

## **Boundaries**

(Structural Family Therapy) Boundaries are the interface between systems and subsystems. The concept of boundaries in families is used to define alignments within the family business , e.g. alignments of a siblings relative to the older generation, or alignments of family who work in the family's business, or alignments of divisions in the company. Boundaries are set by functions of the system, the implicit rules defining who participates in the system and how they can participate. Boundaries and the subsystems that they define in a family business may change over time or in response to a changing situation, e.g. the death of a family member, or the opening of a new store. Systemic boundaries are characterized as being diffuse, open or closed. Boundaries in a family business can also be distinguished on the basis of flexibility and rigidity. All of these terms describe how easily people come and go across the boundary.

Diffuse boundaries are extremely open with no barriers to entry while closed boundaries strictly define participation and access. Open boundaries are described as having the ability to define membership, while extending temporary access to non-members. A family that makes exaggerated claims that all their employees are "family" is defining a diffuse boundary, while a highly secretive Board of Directors that does not communicate with any non-board members would be an example having a closed boundary.

Rigid boundaries do not respond to changing situations while flexible boundaries do. For example, the willingness to use outsider advisors when a company enters a new market would be a sign of flexibility.

The process of succession in a family business tests the capacity of the system to define, redefine, and maintain functional boundaries around the subsystems of family, owners and management.

## **Closed Systems**

These are systems which are self-contained as compared to open ones which utilize free exchange with the external environment to alter internal functions, relationships, etc. A closed family business is organized to preserve the status quo and resist change. An example of this is that new ideas can only come from the founder.

## **Coalitions**

When two members of a triad work together to counteract the third person. Coalitions may not be stable and often shift to keep power somewhat distributed in the family business. An example of a coalition would be when the influence of an overbearing parent leads the other parent to join with a child to balance the power. This of course can be done at the psychological expense of the child.

## **Entitlement**

A condition in a person that results from the balance of fairness and trust in a relationship. Chronic states of entitlement are created in offspring by parents based on their capacity to care for their children. Constructive entitlement reflects a willingness to care about others based upon the experience of being cared about by ones parents. Destructive entitlement is based on the unwillingness to care about others and results from being mistreated, neglected or exploited by parents. Destructive entitlement can also result from "over-giving" of things by a parent while emotionally neglecting the child. Having a "chip on their shoulder", or "acting like the world owes them a living" are the way people describe destructive entitlement in others.

Expression of entitlement is not limited to the relationship in which it was engendered. The positive effects of constructive entitlement and the negative effects of destructive entitlement can have long lasting effects on all significant adult relationships.

Some of the more powerful sources of destructive entitlement arise from emotional, physical or sexual abuse of children by their parents, and/or chronic addiction in parents. Long standing destructive entitlement is typically the source of litigation between family members, although the focus of the litigation may only be a substitute issue for something more profound in the families past.

## **Ledger of Merits**

This concept reflects the balance of fairness and trust in a relationship between two people. This balance has strong influence on what is possible in that relationship. High trust relationships are more efficient than low trust ones where the imbalances resulting from past transactions cause constant vigilance and suspicion of the other's motives.

The basis of relational balance differs in symmetrical (brother-sister, husband-wife) and asymmetrical (parent-minor child, adult child-elderly parent). In the former balance is reached through roughly equal give and take over time between the parties. In the latter balance is based on what is equitable given the imbalance is power.

## **Merit**

The basis for self-validation earned in the process showing due consideration of others. The desire to earn merit in relationship with ones parent motivates children to earn their parents pride. The virtues that parents recognize and support influence the paths that their children have in earning merit. Earning merit in a relationship leads to license, authority and influence in relationships.

The outcome of succession is greatly influenced by the capacity the successor has to earn merit in both symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships in the business and family.

## **Multi-directed Partiality**

A relational posture assumed by a therapist, advisor or consultant that is meant to prevent the outsider from being drawn into the dysfunctional dynamics of the client system. Methodologically, multi-directed partiality takes the form of sequential identification with each member of the family. This is typically done by trying to empathize with and credit each person for their contributions, or attempts to contribute to the well being of their family. Even if they were misguided or inept.

Successful execution of multi-directed partiality earns merit and perception of trustworthiness for the advisor in relation to each family member.

## **Parentification**

The process of turning a child (even an adult child) into a functional parent of their own parent. There are situations where this is a normal adaptation to changes in the family, for instance when a parent becomes incapacitated by illness or old age. Parentification becomes destructive when it is in service to the parent's manipulation of their offspring's natural inclination to be devoted to their parents. Creating a split loyalty is one way to engender a destructive form of parentification.

### **Presenting Problem**

A term used to describe a condition that a family seeks outside help with, but which actually is a symptom of a more deep seated problem that the family is ashamed of, or unconscious of (see scapegoating). A family business may engage a consultant with a "presenting problem" concerning compensation of key employees, when they actually have a problem with an incompetent successor but are afraid to bring it up.

## **Split Loyalty**

A situation created by a parent or grand parent where a child must choose between their loyalties to both parents, or between a parent and a grand parent. It typically takes place when a parent or grand parent tries to manipulate the offspring onto the elders "side" in a controversial issue with another elder. This is a deeply damaging to experience to children whether adult or minors, that can lead to serious personality problems, depression or suicide.

## **Triangling**

The process that occurs when a third party is drawn into the relationship between two others to balance something in that dyadic relationship. That which is balanced usually has to do with excessive intimacy or over-connectedness, negative reactivity between the two, or emotional distance that strains distresses other members of the family.

Advisors and consultants can be easily triangulated into the emotional drama of two relatives, and often made a scapegoat as a result.

## **Scapegoating**

The process through which anxiety in the family is reduced by the chronic symptomatic behavior of one family member. A classic example would be a pattern where parents who are near divorce are drawn closer together whenever their child becomes depressed to the point of requiring hospitalization. In this circumstance it is predictable that a fight between parents results in a hospitalization of the child. Thus the symptoms of the child become the glue that holds the parents marriage together. The symptoms of the scapegoat in the family are often referred to as "the presenting problem" of the family, behind which the family members may hide.

### **Trustworthiness**

A form of merit that accrues on the side of a predictable, responsible, competent and considerate partner in a relationship. Trustworthiness is earned over time through the ability of two people to balance the process of give-and-take between reliable partners.

Trustworthiness is seen as more important than love in family business relationships. A relationship with great love but without trustworthiness is usually a destructive relationship. In contrast a trustworthy relationship between two people who do not necessarily love each other is very durable and a resource to both parties.

High trust families, organizations and cultures are far more efficient than low trust systems in that members do not need expend energy to protect themselves from other parts of their own system. Low trust systems are typically more anxious, more prone to crisis, and less capable at planning and decision making, and implementation.

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