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Learning bad habits across generations: How negative imprints affect human resource management in the family firm☆

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ABSTRACT

Organizational learning can be a key shared value that perpetuates the family's and the family firm's culture across generations. Imprinting theory helps to explain the impact that lessons learned and transmitted can have on the development of human resources in the family firm. However, the results of imprinting may not necessarily be positive, particularly when imprinting manifests itself in negative processes and expectations. Whereas imprinting and organizational learning are often associated with a "positive halo effect," they have the potential to result in negative behaviors and deleterious firm-level outcomes. Employing imprinting theory as a framework, we highlight the potential dark side of imprinting within the family firm context and how it can damage human resource efforts and threaten company performance and firm survival. Finally, we suggest how bad habits may be broken and replaced with more effective routines so as to ensure the family firm's continuity and success.

A little learning is a dangerous thing;
drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
there shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
and drinking largely sobers us again

(Pope, 1711)

1. Introduction

Imprinting – the perspective that what happened to people and organizations during past crucial events holds a large sway on how they behave in the present and the future – is an important mechanism to explain how individuals and firms gather resources and pursue opportunities that help the organization survive, perform and grow (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013; Simsek, Fox, & Heavey, 2015). Research that takes an imprinting perspective has generally focused on potentially positive outcomes such as entrepreneurial legacy and innovation in family firms (Jaskiewicz, Combs, & Rau, 2015; Kammerlander, Dessi, Bird, Flori, & Murru, 2015), entrepreneurial network partnerships (Milanov & Shepherd, 2013), venture capital investment in new industries (Dimov, de Holan, & Milanov, 2012),

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sustaining of multi-family-owned businesses over several generations (Pieper, Smith, Kudlats, & Astrachan, 2015), human resource values in early-growth stage firms (Leung, Foo, & Chaturvedi, 2013), human resource management changes and practices (e.g., Kim, Bae, & Yu, 2013; Kim & Gao, 2010), and organizational learning's role in the survival of new firms (Dencker, Gruber, & Shah, 2009).

As research interest grows regarding imprinting and its impact on entrepreneurship, family firms and human resource management, there has not been as great an emphasis on how the imprinting process might be associated with negative consequences for the organization and its members (for a limited discussion of negative effects of imprinting see Boeker, 1989; Braun & Sharma, 2007; Leung et al., 2013). This is especially true when organizational learning and imprinting are considered in the context of the family firm; most of the relevant literature focuses on how learning aids development and functioning of the family firm, in areas such as stewardship (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2015) and continuity (Konopaski, Jack, & Hamilton, 2015; Pieper et al., 2015), particularly how the imprint that occurs among members of the founding family affects how family members subsequently learn and engage in behavior they believe will help their personal success in the family firm. The purpose of this paper is to address a missing element of imprinting theory and research by examining what may be considered by some to be "appropriate" behavior in the context of family relationships and how this behavior relates to the imprinting of bad habits that are difficult to break and that carry with them the possibility of dysfunctional human resource consequences and the ultimate destruction of the firm.

The familiar statistic that family firms fail to pass to the next generation at alarming rates is well known, and many explanations have been offered (for a review on succession see De Massis, Chua, & Chrisman, 2008). We propose that one reason many family firms wither as they pass from generation to generation is a human resource failure that involves the negative effects of imprinting in the family and intragenerational and intergenerational learning that follows from the imprint. We explain the process by which this dysfunctional behavior occurs and is perpetuated over time, and suggest that imprinting originating in relationships among family members can carry into the family firm and evolve into learned shared values that have a negative impact. We discuss how a family culture transfers to the family firm and influences human resource management (HRM) practices such as selection, training and development, performance appraisal and compensation. We identify culture as the overarching element that links the transmission of attitudes, values and behaviors to the family firm. The question of how family members in a family firm learn between and across generations and what they learn locates the imprint of a family firm's culture in the framework of the family, revealing the potential for imprinting to contribute to the dark side of family firm dynamics.

This paper extends imprinting theory to the family firm and human resource management literatures by proposing how a negative manifestation of imprinting in the family subsystem then transfers to the family firm to affect HRM practices. We suggest the roots of potentially negative behaviors and values such as entitlement, injustice and parental altruism are imprinted early in family relationships and can evolve into dysfunction through a learning process on the part of family members, owners and employees. In advancing a model of imprinting in the family firm, we propose that negative family dynamics make their way into the organization through a family culture that develops into the family *firm's* culture and is perpetuated through transgenerational learning that imprints attitudes, values and behaviors on current and future family employees.

2. Human resource management in the family firm

Whereas definitions of the family firm vary, an accepted definition that distinguishes family from non-family firms posits that the family firm is "a business governed and/or managed with the intention to shape and/or pursue the vision of the business held by a dominant coalition controlled by members of the same family or a small number of families in a manner that is potentially sustainable across generations of the family or families (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999: 25)." However, within this broad definition, it is important to acknowledge that a key issue in researching and theorizing about family business is the heterogeneity of family firms; in other words, family firms can differ widely based upon factors such as organizational goals, governance structures, founders' values, firm size, cultural background and type of industry (Chua, Chrisman, Steier, & Rau, 2012). This implies that boundary conditions exist when attempting to evaluate the impact of family member behavior on the human resource practices of the family firm. Whereas the model we propose has some application to all family firms, we believe it would be most relevant to a growing family firm in which formal HRM practices have been established but family members still have a large role in the leadership and management of the business. The model may also be relevant as the family firm engages in a professionalization process by hiring more non-family managers and employees and thus potentially being subject to dysfunctional bifurcation bias, "whereby family employees are treated by default as highly valuable, firm-specific assets, being 'on the inside for the long run,' and as loyal stewards with a long-term commitment to the firm, while nonfamily employees are dealt with as easily substitutable, commodity-like, short-term assets, and as self-serving agents who ultimately remain 'outsiders' even if used/internalized temporarily by the firm" (Verbeke & Kano, 2012: 189).

Managing human resources in many family firms is complex because family members often participate simultaneously in family and business interactions at home and at work. The lack of boundaries between family and business leads to unclear demarcations of authority and responsibilities that complicate family members' interactions in the family firm (Cruz, Firfiray, & Gómez-Mejía, 2011). The contradictions in institutional norms that govern behavior and expectations in the family and business further confound HRM in family firms (Lansberg, 1983). Whereas the family's primary function is to nurture and care for its members based on an individual's needs, the firm's primary function is to successfully compete in the marketplace, which requires its members to perform and excel in their jobs. In the early years, a family firm often benefits from the institutional overlap between family and business because the family is compelled to assist the founder with his/her needs by offering human capital, social capital and financial capital (Lansberg, 1983; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). However, as the family firm grows it often requires the establishment of formal HRM practices that conflict with family norms that place emphasis on belonging and loyalty rather than merit (Lansberg, 1983; Verbeke & Kano, 2012).

HRM refers to the process of attracting, compensating, training and retaining a workforce that supports and advances the mission, goals and strategies of an organization. In line with research that proposes that HRM should be seen as a bundle of practices because the combination of these practices best reflects the firm leaders' management philosophy and interactions between firm leaders and employees (e.g., Subramony, 2009; Toh, Morgeson, & Campion, 2008), we consider selection, compensation, training and retention as bundled HRM practices. Although family firms tend to employ less formal HRM practices than nonfamily firms (De Kok, Uhlaner, & Thurik, 2006), formalization of these practices can help to develop strong relationships between family firm leaders and employees (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2014). Yet, establishing HRM practices does not ensure effective human resource management in family firms due to problems in monitoring and disciplining the conduct of family employees (Chrisman, Chua, Kellermanns, & Chang, 2007; Schulze, Lubatkin, Dino, & Buchholtz, 2001). Because norms from the family transfer to the business, family firm leaders often feel compelled to offer family members jobs and promotions despite their lack of capabilities (Eddleston & Kidwell, 2012b). Family employees can also come to expect preferential treatment and rewards due to their family status. Over time, negative patterns of behavior such as these may become routine in a family firm, creating negative imprints. Therefore, it appears that as the family firm matures and grows, the institutional overlap between the family and business can cause serious problems for the firm's HRM. Below, we argue that imprinting effects that occur in the family domain may explain why some family firms develop harmful firm cultures that damage the effectiveness of HRM practices.

3. The imprinting process in brief

The concept of imprinting, introduced into organization studies more than 50 years ago (Stinchcombe, 1965), considers how, in a sensitive time in the founding process, entities adopt elements of their environment and these elements persist well into the subsequent life of the organization (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). Whereas its major focus originated in the study of industries and organizations, imprinting has been adapted across a wide variety of theories (e.g., organizational ecology and institutional theory), research areas (network analysis, entrepreneurship, strategy, careers), and levels of analysis (individuals, teams, firms, communities and industries) (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013; Simsek et al., 2015).

The focus of this paper, which takes a psychological (or individual-level) approach to imprinting, considers how experiences of individuals early in their lives and careers impact their subsequent behavior (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). Although distinct from other learning processes, individual-level imprinting is embedded in broader learning theory in the sense that beliefs and behaviors are shaped early on during the formative years of an individual's life (McEvily, Jaffee, & Tortoriello, 2012). While previous research has focused on events that occur at the beginning of an individual's career that have lasting impact on behavior (Tilcsik, 2014), our consideration of the phenomenon locates the potential psychological imprint through family interactions that happen long before the family member enters the firm. This is in line with research that has shown that growing up in a particular social class has a lasting imprint on individuals that later impacts the individuals' tendency to take business risks (Kish-Gephart & Tochman Campbell, 2015). Accordingly, we propose that the learning that occurs via psychological imprinting in the family as children interact with their parents can later affect attitudes and behaviors in the family firm. Our extension of imprinting theory also captures the learning that takes place as new employees enter a firm and are socialized into its practices. When employees are new to their jobs and have little prior experience, they are more open and receptive to learning new skills as well as work practices (Briscoe & Kellogg, 2011; Tilcsik, 2014). As they continue through their careers they become less disposed to imprinting in part because they are less open to learning (McEvily et al., 2012). Thus, imprints that are adopted early on are less likely to decay over time than those that are introduced later, suggesting that imprinting that occurs in the family domain is deeply engrained.

In their recent review of imprinting research, Simsek et al. (2015) proposed that there are three processes by which an imprint is formed: "(a) *genesis*, whereby the characteristics of the imprinters (the sources of imprints) and the imprinted (the target entity that bears an imprint) interact in ways that culminate in the formation of an imprint; (b) *metamorphosis*, the evolutionary processes or dynamics by which imprints persist, amplify, decay, and/or transform; and (c) *manifestations*, the influence of the imprint on entity characteristics and the direct and indirect effects of the imprint on entity survival and performance" (Simsek et al., 2015: 289).

We apply this multiple process approach to the family and the family firm, first considering how potentially negative behaviors and values such as entitlement, injustice and parental altruism are imprinted on the family unit (genesis). We focus on these behaviors and values because research into family firm dysfunction has documented their particularly strong connection to negative outcomes such as free riding and shirking, family member incompetence and the presence of a family member who is an impediment to the firm (Bennett, Thau, & Scouten, 2005; Eddleston & Kidwell, 2012a, 2012b; Kidwell, Kellermanns, & Eddleston, 2012). We describe how these behaviors and values learned by family members transfer to the family firm and may evolve into a family firm culture in which the values of the family are imprinted on the organization and the people connected to it (metamorphosis). Then, we identify how specific imprints on a family firm's culture can result in human resource failures, resulting in negative impacts on interpersonal relations, firm financial performance and prospects for firm survival into the next generation (manifestations). Finally we discuss the need for re-imprinting in the family firm and how these bad habits might be broken and readjusted to positive practices in the firm. The model and these relationships are illustrated in Fig. 1.

Following from previous discourse regarding imprinting (e.g., Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013; Simsek et al., 2015), we propose that characteristics of the family firm are shaped by actions and behaviors that occurred within the family unit, both as parent-child relationships develop over time and also during significant moments of family interaction. These characteristics endure even as the environment of the family firm and the make-up of the family changes, and as the firm grows and formalizes its HRM practices as it hires more non-family employees into important positions. Most of the studies included in Simsek et al.'s (2015) review of the imprinting literature focus on four key aspects of firm-level imprints: cognitions including strategies and learning, structure including interactions with employees, culture including transmission of norms and values, and resources including status and knowledge

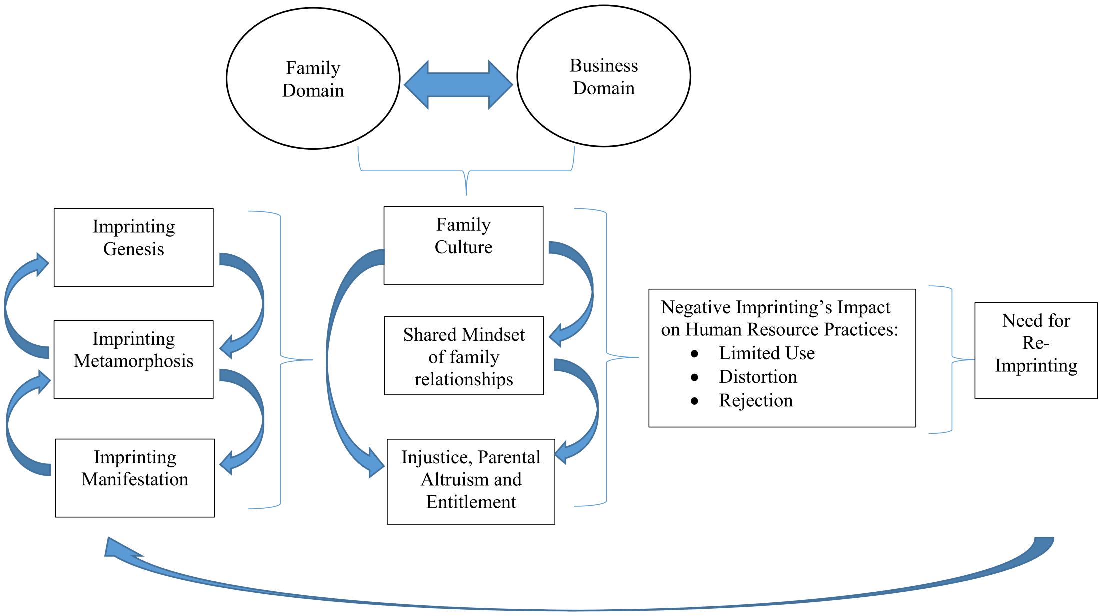

Fig. 1. The dark side of imprinting in the family firm.

(Simsek et al., 2015). Indeed, it has been suggested that later generation family members lead the family firm in accordance with early established values, traditions and routines that reflect the family's culture (Eddleston, 2008; Hall, Melin, & Nordqvist, 2001). Further, because the family, in most instances, was established before the firm, the family is expected to have a significant impact on family member interactions in the firm (Lumpkin, Martin, & Vaughn, 2008). As such, firm-level aspects have the potential to be imprinted by the family on the family firm. Our imprinting framework differs from the founder's shadow concept in which the founder attempts to stay involved in the business by exerting influence on the next generation (Davis & Harveston, 1999) in that we consider how attitudes, values and behaviors learned in the family domain are potentially imprinted on the family firm by different family members of different generations.

4. Genesis: negative imprinting from the parent-child relationship

> *This was a family where the parenting regime was harsh – authoritarian rather than authoritative in the jargon of family theory. Fred Sr had the frontier spirit, and had become an entrepreneurial dragon, forging his way forward through calculated risk taking and a succession of legal and business battles with Big Oil. His four sons were brought up under a strict disciplinarian regime, and were expected to work for the firm through their holidays and at all times to live up to the very highest standards of behavior. The eldest son, Frederick, like Cain, earned his father's extreme disfavor over an alleged act that the father strongly disapproved of. Despite Frederick's strenuous protestations of innocence, Fred Sr., like a vengeful deity, concluded that he wished to sever all connections with his son, transferring his bequest on to his other offspring. The second son, Charles was the most ambitious; driven and hardworking, like his father. As a youngster he pushed his brothers around when they played a game they knew as 'King of the Hill'. The youngest two brothers, David and William (Billy), were twins. Of the two, Billy was the forceful character, and bridled at the tough treatment he received from his dad, as well as the bullying he received from his older brother Charles.*
>
> (Gordon & Nicholson, 2008: 39)

As is the case in many families, the parenting strategy in Fred Koch's family and the incident involving his eldest son left an imprint on the children who subsequently engaged in conflicts that carried over from the family into the business. That business evolved into one of the largest family-owned private firms in the world, Koch Industries, but not without harsh conflict among the brothers of the second generation. This case is not unusual as parent-child relationships have been posited to have adverse effects on subsequent behavior in the family firm. For example, differentiation in how children are treated before they enter the family firm influences each child's behavior within the firm, thus provoking dysfunctional behavior by less-favored offspring (Eddleston & Kidwell, 2012b). Attachment theorists highlight how the parent-child relationship influences a child's moral development, conscience, and acceptance of parental values (Laible & Thompson, 2000). Children in weak parent-child relationships exhibit greater behavior problems (Richmond & Stocker, 2008) and less self-restraint than those in stronger relationships (Laible & Thompson, 2000). A distressed family, characterized by weak parent-child relationships, therefore sets the stage for future antisocial conduct by adult children (Bullock, Bank, & Burraston, 2002).

Although many parents engage in and model behaviors that are designed to assist children in coping with life in a positive way (Volling & Blandon, 2006), other parents model behavior that has negative effects. For example, numerous studies identify conflict as a central element of family life that shapes a broad range of parent-child processes (Schlomer, Giudice, & Ellis, 2011), and parents' modeling of certain behaviors has been linked to the development of anxiety and destructive behaviors in children (e.g., Fisak & Grills-Taquechel, 2007). Parents' values and behaviors contribute to a shared family culture in which certain norms are consistently articulated and perpetuated. Even as the external environment changes, social norms are enduring from one generation to the next such as respect for authority, strength of social bonds and communication styles (Maccoby, 2015). Because individuals tend to model their parenting style after their own parents, a family's culture tends to resist change (Baumrind, 1991; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Wu, 1991). As a result, the family is considered the most enduring socializing institution that influences a person throughout his or her life through social learning (Maccoby, 2015). The socialization of family employees of family firms may be particularly strong and enduring given the central role the family continues to play both at work and home.

Social learning theory and its successor social cognitive theory help to explain how human functioning is a result of interactions among behavior, cognitive and personal factors, environmental events and the observation of others and modeling their actions (Bandura, 1977, 1986). By observing one's parents, individuals develop an internal working model of relationships that affects the formation and maintenance of relationships for the duration of the individual's life (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Through socialization in the family, individuals learn the attitudes and values as well as the behaviors, modes of thought and habits of the family system to which they belong (Bragg, 1976). Sometimes referred to as the 'family paradigm' (Reiss, 1981), a family's culture reflects the family's shared belief system whereby common values and role expectations are established (Hall et al., 2001; Lumpkin et al., 2008). Through the family culture, a shared sense of reality is defined that guides family members' behavior and helps them contribute to the social order by fulfilling the family's expectations (Maccoby, 2015). For example, family systems theory explains how a family instils attitudes, values and behaviors that support independence vs. dependency, and individuation vs. togetherness (e.g., Friedman, 1991; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Through these patterns of behavior that tend to be emulated by each generation (Baumrind, 1991; Simons et al., 1991), a family's attitudes, values and behaviors are passed from one generation to the next.

As noted, the outcomes are not always positive in their implications for the family. For instance, dominant and authoritarian parents create family cultures where children's viewpoints and opinions are discounted (Baumrind, 1991). Permissive parents who overly stress togetherness foster family cultures that avoid confrontation and encourage children to remain dependent on their parents (Baumrind, 1991). Further, the belief systems and patterns of communication that underscore the parent-child relationship tend to persist through time by the continuation of family traditions, rituals and role expectations. In this way, a family imprints children with a way of thinking, feeling, judging and acting that they carry into adulthood. As such, the imprinting from family life marks family members in a way that encourages the perpetuation of a family's culture.

Proposition 1. *The parent-child relationship imprint contributes to the perpetuation of family attitudes, values and behaviors through the transfer and maintenance of the family's culture.*

5. Metamorphosis: imprinting, learning and culture in the family firm

> *Founder John Rigas and son Timothy of Adelphia Communications Corp. were recently convicted of conspiracy, bank fraud and securities fraud for looting that cable company of $100 million and deceiving investors by hiding $2.3 billion in debt. By diverting cash to family-owned entities, they drove Adelphia into bankruptcy. As their personal automobile collections, timberland purchases and other extravagances grew out of control, Timothy limited his father to withdrawals of $1 million a month. This father-and-son bonding will soon include incarceration. …There is precedent for the generations working together toward nefarious ends. For example, the infamous Ma Barker and her four sons became public enemies in the 1930s by robbing banks and kidnapping millionaires. One difference: Ma Barker and her boys were honest enough to admit they were crooks.*
>
> (Leckey, 2004: 7)

John and Timothy Rigas demonstrate how a family's culture, one that encouraged entitlement and extravagance, can transfer to the family firm. As father and founder, John Rigas created a shared family culture whereby the family viewed Adelphia as their own, private asset to do with as they pleased (Kidwell, 2008). Rather than establish a family firm culture that espoused stewardship for the firm's assets, the Rigas family behaved as parasites who felt entitled to Adelphia's resources and wealth. Whereas the Rigas family is an extreme example of how the family can create a family firm culture that ultimately impedes the business, stories abound about generations of conflict, inequity and entitlement infecting family firms (Gordon & Nicholson, 2008; Kidwell, Eddleston, Cater, & Kellermanns, 2013; Litz & Turner, 2013). How the founder views the relationship between his/her family and the business is therefore likely to influence how other family members view the firm and how elements from the family's culture imprint the culture of the family firm. Indeed, how founders view the role of their business in their family is believed to influence how the next generation of family members are introduced and socialized into the family firm (García-Álvarez, López-Sintas, & Saldaña Gonzalvo, 2002). Over time, a stable, dominant culture is established in the family firm that is rooted in the family's beliefs, values, goals and history (Hall et al., 2001).

As the family's culture breathes life into the family firm's culture, organizational routines, principles and values are established that reflect those of the family. Symbols, stories and metaphors about the family and family firm reflect shared values that guide family members through a learning process that aligns the family firm's culture with that of the family. In the process of transmitting values from the family to the family firm, family employees develop a shared way of thinking (Hall et al., 2001). Long-developed family recipes for decision-making and pervasive ways of thinking are revealed as conscious and unconscious mechanisms that transmit family values to the family firm. Although the business's leadership may change, a family firm's culture is enduring because the basic attitudes, values and behaviors that represent the firm's culture are taught to new family members, maintaining the cultural imprint (Eddleston, 2008). Further, since imprinting in family firms occurs at both work and home, a family firm's culture is particularly persistent and amplified by the family's culture over time (Lumpkin et al., 2008). Because of the lack of boundaries between work and family, family employees' commitment to the business is shaped by how they were first introduced to the business and how business responsibilities were characterized by the previous generation (Kelly, Athanassiou, & Crittenden, 2000). This imprinting that occurs at both work and home often leads family employees to accept, and not question, structures and rules established in the family firm (Hollander & Bukowitz, 1999). In addition, because the family system stresses stability and homeostasis, when a family member strays too strongly from the family's ascribed culture, the rest of the family tends to exert pressure and impose sanctions that return the family to its stable, 'normal' state (Lumpkin et al., 2008). As such, family employees tend to adopt and maintain the values of the family firm that serve to form the basis for firm policies, practices and actions (Eddleston, 2008).

Unfortunately, in some cases, the values, attitudes and behaviors transmitted from the family to the family firm create a deleterious firm culture. Yet, the socialization and learning that occurs in the family lead family members to see the family firm's culture as 'normal' and to not question it (Kidwell et al., 2013). For example, family cultures that stress filial loyalty, i.e., children's obedience and obligation toward their parents, may push children to feel obligated to join the family firm despite their career interests or capabilities. Family firms that place family needs above those of the business are likely to display nepotism in hiring and promotions, provide unjust and unearned compensation, and retain family employees despite poor performance (Eddleston & Kidwell, 2012a, 2012b). Family firms have also shown negative patterns of behavior across generations regarding accountability to shareholders and the delay of the succession process (Gordon & Nicholson, 2008; Kidwell, 2008). Although our focus here is on the learning and transmission of negative values, attitudes and behaviors from the family to the family firm, it should be noted that a virtuous relationship can also exist. For instance, families that model trust provide the foundation for moral behavior that imprints principles of reciprocity and exchange in relationships (Bubolz, 2001). In turn, a family culture that values trust and reciprocity encourages adult behaviors reflecting cooperation and coordination (Bubolz, 2001). Additionally, research suggests that families that value learning foster family firm cultures that nurture entrepreneurship across generations (Hall et al., 2001; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). Therefore, it appears that family and family firm cultures work in concert to encourage family employees to either see the family and business as having a synergistic relationship, or a parasitic relationship whereby family members see the business as existing for their benefit.

Proposition 2. *Through interaction in both the family and business domains, family employees learn to develop a shared mindset that reflects the family's relationship with the firm, thus explaining why some families view the relationship as synergistic and others as parasitic.*

6. Manifestations: the dark side's effect on family firms

> *Luray Caverns is the third most-visited cave in the United States, trailing only Mammoth Cave in Kentucky and Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. Those are national parks. Luray Caverns is what is called a show cave, defined by the National Caves Association as "developed for public visitation." In other words, show caves are there to make money…. The Graves siblings, two brothers and four sisters, are now the owners of this empire, what can properly be called the Luray Caverns fortune, worth about $20 million. It is a family business, run by a family that can't get along. It is hard to pinpoint exactly when they began fighting over money, control and perhaps the future of the Caverns. Maybe it was after their parents invested with one of their brothers-in-law in an auto-parts store that then went belly up. Or maybe it was when a sister put together a comfortable retirement package and golden parachute for herself. Or maybe it was after the siblings clashed over the management of the trusts that controlled their inheritance. More recently, they've been in U.S. District Court in Harrisonburg, where the three youngest Graves siblings sued two of their older sisters and said the women had disqualified themselves as beneficiaries of the family trusts and should not receive any shares of the Luray Caverns Corp.*
>
> (Otterbourg, 2013)

At this point, we consider the question of how the negative imprint, which has morphed into an element of the family firm's culture, is manifested in general themes that result in individual behavior that carries over into and affects the operation of the firm. We elaborate on the outcomes that result from these family dynamics and explain how they become negative performance outcomes, particularly in the realm of human resource management. In so doing, we look at manifestations of imprints such as entitlement, injustice, and parental altruism, and how they can become "bad habits" that adversely affect the family firm. Outcomes connected to the human resource function can include anti-social behavior, family member impediment to firm operations, discrimination in hiring/treatment of employees, damaging nepotism, abusive supervision, and free riding by family members. Ultimately these dysfunctional behaviors can threaten firm performance and survival.

In the case of Luray Caverns, the author mentions several critical incidents and potential imprints that shaped the attitude among the brothers and sisters that they, rather than their siblings, were entitled to take ownership, control and rewards from the firm. Entitlement is an employee's belief that he/she deserves benefits from the organization based on a perception of contributions. Entitlements can be positive when they are based on fair contributions and aligned with business needs (Heath, Knez, & Camerer, 1993), but they can be negative when employees think they deserve rewards and privileges that are not merited by performance. A family can also create a culture that supports entitlement by espousing a sense of privilege and superiority that leads members to feel that they deserve extra benefits (Bennett et al., 2005). Entitlement is complicated in family firms because the family institution is geared toward meeting the needs of family members (Van der Heyden, Blondel, & Carlock, 2005). In particular, whereas families allocate resources based on need, businesses are meant to allocate resources based on merit and performance. Thus, when a culture of entitlement imprints within a family firm and thus, family members believe they deserve more benefits because of their family status, problems are likely to ensue.

Whereas an effective business distributes its resources to reward individual performance and contributions, a family firm can develop a culture of entitlement in which family members expect the firm to allocate resources in the same manner as the family (Bennett et al., 2005; Lansberg, 1983). For example, an entitlement culture may lead family members to believe that firm resources are theirs to do with as they wish, because they have a residual claim on the family firm (Schulze et al., 2001). Accordingly, family firms with a culture of entitlement may imprint family employees with a mindset that causes them to focus more on what the firm owes them instead of what they owe the firm.

In turn, family firms with a culture of entitlement are more likely to have HRM practices that give special privileges and opportunities to family employees over nonfamily employees. Indeed, research shows that some family firms have significant differences in the HRM practices utilized for family vs. nonfamily employees (Astrachan & Kolenko, 1994). Whereas nonfamily employees are subject to the firm's compensation policies and performance appraisals, family employees rarely participated in such HRM practices. Research also shows that while the training nonfamily employees receive tends to be based on firm-specific needs, family employees tend to be trained based on their individually-desired career development needs (Matlay, 2002). Many family firms also have compensation systems (Gómez-Mejía, Núñez-Nickel, & Gutierrez, 2001; Poza, Alfred, & Maheshawi, 1997) as well as career ladders and tenures that vary between family and nonfamily employees (Cruz et al., 2011; McConaughy, 2000). Although not all family firms have such divergent HRM practices for family and nonfamily employees, we propose that those with a culture of entitlement subject nonfamily employees to more formalized HRM practices than family employees.

Proposition 3. *Families imprinted with a sense of entitlement will be less likely to use formalized HRM practices (selection, compensation, appraisal, retention) for family employees than for nonfamily employees.*

A family firm can also perpetuate a sense of injustice among family employees due to actions that took place as they grew up that bred feelings of inequality, favoritism and competition that then transferred to the firm (Eddleston & Kidwell, 2012a, 2012b). Children often compare the way their parents treated them and their siblings, which leads to relationship problems and feelings of injustice later in life (Dunn, Stocker, & Plomin, 1990; Kowal, Krull, & Kramer, 2006). Many family firms suffer from problems of injustice (Barnett & Kellermanns, 2006) as family members carry with them feelings of unfairness and inequality into the family firm. Such families often have niches comprised of ingroup and outgroup members that, in turn, expect such patterns of favoritism to transfer to the family firm (Eddleston & Kidwell, 2012b). Additionally, a sense of injustice can be imprinted on a family firm due to problems in institutional overlap between the family and business. More specifically, when the family norm takes precedence and family employees are treated equally regardless of their contributions to the family firm, a sense of injustice is likely to ensue for those who have made greater contributions and sacrifices (Friedman, 1991). Injustice can also be imprinted in a family firm when family employees expect the family firm to abide by family norms of support, care, forgiveness and nurturance when applying HRM procedures (Lansberg, 1983).

As such, a sense of injustice can form within and permeate a family firm culture because family employees compare themselves to other relatives based on their status at work as well as their status in the family (Rosenblatt, de Mik, Anderson, & Johnson, 1985). In addition, norms and values of justice vary in the family system and the business system, which can spark incidents of injustice. Whereas equality is the dominant justice norm in the family, in that each family member should receive an equal share of resources and opportunities, in the business the dominant justice norm is merit whereby rewards should be distributed based on contributions. Further, due to preferential treatment of family employees, nonfamily employees often express feelings of injustice in family firms (Barnett & Kellermanns, 2006; Van der Heyden et al., 2005). Finally, injustice can be engrained in a family firm when authority and power are given to family employees based on their ascribed family position as opposed to their achieved status (Dyer, 1994). Thus, while injustice can manifest in a family firm's culture in multiple ways, its roots are based in the incompatibility of family and business norms that bleed into the family firm.

In turn, a family firm culture that supports a sense of injustice may be harmful to the firm's HRM practices. Studies on justice have shown that employees care a great deal about fairness and withdraw their commitment from organizations they see as unfair (Greenberg, 1993; McLean Parks, Kidder, & Gallagher, 1998). Feelings of injustice lead individuals to punish those whom they see as unfair (Loewenstein, Thompson, & Bazerman, 1989) by reducing inputs or increasing outcomes to achieve justice (McLean Parks et al., 1998). Research also suggests that when violations of HRM practices occur in family firms, employees are likely to seek retributive justice through negative behaviors or passive resistance (Van der Heyden et al., 2005). For families with strong ingroups and outgroups, individuals often participate in self-promoting strategies and competitive behaviors (Desmarais & Lerner, 1989) suggesting that in the family firm setting HRM practices such as selection and compensation may be distorted or ignored to appease such favoritism and rivalry. HRM practices may also be ignored by family employees when they feel they deserve more benefits either because they are family, thus invoking family norms, or because they have contributed more to the firm than others, thus invoking business norms. Key outcomes associated with feelings of injustice are withdrawal of participation, reduced commitment, and dysfunctional behavior (Kidwell et al., 2013; Van der Heyden et al., 2005). This leads us to propose that family firm cultures imprinted with a sense of injustice are likely to have their HRM practices deviated from and/or ignored by family employees.

Proposition 4. *Families imprinted with a sense of injustice are likely to distort and reject HRM practices (selection, compensation, appraisal, retention) thus promoting dysfunctional behaviors in the family firm.*

Parental altruism is another important phenomenon that can be imprinted within the family and then enter the family firm as a learned behavior that becomes an element of the firm's culture. Instances of parents being overly generous toward their children can later encourage the children to remain dependent on their parents and shirk their responsibilities within the family firm (Schulze, Lubatkin, & Dino, 2003b). Altruism can be very dangerous when it becomes engrained in the family firm because it encourages parents to continue to provide unwarranted resources to their children regardless of the child's contribution to the firm (Van den Berghe & Carchon, 2003). Further, because parents' perceptions of their children tend to be biased, altruism hampers their ability to effectively monitor and discipline their children (Lubatkin, Durand, & Ling, 2007). When parents do recognize a problem with their children's behavior, parental altruism often prevents them from correcting or punishing their children (Bernheim & Stark, 1988).

There are several potentially negative impacts of parental altruism on a family firm's HRM practices. Parental altruism can encourage parents to hire family members who are of low quality or ill-suited to the family firm and to also offer promotions and rewards irrespective of family employees' job performance (Burkart, Pannunzi, & Shleifer, 2003; Lansberg, 1983; Lubatkin et al., 2007). When parental altruism is strong in a family firm, family members learn to expect firm leaders to be overly generous causing them to believe their needs should be fully met by the firm, similar to how their needs are met by the family. For example, parents who spoil their children and allow them to have privileges they otherwise would not receive, encourage their children to become dysfunctional (Eddleston & Kidwell, 2012a). Furthermore, because altruistic parents seldom provide constructive appraisal of their work performance, these children may not perceive their poor behavior as wrong, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle that threatens the future of the family firm. Because family members are more tolerant and forgiving of one another than they are of nonfamily employees (Fitness, 2015), parental altruism tends to limit any type of corrective actions or repercussions children receive for their dysfunction behaviors in the family firm (Bennett et al., 2005; Eddleston & Kidwell, 2012b). Finally, parental altruism can also cause problems with retention. Whereas non-family members who dislike their organizations or perceive a lack of fit are likely to leave their jobs (Graen, Liden, & Hoel, 1982), parental altruism may lead poor performing or disgruntled family members to stay with the family firm because they believe they will be taken care of by the parents. Parental altruism can also cause parents to use excessive enticements to retain family members and prevent them from leaving the family firm. Therefore, it appears that parental altruism encourages family firm leaders to manipulate HRM practices to benefit their children working in the firm.

Proposition 5. *Families imprinted with strong parental altruism are likely to manipulate HRM practices (selection, compensation, appraisal, retention) so as to benefit their adult-children working in the family firm.*

7. Reimprinting: breaking bad habits in the family and firm

The uniqueness of the family subsystem in the family firm context is the genesis of bad behavior that occurs in the parent-child relationship, perhaps long before the child actually works with the parents in the firm. These behaviors evolve into bad habits through the mechanisms of learning and culture in the family and the family firm. Finally, as we have shown, the phenomena of entitlement, perceived injustice and parental altruism can have deleterious effects on the human resource management functions of the firm and threaten firm performance and survival. The bad behavior that occurs early on might be likened to bad habits once it takes hold, and here we discuss how these bad habits might be addressed. Two main strategies that are used to modify habits are implementation intentions in which new behavioral responses are established by linking cues to an alternative response in an effort to supersede an undesired habitual response (Adriaanse, Gollwitzer, De Ridder, de Wit, & Kroese, 2011) and context modification in which a situation is changed so as to disrupt cues to habitual action and create opportunities to modify habits (Fritz & Cutchin, 2016). We suggest that both of these strategies are potential means to hasten the decay of a negative imprinted behavior.

As the family business grows through generations, family and business subsystems gradually draw apart from each other. This potentially lessens the positive and negative family dynamics that can have an impact on the business, yet a strong culture tends to be perpetuated across generations, and if that culture is built upon bad habits, it may be especially hard to break. Almost everyone's daily life is habitual, and Jager (2003) defines habits as behaviors that are performed with minimal cognitive effort. Breaking habits is very difficult because the direct personal outcomes of the habit are satisfying, or in the case of the family firm, rewarding in some way. To get rid of the habit, one has to make it impossible; outcomes resulting from a bad habit can be addressed on an indirect level by setting rules and establishing a punishment for breaking them (Jager, 2003).

Although habits are slowly formed, stimulus-bounded and inflexible, given changeable conditions they can be suppressed (Ostlund & Balleine, 2008). Holland, Aarts, and Langendam (2006) found that previously-learned habits can be replaced with new habits through conscious planning and goal setting. Forming implementation intentions that run counter to the habit creates a strong mental link between a situation and a behavioral response and this allows individuals the flexibility to choose the appropriate behavior to perform and break the habit in a critical situation but only if the individual has strong alternative goals (Adriaanse et al., 2011).

In addition, changing the situation can be effective in altering a habit because this forces the person to act differently because the habitual behavior may be blocked from occurring. To be prescriptive, we suggest that a desire to change bad habits in the family and the family firm would have to start with a recognition that such habits and behaviors exist and are harmful before an attempt could be made to address them in a positive way. Based on the imprinting literature as it has been applied to other situations and industries (e.g., Ferriani, Garnsey, & Lorenzoni, 2012; Simsek et al., 2015), the imprint may decay over time or a significant event may result in more positive behaviors being imprinted thus presenting the opportunity to replace bad habits and eventually re-imprint the firm's participants with positive behaviors. This would allow the vicious cycle that we have described above to be overcome and even replaced with a virtuous cycle that perpetuates more effective human resource practices and improves firm performance.

For example, Ferriani et al. (2012) focused on the issue of re-imprinting when looking at new market entrants that spinoff from established firms. Due to the spinoff effects, the new firms' learning model and strengths were linked to the heritage passed down from the established parent organization. The authors conducted an in-depth case study and proposed that whereas the learning elements that were passed down from the parent to the new company often provided an advantage, they could also create a resistance to change and inertia if the new firm did not unlearn obstructive practices and create a new identity. It appears that a new firm undergoes tension between what it inherits from the parent company and what it needs to do in terms of a search for innovation and change.

We suggest that the process by which values and behaviors are transmitted from the parent company to the spinoff can be similar to the way values and behaviors are passed down from parents to their children. The founding generation imprints key family values on the family and the firm, which may have been successful (or harmful) to the family business' success. The next generation of owners is then faced with keeping those cultural elements that represent positive attitudes, values and behaviors and unlearning those that stand in the way of firm performance. From the first to the second generation, the imprinting process functions directly, while values from the first to subsequent generations can also be imprinted through "second hand" imprinting (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). Whereas the family firm's founding culture provides continuity, the next generation must surface and critically assess how elements of that culture align with the firm's current environment and impact the firm's potential for growth. As such an emphasis for the next generation should be placed on education, entrepreneurial bridging and strategic transitions between the generations to ensure the ability of the family firm to stay entrepreneurial and engage in change (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). Without changes in an organization's culture over time, there is little hope of enduring improvements in firm performance. For example, research suggests that a family firm's culture needs to evolve so as to develop dynamic capabilities and transgenerational value creation (Chirico & Nordqvist, 2010; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015).

Yet, to successfully change an organization's culture requires leadership and most often – a change in leadership (Cameron & Quinn, 2005; Schein, 2006). Indeed, Schein states that "an ultimate act of leadership (is) to destroy culture when it is viewed dysfunctional" (2006: 11). As such, for family firms succession is an opportune time to assess the family firm's culture to determine what elements are sources of strength and which are sources of weakness. Because the success of organizational culture change heavily relies on personal change (Cameron & Quinn, 2005), for family firms this implies that the family also needs to assess how its family's culture impacts the firm's culture. The successor can then serve as a change agent who sets the tone for organizational culture change and creates practices and behaviors that re-imprint the family firm with new cultural elements that lead to more effective HRM practices. But successful navigation of this process is neither simple nor easy. These arguments lead to the following proposition:

Proposition 6. *The second and subsequent generations of family firm leadership are more likely to initiate an effective re-imprinting process that can lead to positive changes in HRM practices (selection, compensation, appraisal, retention) than the founding generation.*

8. Discussion

The imprinting literature has predominantly focused on the positive and lasting effects from imprints (Simsek et al., 2015), while neglecting potential negative consequences of the imprinting process. Similarly, with the exception of research on negative conflict (e.g., Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007; Gordon & Nicholson, 2008), nepotism (e.g., Kidwell et al., 2012, 2013) and negative outcomes of socio-emotional wealth (e.g., Kellermanns, Eddleston, & Zellweger, 2012), the involvement of the family in the firm is most often portrayed as a positive aspect in the family firm literature (for early critical voices see also Schulze, Lubatkin, & Dino, 2003a; Schulze et al., 2001). Although not explicitly operationalized as imprinting, the long-term orientation of the family firm and the ability to pass down values such as entrepreneurship, innovation, cooperation, and trust through social learning (observation and modeling) and through a learning culture (stories, symbols and myths that perpetuate through rhetorical reconstruction) have been seen as key advantages of family firms. Yet, this very advantage of imprinting can lead to negative consequences in the family firm as it has the ability to lead to core rigidities (Leonard-Barton, 1992) and the establishment of negative routines and practices.

Our paper advanced six propositions, explaining the genesis, metamorphosis and manifestation of imprinting in family firms, with a focus on negative consequences. Whereas the intermingling of the family and business systems is not necessarily a negative aspect of family firms, we believe that a look at the darker side of family firm behavior is necessary to obtain a more detailed understanding of its impact on HRM practices in the family firm. Addressing the effects of negative imprints on HRM practices can ultimately help these organizations break cycles of negative behavior and prosper in the long term.

Specifically, we argued that through the parent-child relationship the attitudes, values and behaviors of the family are established and maintained through the family culture and that this culture constitutes the genesis of the imprinting process. In the metamorphosis state, through the intermingling of the family and the business domain, the family culture influences the collective mindset of family members involved in the business, thus reflecting either a synergistic or parasitic perspective of family relationships. As our paper focused on the negative consequences of imprinting, we argued that imprinting with a sense of entitlement, sense of injustice and strong parental altruism are likely to harm and manipulate HRM practices. Lastly, we argued that family firm succession offers an opportunity for re-imprinting if the latest generation chooses to critically evaluate the family's imprint on the firm and the family firm's culture, and in turn, chooses to unlearn 'bad habits' and replace them with effective values, attitudes and behaviors.

This paper makes multiple contributions to the literature. First, this is one of the first papers applying imprinting as a main theoretical focus in the family firm literature. Whereas some papers have mentioned imprinting (e.g., Cruz & Nordqvist, 2012; Eddleston, Chrisman, Steier, & Chua, 2010), we are the first to develop a family firm specific model of imprinting that is applied to HRM in the family firm. We thereby not only identify family firm specific imprinting effects, but also show potential detrimental consequences for human resource policies, as we focus on negative aspects of imprinting. Thus, we contribute to an under-researched aspect of imprinting and also identify mechanisms that may facilitate a re-imprinting process (e.g., Simsek et al., 2015), i.e., a new generation of family ownership and the continuing development of more formalized HRM systems and practices.

Second, we contribute to the general human resource literature by explicitly identifying family firm specific effects (entitlement, injustice, parental altruism) on the firm's HRM practices (selection, compensation, appraisal, retention), and how the functioning of the HRM system might be distorted to benefit family members in some circumstances. Whereas managing human resources was an early focus in family firm research (e.g., Lansberg, 1983), this focus has almost been exclusively centered on the positive influence of the family (e.g., Habbershon & Williams, 1999) or better utilization of human resources by the firm (e.g., Astrachan & Kolenko, 1994; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003). This paper is in line with recent research, highlighting potential downsides of family involvement regarding HRM practices and the importance of ensuring that family members are appropriately engaged with the family firm (e.g., Kidwell et al., 2012; Kidwell et al., 2013).

Third, we contribute to the general learning literature. In advancing a model of imprinting in the family and family firm, we propose that negative family dynamics make their way into the organization through the family's culture that then develops into the family firm's culture and perpetuates over time through these imprinted attitudes, values and behaviors of family employees. Similar to recent studies that question whether all learning is positive (e.g., Walter, Lechner, & Kellermanns, 2013), our paper stresses that transgenerational learning through detrimental imprinting in family firms can lead to family cultures lacking alignment with the business environment and leading to negative performance consequences through poor HRM practices, thus challenging the positive "halo" of organizational learning (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Walter et al., 2013).

8.1. *Implications for practice*

Bad habit imprints can be recognized by a variety of people connected to the family firm: a new generation of family leadership, a non-family member who has been appointed to a leadership position such as human resources director, a diagnostic family business consultant, or even family members who are engaging in the bad habits themselves. Once they have been recognized, the leadership of the family firm is in a position to take action to address them if there is a will to do so. One option is for the family to seek counseling to overcome the effects of negative imprinting in general so that more effective interaction patterns can be established among family members (for a review of conflict management practices in family firms see McKee, Madden, Kellermanns, & Eddleston, 2014). A family business consultant can also identify problems with HRM practices and develop new practices to improve selection, compensation, appraisal and retention of family and nonfamily employees. As a means for a family to unlearn habits that have led to serious issues in the functioning of the firm (see also Shih, 2004), family firm members could be encouraged to 1) develop an emphasis on showcasing skills that enhance the effectiveness of the firm such as eliminating problematic HRM practices (Kidwell et al., 2013), emphasizing new product and service innovation (Kraiczy, Hack, & Kellermanns, 2015), or grooming effective successors (De Massis et al., 2008); 2) recognize that many families deal with dysfunctions that have much worse consequences, e.g., none of our family are in prison for fraud or have committed violent crimes (Gordon & Nicholson, 2008); 3) stress successful and functional firm identity over dysfunctional family identity (e.g., see Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2014; Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010).

8.2. *Implications for theory and future research*

Our conceptual paper, which develops a model that applies aspects of imprinting theory to explain how patterns of behavior that originate in the family domain transfer to the family firm to affect HRM practices and firm performance, offers only a first step and invites multiple avenues of future research. For example, in their review of imprinting research, Simsek et al. (2015) concluded that a key research question that needs to be addressed involves the identification of the key mechanisms and processes of re-imprinting. The question of how new imprints form within the constraints and the context of previous imprints is an important area for future family business research. We took an initial step in this regard by focusing on family firm succession as a key process that can help to break bad habits that have grown up over time within the family firm. However, other literatures, such as the literature on change (e.g., Hannan & Freeman, 1984; Schein, 1980; Triandis, 1971) may provide promising avenues.

Additionally, research that has focused on overcoming stigma (e.g., Shih, 2004), a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person, could shed light on ways family firms can move forward after a family's bad habits are recognized. Stigmatized individuals may be viewed negatively by society due to an affliction, whether it be mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse, an eating disorder or a physical characteristic. The negative elements of the family that have become learned and established in the firm may constitute a mark of disgrace, i.e., stigma, in that dysfunctional elements of the family and the firm may harm the individuals and the organization in the eyes of non-family employees, customers, competitors, other stakeholders or even other family members. For example, case histories of 'family first' behavior, family conflict, petty jealousy, feuding siblings, disinherited offspring etc. tend to put the related family firm in a bad light to society despite all of the organization's accomplishments as a business. To overcome the negatives associated with stigma, Shih (2004) identifies three processes: compensation (the stigmatized individuals develop skills to compensate for the stigma), selective social comparisons and observations (the stigmatized individuals compare themselves to members of their own group who are experiencing similar or worse outcomes), and multiple identities (the stigmatized individuals stress an alternative identity that is not viewed negatively by society). Future research might investigate the applicability of these processes as ways to facilitate the re-imprinting of an organization's culture in family firms thus suggesting a context for examining the concept of stigma at multiple levels of analysis.

This paper also offers additional avenues for future HRM related studies. For example, the existence of the family subsystem can impact the learning and perpetuation of negative workplace phenomena such as abusive supervision. Garcia, Restubog, Kiewitz, Scott, and Tang (2014) theoretically framed abusive supervision as a *learned* aggressive behavior. Their findings indicated that non-work related experiences such as a history of family aggression is associated with a predisposition toward abusive supervision. Entitlement, arguably a learned condition in a family firm, might also relate to the impact of abusive supervision in that psychologically entitled employees are prone to feel they are victims of abuse that, in turn, leads them to react in undesirable ways (Harvey, Harris, Gillis, & Martinko, 2013).

Preliminary linkages of learning to negative characteristics and values of the family firm indicate that learning as a condition and core family firm value deserves consideration in future research into the dark side of family firms. Mistrust, relationship conflict, entitlement, abusive supervision, 'family first' mentality and extreme competition can be learned as individuals grow up in the family and the family firm, but the establishment of a positive family culture may result in these negative values being unlearned as assumptions are challenged and changed. As such, assessing the effects of learning as a mechanism, a shared value, and ultimately as a learning culture in the family, business and ownership subsystems may assist in further developing theories of the family firm (Chrisman, Chua, & Steier, 2003).

Research in both psychology and sociology has investigated the family social context and genetic factors in predicting subsequent behavior, mental health and physical health problems (e.g., Aunola & Nurmi, 2005; Miller, Chen, & Parker, 2011; Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002; Umberson, Crosnoe, & Reczek, 2010). This research identifies risk factors that may lead to negative outcomes. Family firm research should also identify risk factors, both in the family and business domains, that lead to a cascade of risk early in the life of the family firm that can jeopardize subsequent generations and their financial (and emotional) wellbeing. In addition, as the model advanced in this paper is tested empirically, it is useful to determine its boundaries and applicability to different types of family firms considering the heterogeneity of family firms on various factors that were previously mentioned (Chua et al., 2012). In closing, future research might also address the nature of the learning that takes place when the establishment of a learning culture in family firms results in the adopted values of the family and the firm questioning the status quo and subsuming negative values that may threaten firm success and survival. On the other hand, learning mechanisms and actions that result from negative imprints may merely be a means for them to immediately cope with situations resulting from longstanding family dysfunction. If the latter is the case, a little learning may indeed be a dangerous thing for the future of some family firms.

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