



## Coentrepreneurial Couples: A Review of Literature on Initiation and Boundaries among Copreneurs

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### Abstract

The dominion, Family businesses and entrepreneurship is a common study in so many countries with referring to the motives of commencement, the problems they encountered, boundaries and the support on several factors in creating intention. Couple-owned businesses are a rapidly growing segment of that main domain. This notion is slightly common to the foreign context. However, it's still a new concept for a county like Sri Lanka. Main objective of this study is to investigate how the concept of Copreneur has been identified and brought forward within literature. In achieving this objective, researcher used the Systematic Literature Review approaching 15 research articles which has gone with this concept. The research articles were taken from top journals as well as different context to get a good exposure on this study. The researcher able to come up with a conclusions based on the literature of considered time frame. The researcher able to understand the main reason for couples to become copreneuers is the responsibilities they get from their families, mutual understanding and trust and the opportunities they see in the market after having their own child. This study will improve the value as this is an under-research area within the Sri Lankan context and most of the time systematic literature reviews have not done in the Sri Lankan context. Based on that this study will enhance the value it generates to the main domain; entrepreneurship as well as sub-domain; copreneurs. Moreover future researchers can use these insights in their studies.

**Key Words:** Copreneur, Family Business, Motives, Obstacles, Career, Self- Employment

### Introduction

Within the domain of entrepreneurship, family business and coprenurs is a heavily considered research area and it has become well established in today business world. Popular as well as scholarly articles are written about characteristics, initiations of family businesses and couples who engage in entrepreneurship. That is because of the population spread within the nations and their high entrepreneurial inclination. According to the past literature, it has proven that there is an increasing tendency of couples (husband and wife) becoming entrepreneurial. They are also interesting examples of the interdependence, intermutual and interaction

of personal relationship and business relationship, or rather love and work. As stated by many home based family businesses are the outputs of husband and wife team efforts. This article reviews the research literature on copreneurs or coentrepreneurial couples, to illustrate how these couples manage the boundaries and transitions of personal relationship and business partnership. The literature is scarce that focuses specifically on the copreneurial relationship. However, valuable insights can be drawn from the research of dual-career couples, executives, and family businesses in general. And these insights can be turned into questions and hypotheses for future research on copreneurs.

The word "Copreneurs" was invented by Barnett, F and Barnett, S, (1988) and they refers to entrepreneurial couples who share ownership of, commitment to, and responsibility for a business (home-based or otherwise). Although the statistics must be gleaned from a variety of sources, jointly owned sole proprietorships (most of which are owned by couples) may be the fastest growing segment of family businesses. Rapoport, R and Rapoport, R, (1965) said that, dual career couples are special case of "families in which both husband and wife pursue. Further, they have recognized as a significant social phenomenon developing in country, an expression value shifts that emphasized an increasing partnership in family life, equality between marital partners, and joint decision making between husband and wife.

However, copreneurs are more than dual-career couples. They are dual-career couples who also share an entrepreneurial venture. Thus, all of the issues that face any married couple, and all of the issues that face any dual-career couple, are compounded by the issues that face family businesses. The popular press was the first to recognize these unique couples. Copreneurs started their businesses for a variety of reasons, including the growth in country's entrepreneurship and the change of the economy from one of production to one of service and information. Growth in



copreneurship is recognized to more women starting businesses and forming partnerships with their husbands, couples working out of their homes, franchises being available to couples with little experience, and the attention given to famous copreneurial couples in the media (Brown, 1989).

It can be viewed as copreneurs are having blended the dimensions of work and family. These couples examine family values and wish to have a greater sense of control over their personal situations (Thompson, 1990). Moreover, Thompson, (1990) is saying that, they have a unique opportunity to achieve control and satisfaction in both work and family domains. Copreneurs seek to operate a business with someone they know and trust and, consequently, blur the boundaries of home and office. They may be seeking greater understanding with a partner (Thompson, 1990). They are expected to have stronger marriages and businesses because of this intertwining. Both the family and business relationship are strengthened by a shared vision and true team effort. Copreneurs offer that unique team of husband and wife, two individuals with shared goals, dreams, and ideas. These elements should work to enhance the profitability and success of the business.

The objective of this study is to investigate how Copreneurs have been identified and brought forward within literature and to identify obstacles they have.

### Methodology

In this research study, the main focus is given towards copreneurs and the dimensions of copreneurship. The main approach of achieving above objectives are systematic literature review and appreciating the previous authors of the same domain. The researcher has collected and reviewed 15 articles relevant to copreneurship domain which were taken from top level journals and which goes together with researcher's concerns. When collecting and reviewing articles the researcher adheres to a time frame. The time frame researcher concerned was from 1985 to 2017. In order to get a good exposure in the concerned area, researcher has taken articles from different contexts. In supporting the literature, the researcher went through their research findings and conclusions of past studies and understood how the copreneurs have been constructed through the literature.

### Findings

Many studies have been done for the main domain of entrepreneurship, from past to present. With referring to the past studies, gender wise men are the once who owns and runs the business and

women are just there to support their male counterpart. For some people to start the business is the accommodation of family needs and a family orientation. Here the Copreneurs has being considered. Copreneurs has been concerned as a new trend of Entrepreneurship, thus literature also turned a new arena.

Self-employment allows a couple to have both roles as a member of family and as a professional. The decision of becoming a copreneur is diverse based on the circumstances and life experiences. Blending of work and family also creates a new opportunity for tension. The literature discusses boundaries (Marshack, 1993), conflicts (Foley, S & Powell, G. N, 1997), roles (Marshack, 1998), neglect of personal needs (Garrett, 1993), as possible tensions. Such issues certainly raise the question whether owning a business together is beneficial or not to the couple. Also, the copreneurial couple losses the ability for the uncomplicated spouse to act as a sounding board for new ideas or for ways to reduce work tension (Garrett, 1993). Similarly, the work place may no longer be a place where one can vent regarding a difficult family situation.

Barnett and Barnett, (1988), state in their observations of copreneurs, among other things, that spouses seem to be as totally involved in the businesses as the husbands, that these couples have strong family values, that equality in the relationship is a strongly held value. Moreover they said that the boundaries between love and work are easier to traverse than popular myth would predict and that the love bond between husband and wife grows stronger with involvement in a coentrepreneurial venture.

Patricia M. Cole and Kit Johnson, (2007) proved in their study that, all the respondents spoke of their commitment and even passion for the business, which fits with the entrepreneurial profile. In this study, couples ultimately chose to leave the intimate relationship and maintain their business, which they viewed in an almost parental way. In fact, several of the participants mentioned words related to "our baby" when talking about their company. Jaffe, (1990) has suggested that the copreneurial venture always does a difficult balancing act by addressing the competing needs of the marriage and the business.

Williams, (2008) said that, copreneurships will continue to grow. Frustration with corporate jobs, desire for quality time at home, and "lack of stability in a shifting economy" are driving forces for copreneurship. Husbands and wives finding that self-employment gives them the flexibility to earn a



living while caring for young children. Seniors are rebuilding their financial independence through self-employment (Klimecka, 2006).

Marshack, (1994) specify some of the psychological and social processes by which work can influence home and home can influence work, by examining the boundaries and transitions of personal relationship and business partnership. They demonstrate that copreneurs are quite traditional in their sex-role orientations while dual-career couples are more androgynous. That is, 80% of the copreneurial husbands espouse a stereotypical masculine sex-role orientation, and 76% of the copreneurial wives espouse a stereotypical feminine sex-role orientation. Dual-career couples, on the other hand, espouse sex role values that are less stereotypic, and which are more equally distributed among the desirable masculine and the desirable feminine traits, thus contributing to their androgyny.

According to the study of Smith, (2000), "Copreneurship" provides the security of working with a trusted spouse towards a common goal, and the sharing and understanding of business challenges and problems may develop the marital bond. For women especially, it allows for the effective integration of work and family responsibilities, and may encourage a flexible and "family-friendly" work environment for other women. Moreover they said that, "Copreneurship" may also contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial spirit in the children of business partners, which will be important not only for small business management, but also for careers in salaried employment in the corporate sector. Furthermore they stated that, running a business and maintaining a relationship without disagreements and problems is almost impossible unless the partners are compatible, genuinely fond of each other, willing to make compromises, and prepared to "tough it out". However, if such partnerships are to be successful, the owners must also be single minded and ambitious. These are critical dimensions that should not be ignored in our educational programmes on career development and small business management.

All couples who are working full time in the business said that, they liked self-employment to salaried employment, despite the long hours and potential difficulties of working with their spouse and the fact that business decisions were often passionate and intense, because of the personal and family values (Smith, 2000). The longer couples were married, the more they emphasised that compatibility and compromise were necessary, if

both business and marriage were to succeed. However, the significance of compromise was highlighted most commonly by female "copreneurs" (Smith, 2000). Moreover, Smith, (2000), said that, the male partners were highly responsible for decision making at work, and generally spent more time working in the business. Thus men were usually perceived by customers to be the boss. Female partners were more likely to scale back their involvement in the venture in order to accommodate childcare responsibilities. In the home domain it was the female partner who undertook most of the daily running of the household, sharing responsibility for major domestic decisions with her husband. However, most women appeared reasonably happy with this arrangement, and some suggested that this not only avoided work- family conflict but made for a more harmonious marital relationship also (Smith, 2000).

A key question raised by these studies is that of the boundary between family and business. Each relationship will have its own unique set-up ways and means of communicating, levels of interaction, perceptions and expectations of behaviour both at home and in business, etc (John Blenkinsopp & Gill Owens, 2010). Some spouses don't prefer to discuss business at home and this does not necessarily mean they are less supportive than the spouse who sits and listens to the entrepreneur's business talk all evening, indeed the latter may argue that they provide greater support (in emotional and psychological) by "forcing" the entrepreneur to switch out of business-mode and relax. Consideration therefore needs to be given to the different types and levels of support offered by the "non-entrepreneurial" spouse, e.g. emotional/psychological support, practical support or a combination of both (John Blenkinsopp & Gill Owens, 2010).

A number of researchers consider the issue of spousal support provided by a non-business active spouse both in terms of emotional support and practical support. Marshack (1994, p. 50) states that "marital satisfaction increases when both spouses are emotionally supportive of each other's career". Individuals perform particular roles based on their own and others' mutual perceptions, assumptions and expectations of that particular role.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The research was conducted based on the family business identity as the study was based on the copreneurship as the main discipline. Based on the finding of the study, researcher tried to understand how different contexts supports married couples to



become entrepreneurs considering the social and cultural factors and what are the boundaries they have. Once the researcher went through the articles researcher understood the fact that, the identities cannot be separated as context, culture and social pressure as most of the couples became entrepreneur due to all these facts. It's hard to separate what actually influences them to be an copreneur. The influence of a married couple to become an entrepreneur is based on the level of life experience, family dimensions, life stage, the perception they have, mutual understanding, characteristics and concerns on family.

It has been identified that understanding of the entrepreneurial process, as it interconnects with family business, is best served by reference to the cultural, industry setting and organisational context within which entrepreneurs are embedded. These things combine to filter the perceptions and behaviours of entrepreneurs as to the potential to achieve their aspired material and social gain. At full intensity this process will result in outcomes that radically infuse and energise economies, society and industries, creating long term and sustainable benefits for society as a whole.

The findings show that, women assumed childcare and household duties, including housework and cooking, as their major responsibility, even when both partners were putting similar hours and energy into the business. Furthermore, some females quit the job with their pregnancy and due to the increasing needs of finance, they have joined with their husbands to manage ventures and became copreneurs. This shows their commitment and concern towards their family. During the childhood of children, they seek the love, attention of their mother, in the absence of that at their childhood will impact on the child growth. The researcher also believes the concern of a mother towards child should come from the pregnancy and not after the birth. She should allocate time accordingly and sometimes it will act as a major boundary foe the success of the business.

Based on all the above, researcher understood the fact that, the role of the spouse has been explored to a limited degree within both the entrepreneurship and family firms literature. It should be noted that much of the existing literature has adopted traditional assumptions that it will be the husband who is the entrepreneur. Though the significant and

continuing growth in the number of women entrepreneurs makes this assumption less empirically valid with every passing year.

The study of copreneurship has already provided us with important insights into entrepreneurship. Here, we have argued that the study of copreneurship still has a high gap to fill in a family embeddedness perspective on entrepreneurship and literature is still frgmented. The domain copreneurship, is an important phenomenon to study in its own right but gaining a greater understanding of the dynamics between couples, and the impact this may have on a business, could also provide a starting point for examining the dynamics of other dyadic family relationships found at the heart of a business.

In the dual-career literature, studies have shown that personal and couple boundaries and role behavior are formed by a complex interaction of social, interpersonal, sociophysical, and psychological boundaries and norms. Career women struggle with societal values and their own internalized beliefs about what is required of the competent professional and the good mother. And young professional women experienced sex role conflict also. Furthrmore, researcher found that couples with young children have role conflicts and they were directly related to unique and personal definitions of roles and conceptual boundaries. As well, husbands of corpreneurs wives report a high level of satisfaction with their partners, even though they experience high stress due to the challenges to traditional sex roles that this life-style encourages.

Resaercher has noticed that, past literature points out how little has been discovered about copreneurs, that is, how they manage the boundaries and transitions between personal relationship and business partnership. However, as in any new and developing field, this lack of findings is understandable. and the literature summarized in this article demonstrates a place to new start. Finally, researcher can conclude that, this concept is extremely important when researching couples who live and work together, and who are crossing and recrossing the boundaries between the domains of love and work all day long and the researcher concludes the study implying the concept copreneur is a mediator of society and economy in improving and enhancing both ends.

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