach are: Do businesses reflect the behaviours and traits of an owner, CEO, Directors or senior managers? Can we describe or perceive a business by those behaviours and traits? The paper reveals the ability, value and limitations of ethnography to inform research relating to organisation and management research, management education and management practice and provides links between personality and organisational culture. The research proposes a schema that represents the role of personal behaviours, beliefs, preferences and values of the senior manager(s) offering some explanation of the role of and suggests need for greater

attention to those aspects of senior staff in the practice and study of strategic business management.

A Tale of Everyday Business Folk: the role of culture and personality in the practice and study of business management

“Writing is a great way to discover what we are thinking, as well as to discover gaps in our thinking” (Wolcott, 1991: 21)

Introduction

The personality, or *institutional character*, of an organisation is sometimes depicted in bold and distinctive mission statements (Collins and Porras, 1996; Hooley, Saunders and Piercy, 1998) with recognised and shared goals and values (Bishop, 1999; Tadepalli and Avila, 1999; Porter and Kramer, 1999; Gratton, 2000). The personality of a business organisation is influenced by historical and cultural overtones alongside managers’ on-going judgments, perceptions and preferences of prevailing and future environments in order to achieve business and personal objectives. Those decisions are influenced by a wider milieu pertaining to the business organisation including distinctive competences as a "fundamental pattern of present and planned resource deployments" (Hofer and Schendel, 1978: 25), metaphoric and symbolic bases (Smircich and Stubbart, 1985), distinctive capabilities such as market sensing, customer linking, and channel bonding (Day, 1994), organisational capability embedded in routines, processes and culture (Collis and Montgomery, 1995), and core ideology and personality (Ellson, 2004). Company resources and culture and the relatedness of strategy are linked (Collis and Montgomery, 1998; Homburg, Workman and Krohmer, 1999) with strategic thinking and planning influenced by the psyche of the organisation (Mintzberg, 1994; Porter, 1996; Heracleous, 1998), the unique history of an organisation (Ansoff, 1984; Porter, 1996; Homburg, Workman and Krohmer, 1999; Ellson, 2004), and the preferences of senior managers (Buzzell and Gale, 1987; Ellson, 2004). These traits are

objective and subjective, cognitive and affective (Treacy and Wiersema, 1993; Juttner and Wehrli, 1994; Van Raaij and Verhallen, 1994) and delineate one business from another by outward behaviours that define a recognizable *persona* to create a unique activity system and distinctive strategy generating discrete positions that result in characteristic and sustainable advantage – or disadvantage.

Strategic choice is determined by a variety of inherent factors within the business organisation and the people who manage the business organisation. There is no strategy without fit (Porter, 1991). The fit may be inside-out or outside-in or a two-way association that imitates and subsumes human interactions between individuals or groups of people. The ultimate source of fit is based on a founder's beliefs and values that become cognitive assumptions validated by survival and success (see Schein, 1983; 1985; 1991). There are many examples such as Microsoft's culture as a reflection of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs at Apple, Sam Walton at Wal-Mart, Akio Morita at Sony, Ray Kroc at McDonalds, and Richard Branson at Virgin, and so on. This proposition describes an entity, the business organisation, interacting through identifiable personality traits and behaviours of individuals to guide strategic direction.

Ellson (2004) calls these strategy drivers "the core of existence" reflecting a *persona* or culture grounded in history and personal preferences and determines strategic positioning of a business as distinct from more perception based operational positioning promulgated through promotional and communication plans. The purpose of the study is to elucidate the role of the core of existence in the business organisation. The research develops the notion that the core of existence differentiates business organisations strategically and operationally

throughout the business suggesting a greater need for attention to behavioural aspects of senior staff in the practice and study of business management.

Method

This paper offers theory development through comparative and descriptive observations of behaviours within a small business organisation over a period of four years. The behaviours of the owner and other actors are juxtaposed with extant research to form a literature review to propose a theoretical structure that sets the scene for an ethnographic approach to answer the question “What is going on here?” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The paper uses cameo scenes of observed principal actors to expose emergent patterns and themes to appraise the role and importance of behaviours and traits to strategy selection and planning, strategic and operational implementation, and the relationship to customers and society.

The principal questions posed using this heuristic approach are: Does a business reflect the behaviours and traits of an owner, CEO, Board of Directors or senior managers? Can we describe a business by those behaviours and traits? Do these behaviours and traits determine a unique strategic positioning of a business? The research further demonstrates the value of longitudinal observation and storytelling in the identification of management problems and solutions and the importance of engagement, involvement and participation in order to enable research to impact on business practice.

The study seeks cultural description through intimate study and residence, the language spoken, first hand participation in activities taking place, and confidence in intensive proximity with a few informants suggested by van Maanen (1982). The nature of qualitative research may lead to a loss in precision in the strictest sense although “the loss in precision

may not be all bad ... an interpretation system is an awesomely complex human social activity that may not be amenable to precise measurement at this point in development ... to design a model that is precise and accurate may be to forego the phenomenon of interest” (Daft and Weick, 1984: 294). The lack of “scientific” certainty is not primary but “success should be measured only in terms of raising issues - not in terms of settling them” (Smircich and Stubbart, 1985: 735) although methodologies are directed by dominant paradigms and key actors (Friedson, 1985).

An ethnographic approach offers a practical look at what is happening within a business organisation and provides a means of observing practitioners as an integral part of the business process. These are matters of practical concern to the practitioner and require time and patience. The *perceived* benefits of ethnography may include a more comprehensive means of enhancing practising managers’ performance, judgments and decisions in a way that will be familiar and understandable through association, credibility and recognition. The study seeks a framework to highlight the role of culture and personality in business strategy suggesting an ontological approach based on qualitative and generic methods (Miles and Huberman, 1994), an explication of cultural and/ or social actions rather than cognitive (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994) with benefits of emerging issues and interpretations from the verificational nature of qualitative research (Charmaz, 1995) leading to the *meaning* of the experience through a presentation of descriptive data (Janesick, 2000).

Some inventive ways of doing realism using ethnography (van Maanan, 2006) have been embraced in this study through the combined use of juxtaposition of extant research combined with cameo glimpses of actor performance and, whilst ““writing” alone....does not an ethnography make” (Yanow, 2009), this case may be read as an allegorical tale of business

life or perhaps a tale of everyday business folk, raising wider issues than the appraisal of the role and importance of behaviours and traits within the theory and practice of strategic business management.

Background and literature

Mr PJ Donaldson "retired" from the business and handed over to his son Mr Roger Donaldson. The company continued to be ruled by its Chairman at eighty two years old. PJ's belief in "printing" as *the only trade* reflected Perrow's (1970) observation that people develop an almost religious dedication to their trade. Every employee within the company knew at least one anecdote about "PJ", a name symbolically enshrining (Johnson 1987) his absolute power. His annual appearance in the factory at Christmas time, his presentations to celebrate long serving employees, memories of the sound of shouting at his son heard through office walls, and even suppliers who held the "old man" in veneration. PJ's management style was recalled with a longing for the "old days", a paradigm of an idealized cherished way of working (Sheldon, 1980), ideologies preserved and sustained by beliefs, stories, language and rituals (Meyer, 1982).

Strategic management was based on a linear process of on-going monitoring of production capacities and machine times. Salesmen would be expected to obtain business to fill the output of machines. Costs were established and prices were set using the established frameworks and margins. Son Roger regularly took the figures to "father" at his home and PJ alone decided outcomes. The process ignored the reality of the environment as customers became more interested in their changing requirements rather than the production capabilities and pride of their supplier. In other words, "dissonance" was ignored by seeking

"consonance" within the existing paradigm (Johnson, 1987) as PJ asserted that skill alone could keep pace with changing technology and customer requirements.

The "character" of the organisation (Selznick 1957) was founded on the personality of the Chairman in the belief that the business will endure based on a social construction of reality (Berger and Luckman, 1966) with family businesses tending to nurture "*Weltanschauung*" (Kuhn, 1970) or "worldview". Managerial thought and managerial action are inseparable (Schon, 1983) with low level change within the existing paradigm. Paperwork, letter headings and gentlemanly manners, often towards slothful debtors, were the hall mark of the past, the present and the future. The belief that past successes had been the result of consistent and "old-fashioned" qualities reflected by the machinery, the buildings, the people and approach of the business dominated a position in the mind of customers that was increasingly inappropriate to the current environment or their particular needs. PJ believed that the company would continue to provide a reasonable living and he saw no reason to take any immediate and significant action in the face of growing losses. The emphasis on legitimacy rather than profit and symbol construction as a central component of strategy (Pettigrew, 1977), family organisations are disinclined to undertake fundamental strategic changes until the occurrence of dramatically reduced performance or crisis (Mintzberg, 1978). Past experience dictates decisions confirmed by present action (Weick, 1979) supported by a "machine bureaucracy" to emphasize a distinction between the few at the top allowed to think and the many below who are supposed to act (Mintzberg, 1978).

Organisations are complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical (Morgan 1986) and the perspective and involvement of different players in a changing environment is an imposing determinant of the outcome of the strategic management process. Whether an informational or

interpretive process, Johnson (1990) notes that research suggests substantial cognitive shifts need major intervention usually by new leaders accompanied by political and symbolic actions. PJ did not want cognitive shifts or major intervention because the paradigm would survive - like him.

Strategy deals with the unknowable and consonance is sought in the known (Quinn, 1980) characterized as a tendency towards "momentum" (Miller and Friesen, 1980) with no unified, comprehensive, and integrated plan (Glueck, 1980) following a logical incremental process (Quinn, 1980). Belief is perceived as an idealized and cherished way of working (Sheldon, 1980) with ideologies or paradigms preserved and sustained through beliefs, stories, language and rituals (Meyer, 1982). Strategy is a *modus operandi*, "a perspective, strategy, ideology, and mission" (Miller and Friesen, 1980: 612), iterative and managerial thinking and managerial action are inseparable (Schon, 1983), a concept rooted in stability (Teece, 1985) to deal with discontinuous futures (Goodstein, Pfeffer and Nolan 1986). Employee "groupthink" is rationalized alongside a shared illusion about the invulnerability of the organisation (Janis, 1985). The capabilities of a firm are defined by where it has been and what it has done in the past (Teece, 1985). The owner and the family operate as a cultural phenomenon in the interpretive mould, a sort of social contract (Chaffee, 1984). The practice of employees "owning" change is an unacceptable approach for an owner and family (Schein, 1985).

Organisation strategy reflects owner and family views mirroring attitudinal and cognitive behaviour (Chaffee, 1984) with no iterative process to cope with discontinuous futures (Goodstein, Pfeffer and Nolan 1986). High congruence creates high resistance to change by insulation from outside factors unable to respond to new situations (Tushman, Newman and

Romanelli, 1986). Change is difficult for owners and families because this suggests shortcomings or failings and whilst organisations are complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical (Morgan, 1986), the family culture favours moving the furniture rather than dealing with the problem (Mintzberg, 1987). The cultural paradigm is held relatively commonly and taken for granted by employees, preserved by management, and the *status quo* is maintained by seeking "consonance" whilst "dissonance" is ignored (Johnson, 1987).

Successful companies have cultures and principles created and consciously sustained through the support and encouragement of individual contribution, team play, and risk taking driven by the personal values of their managers (Pottruck and Pearce, 2000). Successful companies will be those that unite internal company culture and the external market position through a shared set of beliefs described as “a corporate religion” (Kunde, 2000). Customers buy company ethos because of what companies do, make, or sell and inseparable from whom they are. Some organisations create products or services out of a need for personal expression - “the organization’s values, behaviors, and attitudes – that is, the way employees all through the ranks feel about the company they are working for” (Hatch and Schultz, 2001: 131). The dynastic influence pervades subsequent direction and strategy with visions and objectives being passed from generation to generation even after the departure of the founder (Ogbonna and Harris, 2001). However, if these visions and objectives are not aligned with customer values, then a business is unlikely to establish a position in the mind of the customer and establish a perceived advantage (Ellson, 2004).

Whereas operational positioning creates a value proposition and differentiates a product or service from competitors’ offerings based on perception and image, strategic positioning matches the organisation and its competencies and capabilities with appropriate target

markets. These distinctive strengths, the unique competencies and capabilities, may include physical resources of the organisation such as machinery and buildings, intellectual resources such as skills and knowledge, and behavioural traits such as responsiveness, reliability and honesty defined by the core of existence.

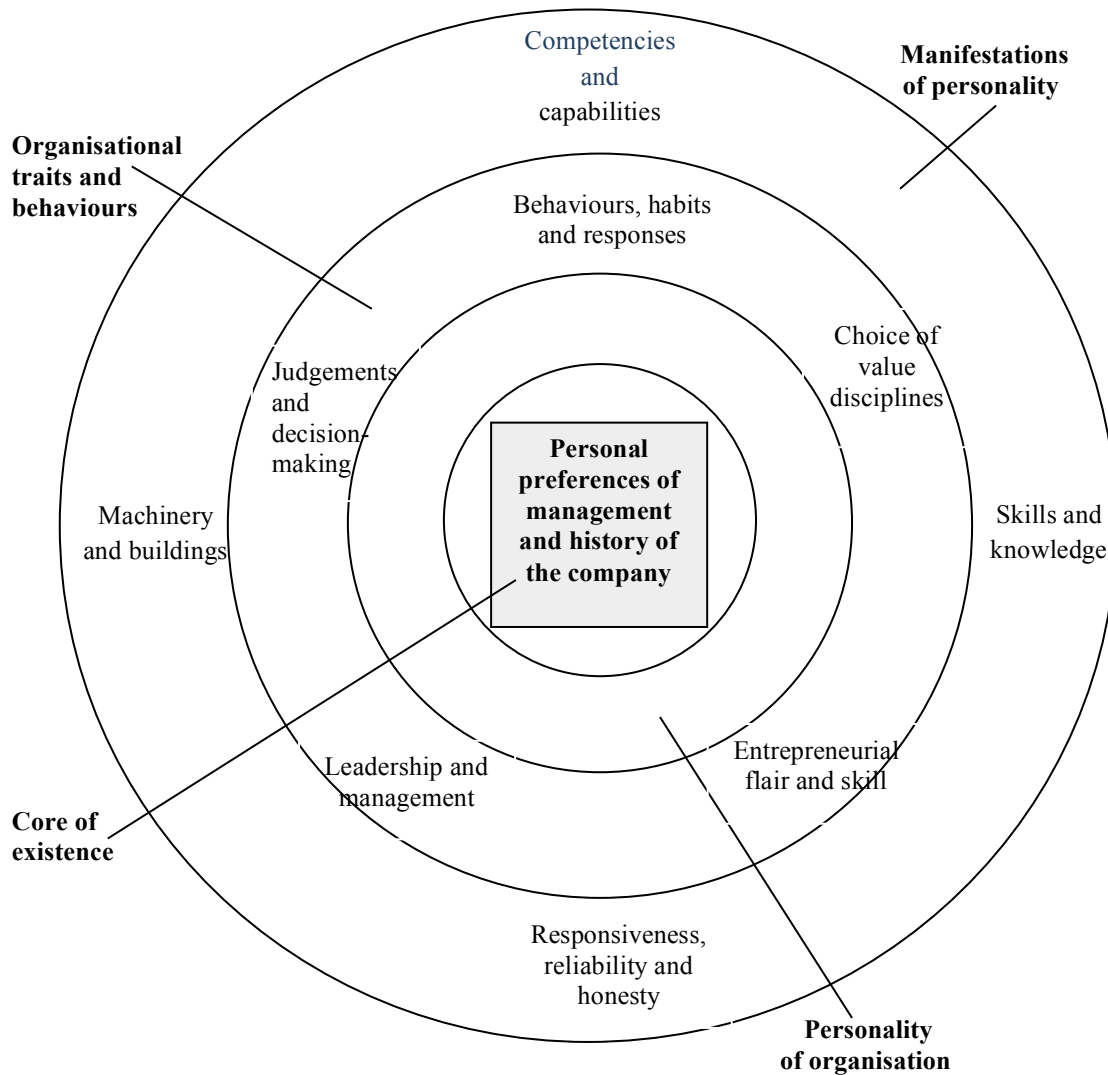


Figure 1
Principal drivers of strategic positioning (Ellson, 2004)

The importance of personality as a determinant of strategy is highlighted by the use of the term coined *the core of existence*. Judgments, the choice of value disciplines, leadership and

management, as well as entrepreneurial flair are directed by the personality of the organisation expressing itself through behaviours, habits and responses to the market, customers and competitors. Manifestations of personality such as capabilities and competences contribute to competitive advantage that differentiates a business organisation from competitors. Strategic positioning is the expression of an organisations personality in the market place and says as much about whom a business organisation is as whom it should serve. The importance of such understanding is not only important to business success and what customers want but also what is acceptable to society in terms of behaviours and values. This study seeks to highlight the effect of the role of personal behaviours, beliefs, preferences and values of the senior managers and more clearly define and explicate the role of culture and personality in the strategic process.

Cameos of everyday business folk

Discussion with company auditor

“I can only say how pleased I am to see you,” said Nigel the company auditor. “The problem is that nobody was doing anything and there are so many problems and nothing being done about them. I am not sure that Roger knew what to do and his father is not getting any younger. I have been trying to persuade them to do something but nothing really changes. Roger said that he had known you for some years and, well, you are here now. I fear that Roger was never really managing director except in title and his father still steered the ship in any case”

“We need a short term solutions to find time for a long term solution. I understand from our telephone conversation that you can sign off the accounts although we are technically close to trading illegally?”

“Tell me more about what you propose. Have you seen the bank yet?”

“No. I see them next week. My initial plan is to collect debts somewhat faster than we have been. An average of 75 days is too long especially when creditors are paid within 30 days! So, creditors will have to wait and debtors can expect some chasing. I have asked a surveyor for a valuation of the factory before I meet the bank manager. It was last done about 15 years ago and has to be worth more than the value shown on the balance sheet. Then we can ask the bank for a larger borrowing facility.”

“If you can let me know the value of the property then I can update the balance sheet and with the banks continuing support I am happy to sign off the accounts.”

“We are also going to employ another sales person and review the performance of the two divisions – printing and stationery. I am not convinced that there is a role for both divisions in today’s market. This is back to the days when the business occupied a site in town and offered printing and stationery to the public and businesses. I don’t think this is sustainable. We need to focus on one key market and make it work.”

Discussion with Mervyn bank manager

“I haven’t seen management accounts from Donaldson for the last twelve months and, judging from sales figures, things seem to be getting worse. I am glad that you have come into the business because something needs to happen – and fast.”

“My intention is to provide monthly management accounts that demonstrate actual against plan” said Tom Eden.

“Well that will be different. I don’t think that I have ever seen a plan.”

“When did you last see Roger or his father?”

“Probably more than eighteen months ago. I have been trying to see Roger for the last nine months. He always seems to be out or unavailable. I have written a few times. He asked for a larger borrowing facility four months ago and I told him that I would need to meet and

discuss future plans. But nothing happened. So your role as managing director and these projections do at least give some prospect that things are going the right way. I could never understand who was really in charge of the business. Mr Donaldson senior must be getting quite old now and Roger is someone who didn't really seem to know what was going on."

"I think that the problem has been recognised. I have a valuation of the factory premises and this has doubled since the last valuation. Nigel is going to include the figure in the balance sheet and I want to seek a larger overdraft facility to gain some time for a plan."

"On the provision that you send monthly accounts, you keep to the plan, and you can accept a charge on the freehold of the factory, then I am happy to do so. I should like a copy of the valuation please."

"Yes of course."

"What will Roger do in the future?"

"He is going to concentrate on estimates rather than the day to day running of the business."

"I think that is a good idea although this should have happened years ago. Keep him out of trouble!"

A production manager's viewpoint

"There isn't a lot more to say really. Roger's father occasionally comes into the factory and meets a few of the older people that he knows and then he goes. Roger keeps himself to himself and we just get on with the work that Paul brings in. Mike brings in new work occasionally but it's the usual customers that really keep us going."

"What size runs are Mike's orders?" asked Tom Eden.

"Usually bigger than Paul's orders but we probably need the bigger four colour machines rather than the two and one colour machines."

"How old are those machines?"

“Thirty years, maybe more. They are good and they keep going but if we are going to grow then we really do need something bigger.”

“Has anyone looked at getting a four colour?” suggested Tom.

“It’s been talked about often enough but nothing ever happens. PJ says that it costs too much money and thinks that we should be able to sell more for these machines. Paul keeps bringing in the same old orders but they are shrinking in size. Something will have to happen because there are times when we have a problem filling what we have at the moment.”

“So who is going to make the decision?”

“PJ. He still runs the place even though he is hardly ever here. He has Roger running around all over the place. Back and forth to his cottage and Roger really doesn’t like that. He just wants a quiet life. PJ is okay but he doesn’t have the understanding that things have moved on. He has the most dreadful arguments with Roger. The walls of Roger’s office aren’t very thick and the whole factory can hear them having a go at each other. I think that the last time was last month just before you arrived. Roger had lost some estimates or something and his father told him to get out. It was bad.”

“How do you get on with PJ?”

“Fine. He doesn’t cause me any problems. He’s a good employer in many ways. When Mike was ill a few years ago PJ heard that he might have to have his leg amputated and he telephoned the hospital and told them that the company would pay if it helped to save his leg. Mike got better without losing his leg or needing any further treatment as it turned out - but PJ cares about his people.”

“What about the machine operators? Could they run a four colour?”

“They probably could with some training. Three came in the last ten or so years and used to run one but I doubt the old hands could cope with the technology or the speed.”

“Any other problems?”

“No, I don’t think so. The guys will do the work if you can get it. It’s just that nothing much ever changes.”

Cousin Paul discussing his role as Sales Director

Paul Donaldson was in his mid-forties, had come into the business after leaving school alongside his father who was PJ’s brother and sales manager since the business started.

“How long have Donaldson had these customers, Paul” asked Tom Eden.

“Most of the customers have been with us for years even when my father was around. Most have known me for a long time and I look after them well” responded Paul.

“I notice that overall annual turnover has gradually gone down each year for the past five or six years. What is the reason for this?”

“The larger work tends to be outside our ability to produce. Our smaller machinery makes the larger runs unviable to produce. It’s not that we can’t do it but simply that the cost is too high.”

“Do you look for work that is suitable for our machinery?”

“Well yes of course.”

“And what about new machinery to take larger runs? Has anyone looked at the possibility?”

“PJ has talked about it and Roger has told him often enough. But the cost is too much and the longer we wait the less PJ wants to take the risk. PJ believes that we should keep to smaller runs and sell what we are good at.”

“You don’t seem to have brought much new business over the past couple of years.”

“I spend most of my time keeping my existing customers happy.”

“And the problem is that smaller customers take more time for less money.”

“Well, yes, you could say that but someone has to keep the business going.”

“What about an additional sales person? Perhaps we could grow some new business through someone new?”

“Yes, I am happy for that to happen but I should have to continue keeping my customers happy.”

“What would you say if I suggested that you should try to increase your turnover by 10% over the next twelve months through new customers? That doesn't sound too much if you visit one new prospect each week?”

“I don't know. I shall try Tom but customers take a time to change supplier and our prices are not competitive for the larger business. I can't promise anything.”

Manager Bernard of the stationery department

“Good to meet you Tom. We heard you were joining a month ago.”

“How did that go down?”

“We were all slightly surprised really because nothing much changes. I have been with the company since school and I suppose that they have looked after me well.”

“Have you any ideas why I am here?”

“Probably to try and improve the sales. Print has been slowly losing sales and stationery holds its own.”

“Any thoughts on how sales can be improved?”

“Well, I think that Paul and Mike need to find new customers who want the things we can print. I don't suppose that we have seen a new customer for some time now.”

“What about stationery products?”

“We have gained a number of new customers over the past twelve months.”

“The problem for stationery sales is that you have so many small orders and the costs are too high. If we could sell larger quantities to fewer customers then that would help. It is a different problem from print and needs to be approached in a different way.”

“PJ and Roger have never said anything about order size.”

“I wonder if we might take a more detailed look at your department and figures next Monday.”

“I am sorry but I can’t do that. Monday is my hospital day. I have a colostomy and other on-going problems. I have to see the nurse. It doesn’t affect my work and the Donaldson’s have always been very supportive.”

Meeting with Donaldson’s largest customer

“How long have you traded with Donaldson, Charles?” asked Tom Eden.

“We must have been doing business for more than thirty years. Maybe longer. I’ve been here for fifteen years and they were the major print supplier then. Paul’s father was selling when I joined and must have retired soon afterwards.”

“I assume that you have always had good service and prices over that time.”

“I think that is true. We took another supplier about eight years ago so that there was an alternative. Things have looked a bit shaky at Donaldson over the years. We wanted to make sure that there was someone else to call upon. But the business has kept going and Paul visits us at least once a week. Are you going to make changes at Donaldson?”

“Some. We are looking at what needs to be done. That is partly why I am here today. Anything that you can tell me about your needs over the next few years would be helpful. We have seen your orders gradually reduce over the past five years and that is slightly concerning.”

“I think that is probably going to continue as we change our packaging requirements. The market is changing and wants a different means of delivery so these paper labels are not going to remain a major part of our requirements. It’s all moving to printing on plastic and we have been looking at our own production line that does the job. I don’t think that you print plastic.”

Board meeting at PJ’s cottage

The cottage in a small pretty country village was some eight miles from the factory. The garden path wandered through tended gardens of flowers and lawns to a front door leading to a hallway. PJ’s lesser height contrasted with son Roger who had to stoop to avoid the low ceiling. PJ welcomed managing director Tom Eden, son Roger and nephew Paul Donaldson into the dining room to the left of the hallway and sat around a fine table on carver chairs. Tea and cakes were brought in by PJ’s wife in her role as company secretary. PJ’s formal approach to all matters pertaining to business practice became immediately apparent with careful recording of those present, approval of last Board meeting, and presentation of agenda.

The meeting considered management accounts, sales to date in the current financial year and sales over the past month. PJ was calm, correct and searching in his chair role until discussion of son Roger’s role was raised.

“We have to consider Roger’s future role in the business,” Tom Eden said.

“Is there anything to consider?” responded PJ.

“Since I took over the role of managing director we need to review what Roger does.”

“He can concentrate on estimating costs for work. He has not always had the time for the task” said PJ.

“Mark does the estimates. I have been encouraging him to take over as much as possible over the past two months. He is keen and well able to do so” replied Tom.

“I think that you need to be doing the estimates – or at least keeping a close eye on them. They are important. How much are you doing at the moment Roger?”

“Mark has been doing them and I have been coaching him” answered Roger

“I don’t think that you can let go of costing, son. What else are you going to do?”

“This is a problem Mr Donaldson. The business cannot afford to employ anyone who does not make a contribution and Roger has expressed an interest in following other interests. Maybe we can help him to do this” countered Tom Eden.

“I agree that the business cannot carry people but Roger needs a job and an income” said PJ.

“I agree that Roger needs an income but his heart is not really in his work.”

“Well he has to do something.”

“Roger tells me that he wants to devote more time to wood carving and turning.”

“That’s ridiculous! You can’t make a living from selling bowls son.”

“There is quite a market for these bowls father. I visited at Downey Fair in May and the Agricultural Show last week. I had some bowls on Pete Malley’s stall and sold five of them.”

“Pete Malley runs another business. His craft stall is just a side interest. You cannot live on the sale of five wooden bowls son. You have a family to look after.”

“I don’t know. I have worked out that

“You cannot do it son. You have to work.”

Tom Eden interrupted. “Roger does not enjoy the work Mr Donaldson. He does not really want to do it and the business cannot afford to pay him for doing nothing.”

“I agree that he needs to contribute and he will do so.”

“Roger tells me that he is not interested and never has been” responded Tom Eden.

“That’s true father” said Roger.

“What do you mean? You enjoyed college in London and you never said anything before” said PJ.

“That’s not true. I have said that

“This is nonsense. You will work and that’s an end to it. You mother and I are not going to live forever and then you will be able to live from the proceeds of our house – but not yet.”

“I want to

“Stop it Roger now!” exclaimed PJ.

“Father, I could survive if I worked a few days in the business and sold some of my products. These things are really popular at shows and art and craft shops. If necessary I could find alternative work to help. Then in six years I could draw my pension at fifty five which would give enough in addition to my craft work until retirement.”

At that moment PJ started to struggle as though short of breath and put his hand to his chest. His wife said that she would fetch a glass of water and PJ asked for his tablets. Roger fetched the tablets. PJ took his tablets and his wife and Roger helped him out of the room. The meeting was adjourned following the revelation to his father that Roger did not really want to work at Donaldson and would prefer to carve wood and make bowls.

Discussion with company solicitor

“Employees of the stationery department will fall under TUPE regulations when the transfer of ownership takes place, stock will be paid at valuation, and the Donaldson name will be combined with Bradshaw’s name for trading purposes. Most importantly Mr Donaldson senior has agreed to the last draft of the contract except he has some further questions about the timetable for payment. I can’t see any problems but he wants to make sure that the

payment is made by close of play Friday. Bradshaw assures me that will happen. I am sorry that this has taken longer than we expected but Mr Donaldson has been keen to check every detail and wanted to meet Bradshaw before the sale was completed.”

“Yes that’s fine. I am sorry that you have had to redraft so many times for these bits and pieces that Mr Donaldson believes to be important. It is his company though and I have had so many meetings with him about this sale.”

“Well at least he has agreed. I thought that there might be a problem and he is not getting any younger. You’ve done a good job. Nigel will be relieved to see the money coming into the company.”

“Yes, so will I. The stationery department has been a real outflow of cash and at least we can focus on one distinct market rather than two. I have told Mervyn at the bank to expect funds by Monday. At least he was pleased!”

Discussion with new sales person Pete

“Pete, you have been here for two months now and you used to work at Donaldson six years ago. What do you think so far?” asked Tom Eden.

“Not much has changed really, same machines, mostly the same people, and the same customers.”

“Its early days but what luck with new customers? ”

“There are some that I have been trying but it’s a long uphill struggle. The larger jobs are going elsewhere based on price. We cannot really compete. That has not changed since I was here before.”

“What about your old customers? Are they still interested?”

“Paul took over my customers when I left. He took his father’s customers when he left. I don’t think that there have been any new customers since I left the company. So I am left to

find new customers while he essentially services my old existing ones. I have been quite surprised.”

“Why surprised?”

“Well I thought that he might have brought in some new business. But I don’t see one new account. His entire turnover is based on his father’s and my old customers. I thought that I might be able to look after some of my old customers.”

“So far you have brought in six new enquiries with no orders. What is likely to happen over the next two months?”

“Well I am hopeful but not optimistic. I have to travel further afield to find the right business and nobody knows Donaldson outside the area. Getting the new business will depend on price and we tend to be at the top end of pricing because of the limitations of the machinery.”

Discussion with new proprietor of Donaldson on the day after purchase

“I honestly thought that old Donaldson would never sign that contract. Every single phrase checked and rechecked and I had to give my personal guarantee for the purchase money”

“Well he’s owned the company for more than forty years and he found the sale hard” said Tom Eden.

“Not as hard as me!”

“Well it’s done now. When do we see the funds from factoring?”

“That should be available within two weeks and I hope that the four colour machine will be installed within a month. I have really put myself on the line for this purchase. I think that it has been the most difficult I have done. I hope that it has been worth it.”

“The company needed the funding. We have a new salesman and he should be able to fill the new four colour machine. New money into the business is going to be important. I don’t

think that Donaldson's has had any new equipment for the past twenty years and the Donaldson's themselves have not taken much out of the business."

"That reminds me. You can give me a cheque for £60,000 before I leave tonight."

"What's that for?"

"You don't think that I did this deal for nothing do you?"

"No. But you've only just arrived and we are tight on the borrowing limits."

"Mervyn will agree to exceed the figure for a couple of weeks."

"Have you asked him?"

"No, just tell him that the money will be arriving next week."

"I don't think that I can tell him. A call from you would help maybe."

"Okay. I'll speak to him later. It seems that I have to do everything."

Tea in a shed at the bottom of the garden

"I popped in to see you now that the business has been sold Roger. How are things?" said Tom Eden

"I'm fine. I have orders for a couple of shops and I'm sharing a stand at a local show next week. As you can see the workshop is small but I have all the equipment. The only problem is time. There's a lot to do."

"How are your father and mother?"

"They seem happy enough - although they still worry about what I am doing."

"Is that more to do with money or wood carving?"

"I don't think they mind so much what I do as doing something and yes, father still harps on about what I am going to live on. But I only need to get through the next four years before I can draw a pension and that will support the income from my work. The payment for

Donaldson is over five years and if I can't make enough from the wood carving then I shall find odd jobs around the place. There is a lot I can do.”

Roger's wife arrives at the open door of the shed at the bottom of the garden with tea cups, teapot, milk jug, sugar and plate of biscuits on a tray.

“You look happy,” said Tom Eden.

“I am very relieved” she said. “Thank you for everything you have done.”

Discussion

The study highlights a number of key aspects of business *persona* influenced by the personality and behaviours of owners and senior managers of business organisations. The case indicates a progression of influence originating from individuals who manage the business organisation and permeating throughout strategic and operational processes to and including the market and individual customer. Stability and change are part of the culture of an organisation (Hatch, 1993) suggesting that some organisations are born to die with the seeds of their own destruction sown in their cultural conservatism and inability to change reminiscent of the *strategic architecture* or DNA suggested by Kiernan (1993). The key contributory components may be broadly described under the following headings:

organisational traits, manifestations of personality, objectives and strategy selection, strategy implementation, competitive position, and customer/ societal. The ethnographic study offers some evidence of each aspect that suggests a further breakdown of each component.

Organisational traits

The company auditor suggests “.... so many problems and nothing being done about them”; the age and general absence of the Chairman from day-to-day matters yet final decisions made over son Roger's head; a lack of interest in keeping bank manager informed (hiding head in sand or simple arrogance?); the production manager indicates PJ and Roger's lack of

interest and involvement of Roger in production or sales; the care for employees such as offer to pay medical fees for ill salesman and tolerance of stationery manager's ill-health and absences; PJ's autocratic management based on original success and experience, yet also a tending towards paternalistic management; a reliance upon hope (almost Micawbersim) and isolation from outside help; PJ's pernickety yet maybe understandable attitude to detail in sale of businesses; son Roger tending towards a dreamer in pursuit of carving wood; limited entrepreneurial skill with a slant towards production orientation; little time for customer or market needs; and a tendency towards being habit bound and change adverse. These suggest a further set of sub headings under the component of organisational traits:

- Behaviours, habits and responses
- Choice of value disciplines
- Entrepreneurial flow and skill
- Leadership and management
- Judgments and decision-making

Manifestations of personality

Blind spots seem to exist in every aspect of management including collection of debts slow (75 days), payment of creditors fast (30 days); valuation of property not undertaken for 15 years and not used for the purpose of collateral against bank lending; sales projections, business planning, monthly accounts; old and limited machinery; a sales director unable to attract new customers; a lack of business skills in recognising need for investment in new machinery; a lack of sales ability or salesmanship – simply order taking and supporting existing customers. These may be regarded under sub headings of manifestations of personality:

- Competences and capabilities

- Skills and knowledge
- Responsiveness, reliability and honesty
- Machinery and buildings

Objectives and strategy selection

Two different markets served by Donaldson have diverged since many years earlier and weakening sales have met without response other than to seek to sell more of what can be made by existing machinery. Strategic positioning and planning are notably absent other than by default and the very nature of the persona of Donaldson the business.

Strategy Implementation

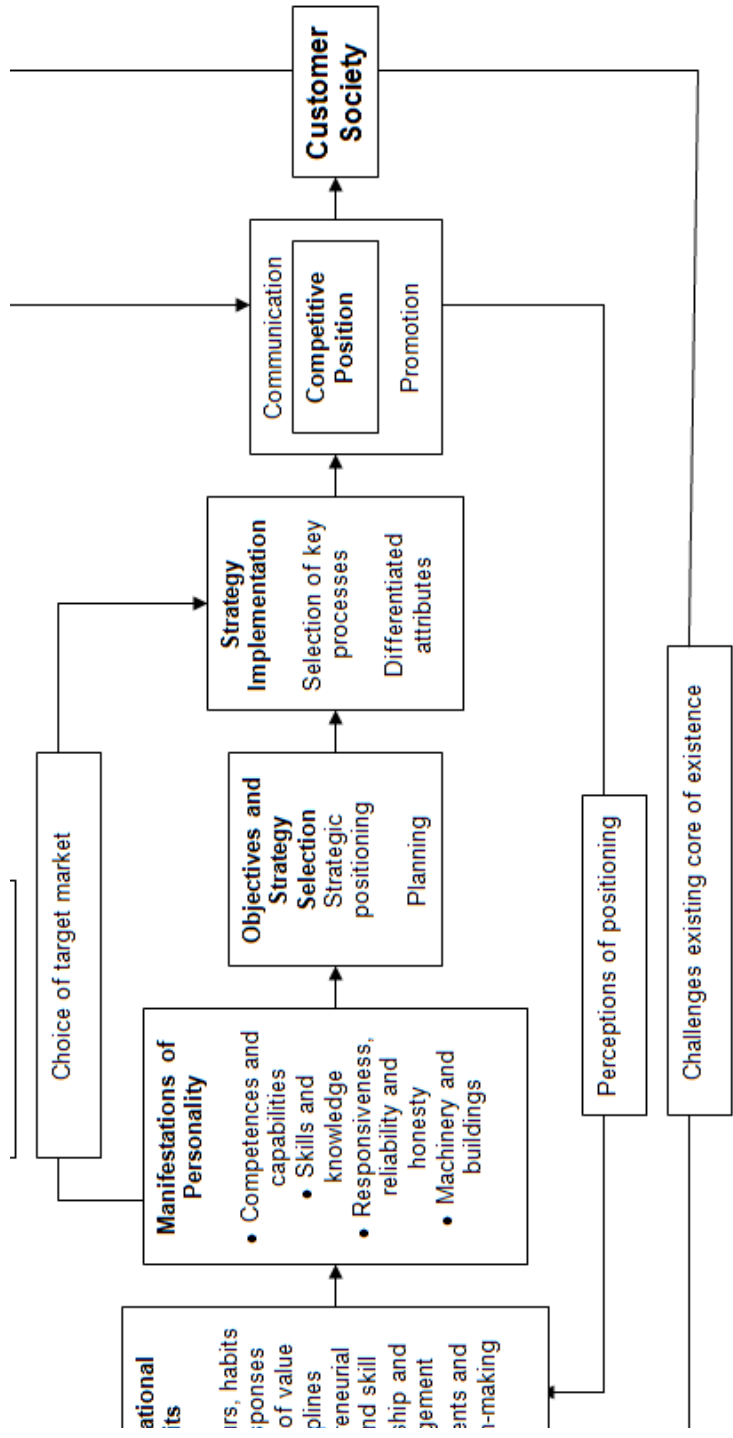
No differentiation from other printers and stationers exists or is sought except perhaps the questionable benefits of ancient and slower and costlier machinery; a lack of clear objectives for business and lack of positioning strategy leads to an inability to implement any chosen strategy alongside a deficiency of motivation (and ability perhaps) to identify markets and differentiate from competitors.

Competitive position

Higher costs, higher prices and lack of differentiation or clear selling points support poor yet affectionate perceptions of the business - described as “shaky” by largest customer.

Customer/ Society

Changes in customer needs cause reduction in sales over many years and further reductions predicted by largest customer into the future.



The study suggests that, whilst Ellson's (2004) model of principal drivers of strategic positioning and core of existence is indicative, the role of personal behaviour, beliefs, preferences and values of the senior manager(s) in the practice of strategic business management is an important symbiosis that cannot be ignored. The model in Figure 2 combines key contributory components and sub-headings suggested by the study to offer elucidation of the role of behavioural aspects of senior staff in the practice of strategic business management. Plainly the study is limited by the nature of the family business yet the tale would surely not be unrecognisable amongst many practitioners in other businesses. The influence of individual behaviours is tantamount in every aspect of the strategic and operational process of business.

Whilst owners and senior managers are usually judged by the ability to achieve and maintain higher profits, consider the suggestion of Babiak and Hare (2006) that psychopaths can be charming and manipulative, meet the criteria of good leadership in an environment where there is a tendency to hire those "who could shake the trees, rattle the cages, and get things done quickly", and offer "fast-paced, high-risk, high-profit environments". To criticise the Donaldson's as people in the business sense might be easy. Yet they are decent and honest folk. The study does perhaps highlight the different behaviours required to succeed in business in contrast to those behaviours at a societal level. Are different behavioural and personality traits required to manage a contemporary business environment? The question of what customers and society find acceptable in business managers is currently one topic of discussion in industries such as banking and finance. Some scholars are asking the same questions (cf. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel, 2010).

The current system embraces competition leading to winners and losers. Winners are accordingly congratulated and losers, well, who wants to be a loser? Yet scholars and practitioners alike need to explore and question the effect of behaviours of senior managers on business strategy and business outcomes. The questions: Who we are? Who do we think we are? Who do others think we are? Who we want to be? These are further important questions to be answered. Business Schools may be able to teach students the processes of management. What behaviours are we supposed to teach?

Now this is the Law of the Jungle -- as old and as true as the sky;

And the Wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the Wolf that shall break it must die.

As the creeper that girdles the tree-trunk the Law runneth forward and back --

For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.

Rudyard Kipling, Law of the Jungle 1894

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