

The Inner Balance Sheet

Consciousness, Systems, Filters and Intergenerational Change in the Family Business

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Synopsis

Autobiography of a Yogi, first published by Paramahansa Yogananda in 1946, appears at first to sit at some distance from contemporary theories of family business. It belongs to a spiritual and philosophical tradition concerned with karma, reincarnation, consciousness, self-realisation and the apparent separation of the individual from a more fundamental unity. Family systems theory, by contrast, developed partly from attempts to understand how behaviour emerges within networks of recurring relationships and communication. Psychoanalysis has traditionally placed greater emphasis upon internal conflict, unconscious repetition and the psychological meanings carried from earlier relationships into present ones.

This paper argues that these traditions should neither be collapsed into one theory nor regarded as completely unrelated. Instead, they may be placed upon a shared descriptive framework termed here the **Human Map**. The map considers the person, perceptual and psychological filters, relationships, recurring patterns, context, meaning and development. It distinguishes between what can be observed, how change is explained, and what different traditions believe the change ultimately means.

Donald D. Hoffman's Interface Theory of Perception and Conscious Agent Theory provide a further, speculative bridge. Hoffman does not scientifically validate Yogananda's metaphysics. However, his willingness to question whether spacetime and ordinary perceptual objects constitute fundamental reality—and to investigate consciousness as potentially fundamental—opens a contemporary scientific discussion about ontology rather than merely perceptual accuracy.

Jay Haley's *The Power Tactics of Jesus Christ* provides a further methodological warning. Haley demonstrates how a phenomenon originating in one intellectual and spiritual tradition may be made to appear quite different when interpreted through the concepts of another. This paper therefore treats filters as applying not only to participants within a family system, but also to observers, therapists and researchers.

Applied to family business, the combined framework suggests that succession, conflict, control and inheritance operate simultaneously at individual, relational, systemic and meaning-making levels. Intervening in a repeating pattern in one generation can alter the

possibilities available to subsequent generations. The paper concludes that science, systems thinking, psychoanalysis and spiritual philosophy offer different languages for different levels of inquiry. Their productive use depends upon preserving their distinctions while allowing each to illuminate parts of the same human territory.

Introduction: The Book in the Brown Box

In October 2011, hundreds of people gathered at Stanford University for a memorial service for Steve Jobs.

As they left, each guest was handed a small brown box.

Marc Benioff, founder of Salesforce and a friend and former protégé of Jobs, later described opening his box after reaching his car. Inside was a copy of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, written by Paramahansa Yogananda and originally published in 1946. Benioff interpreted the gift as a final invitation towards self-realisation and the development of an inner life (Perez and Ha, 2013).

The choice was consistent with Jobs's longer history. Walter Isaacson reports that Jobs first encountered Yogananda's book as a young man, reread it during his journey to India and returned to it repeatedly thereafter (Isaacson, 2011).

This leaves a curious question.

Why would one of the people most closely associated with modern technology repeatedly return to a book concerned with gurus, meditation, karma, reincarnation, miraculous healing and cosmic consciousness?

More specifically, what could such a book contribute to thinking about a family business?

The answer depends upon resisting two temptations.

The first is to treat Yogananda as though he were offering an early version of contemporary psychology or management theory.

He was not.

The second is to dismiss the book because many of its claims fall outside modern scientific standards of evidence.

That would also be premature.

The more productive approach is to ask what kind of questions Yogananda was attempting to answer, how those questions differ from those of science and psychotherapy, and whether different intellectual traditions may nevertheless illuminate the same human events from different directions.

Science and Philosophy Were Not Always Separate Territories

Autobiography of a Yogi is not a scientific text in the modern sense.

Yogananda reports extraordinary healings, unusual states of consciousness, apparent bilocation and other events which cannot simply be treated as established scientific findings because they appear in a sincere autobiographical account.

Scientific inquiry depends upon evidence, criticism, reproducibility where appropriate, methodological transparency and the possibility that a preferred explanation can be rejected.

Yet the modern separation between science, mathematics and philosophy is historically relatively recent.

Ancient Greek inquiry did not divide knowledge according to contemporary university departments. Aristotle's theoretical investigations included nature, mathematics and what later became known as metaphysics. The study of nature developed for centuries within what was termed natural philosophy (Lindberg, 2007).

This remained visible in the early modern period.

Newton's great work of 1687 was entitled *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*—the *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (Newton, 1999 [1687]).

The development of modern science involved increasingly specialised methods, institutions and standards of evidence. This specialisation produced immense intellectual gains.

It did not, however, abolish philosophical questions.

What constitutes knowledge?

What is consciousness?

What is a person?

What makes one life preferable to another?

What obligations do parents owe their children?

When does loyalty become obligation?

When does stewardship become control?

How much wealth is sufficient?

These questions cannot all be settled by measurement alone.

An accountant may demonstrate that a 78-year-old founder remains financially valuable to the company.

The accounts cannot establish whether continuing to work represents healthy purpose or fear of becoming unnecessary.

That distinction requires another kind of inquiry.

Indian Philosophy and the Problem of Taking Yogananda Seriously

A further difficulty arises when Indian spiritual literature is treated as though it belongs outside philosophy altogether.

Indian intellectual traditions developed sustained disputes concerning knowledge, perception, inference, identity, consciousness, causation, rebirth, liberation and the relationship between appearance and ultimate reality (King, 1999).

These traditions did not have the same purposes as contemporary experimental science.

Many placed liberation from suffering and ignorance at the centre of philosophical inquiry.

But different purpose does not mean absence of intellectual structure.

Yogananda therefore need not be accepted as a scientist in order to be taken seriously as a philosophical and spiritual thinker.

The useful question becomes less:

Can modern science verify each extraordinary event reported in the book?

and more:

What account of the individual, consciousness and human development is being proposed?

Yogananda Is Not Simply Describing Personal Development

Modern readers can easily turn *Autobiography of a Yogi* into a familiar self-development narrative.

Meditate.

Become calm.

Trust intuition.

Discover your potential.

Improve your life.

Such themes certainly occur within the book, but this interpretation reduces the scope of Yogananda's argument.

For Yogananda, the ordinary individual life sits within a spiritual process extending beyond a single career, family and lifetime (Yogananda, 1946).

Karma and reincarnation form part of that account.

The ego is not treated as the deepest identity of the person.

Nor is the final objective simply a healthier, happier or more competent ego.

Yogananda repeatedly places human development within the possibility of self-realisation: awakening from ignorance concerning the nature of consciousness and the apparent separateness of the individual from a more fundamental divine reality (Yogananda, 1946).

This is an important distinction.

A family therapist may regard reduced anxiety, greater autonomy and improved relationships as worthwhile therapeutic outcomes.

Yogananda could value those changes while regarding them as episodes within a much larger process.

Thus the two approaches may recognise a similar local change while attributing entirely different ultimate meaning to it.

Donald D. Hoffman and the Scientific Courage to Ask About Being

Donald D. Hoffman provides an unexpected contemporary point of contact.

Hoffman's importance in this discussion does not rest simply upon the proposition that perception is imperfect.

That idea is neither new nor unique.

His more interesting contribution lies in his willingness to ask whether ordinary perceptual reality is fundamental at all.

Hoffman, Singh and Prakash developed the Interface Theory of Perception, arguing from evolutionary modelling that natural selection need not favour perceptual systems which reveal objective reality truthfully. Selection may instead favour perceptual strategies tuned to biological fitness (Hoffman, Singh and Prakash, 2015).

Hoffman commonly illustrates the idea through the metaphor of a computer desktop.

An icon representing a file is useful precisely because it hides the overwhelmingly complicated physical and computational processes underlying it.

The icon is not necessarily false.

It is an interface.

The radical step occurs when Hoffman asks:

If ordinary perceptual experience functions as an interface, what lies behind it?

Consciousness Rather Than Matter?

In the Conscious Agent Theory developed by Hoffman and Prakash, the proposed ontology begins not with physical objects but with interacting conscious agents (Hoffman and Prakash, 2014).

Hoffman later developed these arguments for a wider readership in *The Case Against Reality* (Hoffman, 2019).

More recent work by Prentner and Hoffman continues to explore a framework in which consciousness is fundamental, while spacetime and physical objects may be emergent representations rather than ontological foundations (Prentner and Hoffman, 2024).

The scientific status of these claims requires care.

Conscious Agent Theory remains speculative.

It has not demonstrated that consciousness is fundamental.

It has not demonstrated karma, reincarnation, divine consciousness or any of Yogananda's specific spiritual propositions.

A Hoffmanian conscious agent should not casually be renamed a soul.

Nevertheless, the significance of Hoffman's project should not be reduced to the claim that evolution provides inaccurate perception.

He is attempting to address **ontology**.

What is reality made of?

Is consciousness produced by physical processes occurring in spacetime?

Or could spacetime itself emerge from a deeper structure in which consciousness has priority?

Those are questions about the nature of being.

Science historically emerged from natural philosophy partly by finding ways of making previously speculative questions tractable.

Hoffman is attempting something similarly ambitious, although the success of that attempt remains unresolved.

Hoffman and Yogananda: Similar Question, Different Destination

Hoffman and Yogananda should therefore neither be equated nor kept artificially distant.

Hoffman argues that perceptual experience may operate as an interface and that spacetime need not be fundamental (Hoffman, 2019; Prentner and Hoffman, 2024).

Yogananda makes a much more explicitly spiritual claim.

For him, the deepest illusion includes the experience of ultimate separateness.

Individuals experience themselves as distinct selves inhabiting a world of distinct objects.

Yogananda places this within the concepts of *maya* and *avidya*: appearance, illusion or ignorance through which underlying unity is experienced as multiplicity (Yogananda, 1946).

One might therefore express the difference as follows.

Hoffman asks:

What if the world presented by perception is an interface rather than fundamental reality?

Yogananda asks:

What if the separate self presented within that interface is also not the deepest level of reality?

Hoffman does not lead scientifically to Yogananda.

But he makes one particular dismissal of Yogananda less secure.

If the experienced world of bodies, objects and spacetime cannot simply be assumed to correspond transparently to fundamental reality, then ordinary perception cannot by itself settle the metaphysical question of separation.

Hoffman does not prove Yogananda correct.

He makes Yogananda's question harder to reject merely by appealing to appearances.

Filters: A Common Descriptive Language

The concept of a **filter** may help build a bridge among these traditions.

The term is used here heuristically rather than as a formal construct belonging to any one school.

A filter selects.

It emphasises some information.

It suppresses other information.

It organises experience.

It contributes to what becomes perceptually or psychologically salient.

Hoffman's interface provides one kind of filter (Hoffman, 2019).

Yogananda's concepts of *maya* and *avidya* provide a radically different spiritual account of filtered experience (Yogananda, 1946).

Psychoanalytic theory describes other forms of mediation through defence, unconscious expectation, fantasy, identification and internalised relationships (Freud, 1958 [1914]).

Family systems theory emphasises how recurring relational contexts organise what participants notice and how they respond (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974).

These phenomena are not theoretically identical.

The term *filter* simply gives us a shared descriptive starting point.

Jay Haley and the Danger of Mistaking the Lens for the Object

The family therapist Jay Haley provides a useful warning about interpretive filters.

In *The Power Tactics of Jesus Christ*, Haley examined the figure of Jesus through a language familiar to strategic and systemic thinking. Rather than beginning with theology, divinity or salvation, he attended to matters such as influence, leadership, opposition, hierarchy, organisation and power (Haley, 1969).

The result is provocative partly because familiar religious material begins to look unfamiliar.

Actions normally discussed in theological language can appear, through Haley's lens, as strategic moves within systems of authority and relationships of power.

This may reveal something.

It may also distort something.

The distinction matters.

Haley's account does not demonstrate that Jesus understood himself primarily as a strategist engaged in power tactics. Rather, it demonstrates what becomes visible when the material is examined through a strategic and systemic conceptual framework.

Another observer may use a theological lens and see revelation.

A political historian may see resistance to religious or imperial authority.

A psychoanalyst may become interested in identity, dependency, projection, sacrifice or symbolic meaning.

A systems theorist may notice hierarchy, coalitions, communication and relationships of influence.

Each lens can illuminate features another overlooks.

Each can also tempt the observer to mistake concepts supplied by the lens for properties belonging unquestionably to the phenomenon itself.

This is particularly important for the Human Map.

The term *filter* should not apply only to the people being observed.

The observer brings a filter too.

A family therapist trained to notice triangles may readily identify triangles.

A psychoanalyst trained to notice unconscious repetition may readily detect repetition.

A financial adviser may interpret a dispute through incentives and ownership.

A spiritual teacher may interpret it through attachment, ego or karma.

Each perspective may contribute something valuable.

The methodological danger begins when one perspective forgets that it remains a perspective.

Capps later revisited Haley's interpretation and examined it through another set of psychological and historical questions, thereby illustrating the recursive nature of interpretation itself (Capps, 2004).

Haley placed a strategic lens over Jesus.

Capps placed another lens over Haley.

A further scholar might then place yet another lens over Capps.

The process can continue indefinitely.

This does not render interpretation useless.

It requires reflexivity.

The observer must ask not merely:

What am I seeing?

but also:

What is my theory making especially easy for me to see?

and:

What might my theory be making difficult to notice?

Haley therefore provides an important methodological principle for the present argument:

A lens may illuminate a phenomenon without exhausting the phenomenon it illuminates.

This applies equally to Yogananda, Hoffman, psychoanalysis and systems theory.

The Human Map is useful precisely because it is presented as a **heuristic framework** rather than a final explanatory theory.

It invites questions such as:

What becomes visible through this lens?

What disappears?

What has the observer contributed?

What might appear differently if another lens were used?

A Founder and His Daughter

Consider a family-business founder who believes:

My daughter is not ready to run this company.

He may have evidence.

She hesitates before difficult decisions.

She has made mistakes.

She dislikes confrontation.

She lacks his experience.

But those observations are not received in a psychological vacuum.

He may also see:

my little girl;

the child who always needed me;

the person who may replace me;

someone who does not understand what I sacrificed to build this;

the person upon whom the survival of my life's work will soon depend.

His daughter looks at the same father.

She may see:

the man who still thinks I am fifteen;

the founder who cannot surrender control;

the father who will never trust me;

the obstacle between me and adulthood.

They do not simply observe one another.

They interpret.

Then they act upon those interpretations.

Father checks the daughter's decisions because he believes she is not ready.

Daughter withholds information because she believes he will interfere.

Her withholding confirms his belief that she is not ready.

His additional supervision confirms her belief that he will never trust her.

The filter helps produce the behaviour which confirms the filter.

At this point we enter the territory of systems thinking.

Systems Theory Changes the Unit of Observation

Early systemic approaches challenged the tendency to locate pathology solely within an isolated individual.

Ruesch and Bateson argued that psychiatric understanding needed to consider individuals within broader communication systems rather than treating behaviour as though it could be understood independently of social context (Ruesch and Bateson, 1951).

The later Bateson group's work on communication and the double bind, despite important historical and clinical limitations, helped shift attention towards recurring interaction rather than purely intrapsychic explanation (Bateson et al., 1956).

Bowen developed an explicitly multigenerational understanding of family processes, including differentiation, triangles and the transmission of patterns across generations (Bowen, 1978).

Minuchin emphasised family structure, boundaries and the organisation of interaction (Minuchin, 1974).

Within this broad systemic tradition the question changes.

Instead of asking:

Why is the daughter difficult?

one may ask:

What happens between father and daughter which repeatedly produces this difficulty?

Father becomes anxious.

Anxiety increases control.

Control increases withdrawal.

Withdrawal increases anxiety.

The relationship becomes recursive.

The behaviour of one person continually alters the environment to which the other responds.

Psychoanalysis Begins Somewhere Else

Psychoanalysis approaches the same scene differently.

It may ask:

What does the daughter's independence represent to the father?

What does surrendering control evoke?

Why does a particular behaviour produce disproportionate anxiety?

What earlier relationships are being re-enacted?

What meaning has remained unconscious?

Freud's concept of repetition is relevant here.

In *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through*, Freud described the tendency to reproduce unresolved material in current behaviour rather than simply remember it (Freud, 1958 [1914]).

His later formulation of repetition compulsion extended the problem further (Freud, 1955 [1920]).

Thus psychoanalysis commonly moves from present behaviour towards internal meaning, history, defence and unconscious conflict.

Systems theory tends to move towards interaction, context and circularity.

These directions are different.

They are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

A father may possess an internal conflict **and** participate in a family pattern which repeatedly activates it.

A daughter may carry an internal expectation of mistrust **and** live with a father whose behaviour continually confirms that expectation.

The wound may be internal.

The relationship may repeatedly touch it.

Yogananda Starts Somewhere Else Again

Yogananda would add another level of interpretation.

Within his framework, the practical conflict could be considered part of each individual's larger development.

The father might face attachment to identity, status, control or the belief that he is indispensable.

The daughter might face her own forms of fear, anger, attachment or identification.

The relationship itself could be situated within karma.

The people, circumstances and even the appearance of a therapist at a particular moment could be interpreted as part of a wider karmic situation (Yogananda, 1946).

A family therapist requires none of these assumptions.

The therapist may simply observe that an intervention changes the pattern and reduces distress.

Nevertheless, therapist and Yogananda may sometimes point towards the same observable human transformation while giving radically different accounts of why it occurred.

This requires a common descriptive framework which does not pretend to resolve the metaphysical disagreement.

The Human Map

The **Human Map** proposed here is not presented as a new psychological theory.

It is a heuristic framework intended to allow several traditions to describe different dimensions of the same human event without forcing their explanatory languages into artificial agreement.

It also assumes that no observer occupies an entirely neutral position outside the territory.

The therapist, analyst, researcher or consultant brings concepts which influence what becomes salient.

The map therefore requires reflexivity as well as observation.

It contains seven elements.

The Person

Each participant enters with history, temperament, bodily state, memory, belief, capacity, vulnerability and expectation.

The Filter

No participant encounters events without mediation.

Perception, expectation, memory, culture, family history, psychological defence and prior learning influence what becomes visible and meaningful.

Observers bring filters too.

Theory affects what therapists, researchers and consultants notice, name and regard as important.

The Relationship

People affect one another.

One person's behaviour changes the conditions within which another responds.

The Pattern

Repeated interaction becomes organised.

Over time, patterns can become so familiar that participants experience them as character or destiny.

The Context

Behaviour occurs within contexts.

A marriage, family, company, community, culture and generation each alters what becomes possible.

Meaning

Human beings do not respond simply to events.

They respond to what events mean.

Retirement may mean freedom, irrelevance, death, relief or humiliation.

Shares may represent capital, love, approval, debt, compensation or belonging.

Development

Persons, interpretations, relationships and patterns can change.

New responses can become possible.

The Human Map therefore describes a recursive process rather than a simple causal chain.

Person → Filter → Relationship → Pattern → Meaning → Changed Person

The changed person returns to relationships differently.

The relationship responds.

Filters may shift.

A new pattern may emerge.

Or the old system may attempt to restore its previous equilibrium.

The observer then interprets the process through another filter.

This final point matters because the map itself remains a lens.

It is useful only so long as it does not pretend to be the territory.

Observation, Explanation and Meaning

Much confusion can be avoided by distinguishing three levels.

What Can Be Observed?

A father becomes less controlling.

A daughter supplies information more freely.

Arguments decrease.

Anxiety reduces.

The daughter subsequently behaves with greater confidence elsewhere.

These are potentially observable changes.

How Is the Change Explained?

Systems theory may describe disruption of a recursive pattern.

Psychoanalysis may describe an unconscious conflict becoming available for reflection rather than enactment.

Learning theory might focus upon altered expectations and reinforcement.

Yogananda could interpret the development through karma and the unfolding of latent spiritual possibility.

These explanations differ.

What Does the Change Ultimately Mean?

The therapist may consider the immediate improvement sufficient.

Greater autonomy and flexibility may constitute successful treatment.

Yogananda would place that development within a larger account of spiritual liberation.

Hoffman's work supplies no therapeutic or spiritual purpose at all.

It asks a different question: what kind of reality permits conscious experience in the first place?

Separating observation, explanation and ultimate meaning makes comparison possible without creating false equivalence.

Haley's work adds another caution.

Even the categories by which observations are organised may already reflect the theoretical commitments of the observer (Haley, 1969).

Individual and System: Opposite Directions Which Become Circular

At first, Yogananda and systems theory may appear to approach change from opposite directions.

Yogananda begins with developing consciousness and moves outward towards the relationships and circumstances through which development occurs.

Systems thinking begins with patterns among people and asks how changing those patterns changes the individual.

One appears to move:

Individual → Relationship

The other:

Relationship → Individual

But neither process remains linear.

The individual changes the relationship.

The relationship changes the individual.

The changed individual enters another relationship differently.

That relationship then acts upon the changed individual.

Development becomes recursive.

This circularity may constitute one of the most useful areas of overlap among otherwise different traditions.

A Better System May Allow a Different Person to Emerge

Consider a child described as “the anxious one”.

The family monitors her closely.

Any sign of distress produces immediate attention.

Activities are reorganised to protect her.

Every anxious response confirms that additional protection is required.

The increased attention also signals that anxiety is dangerous.

A systems intervention might reduce the family’s organisation around the child’s anxiety.

Parents become calmer.

They allow discomfort without immediately treating it as an emergency.

The child gradually discovers that anxiety can be tolerated.

Her behaviour changes.

From a systemic perspective, the family’s response changed the conditions maintaining the symptom.

From another perspective, a capacity for greater self-regulation has become available.

Yogananda might describe this capacity as a possibility latent within the individual which particular circumstances now allow to emerge.

He might also place those circumstances within karma.

The causal accounts differ.

But the changed system and changed person remain linked.

Change Does Not Always Feel Like Healing

The word *healing* must therefore be used carefully.

Families often maintain forms of equilibrium.

Some are painful but predictable.

Consider a founder who makes every important decision.

His son complains that he is never allowed to lead.

The founder complains that the son never takes responsibility.

The son waits.

The father intervenes.

The waiting confirms the father's belief.

The intervention confirms the son's complaint.

Everyone is unhappy.

The system is nevertheless stable.

If the father suddenly stops deciding, anxiety may initially increase.

The son must take responsibility.

Employees become uncertain.

The founder feels unnecessary.

His spouse worries about him.

Managers test the new chain of command.

The family may temporarily feel worse because its familiar organisation is changing.

Conversely, calm does not necessarily indicate healthy development.

A family may become peaceful when everyone returns to obedience.

A more useful concept across traditions may therefore be:

greater freedom from automatic repetition.

Systems approaches seek increased flexibility.

Psychoanalysis seeks greater freedom from unconscious repetition.

Yogananda uses an entirely different spiritual language but likewise places liberation from habitual identification, attachment and ignorance at the centre of development (Yogananda, 1946).

The different traditions do not mean exactly the same thing by freedom.

They nevertheless share an opposition to the idea that inherited or habitual patterns must indefinitely determine what comes next.

Is Separation the Most Fundamental Filter?

The concept of the filter now returns at a deeper level.

Hoffman questions whether the objects presented within spacetime reveal the fundamental structure of reality (Hoffman, 2019).

Yogananda proposes something more radical.

Within his non-dual spiritual orientation, the experienced boundary between self and other is itself not ultimate.

The world of separate persons remains practically real.

People make decisions.

They possess responsibilities.

They affect one another.

They experience consequences.

Yogananda does not eliminate ordinary individuality from daily life.

At the deeper metaphysical level, however, he presents multiplicity as arising within a more fundamental unity of consciousness (Yogananda, 1946).

Using the present article's terminology, one might say:

separation itself may be a filter.

Hoffman does not establish this conclusion.

His conscious agents remain formally distinguishable.

His scientific programme does not entail Yogananda's theology.

But Hoffman destabilises the naïve assumption that the experienced division of reality into objects in spacetime must represent ultimate ontology.

That is enough to reopen the philosophical question.

Unity Must Not Be Confused With Enmeshment

This point requires particular care in family therapy.

A spiritual assertion that “we are all one” cannot be translated clinically into the conclusion that boundaries are unnecessary.

Healthy families require differentiation.

People require room to possess distinct thoughts, responsibilities, desires and identities.

Structural and Bowenian family therapies have repeatedly emphasised boundaries and differentiation precisely because excessive fusion can restrict development (Minuchin, 1974; Bowen, 1978).

Thus metaphysical non-separation and psychological differentiation operate at different levels.

A daughter may need to become **more psychologically separate** from her father even if a spiritual philosophy ultimately denies that persons are metaphysically isolated entities.

There is no contradiction once the levels are distinguished.

Indeed, adequate differentiation may allow relationships to become less defensive and therefore more genuinely connected.

Family Business Reveals Interdependence Even Without Metaphysics

Family businesses make practical interdependence unusually visible.

“My shares.”

“Her department.”

“His money.”

“My father’s company.”

“Their side of the family.”

Such distinctions may be legally necessary.

But actions cross the boundaries.

A founder’s refusal to retire affects his successor.

A daughter’s withdrawal affects the founder.

A dividend decision affects siblings.

A family dispute affects managers and employees.

An argument between two brothers may shape what their children later believe about family loyalty.

Systems theory does not require belief in divine unity to recognise that participants in a relational system do not act independently.

Yogananda extends the argument much further at the metaphysical level.

The two propositions should remain distinct.

Intergenerational Transmission

Families transmit more than property.

They transmit stories.

Expectations.

Ways of handling disagreement.

Ways of responding to authority.

Patterns of dependence and independence.

Bowen's family theory placed particular emphasis upon multigenerational processes and the transmission of patterns across generations (Bowen, 1978).

Psychoanalysis uses another language involving identification, internalisation and repetition (Freud, 1958 [1914]; Freud, 1955 [1920]).

Yogananda uses karma.

The concepts should not be treated as synonyms.

Yet a common observation remains possible:

What happened before influences what becomes likely next.

Likely is not the same as inevitable.

This distinction creates room for development.

What Changes in One Generation Can Alter the Next

Suppose a father learns to tolerate disagreement.

He stops withdrawing affection when his daughter challenges him.

He gives her genuine authority.

She makes some mistakes.

He permits them.

The company survives.

The daughter's experience of authority changes.

Later she becomes a parent.

Her children grow up in a family where disagreement does not automatically threaten belonging.

What passed forward?

It need not be described as a mysterious substance called healing.

One can describe more concrete changes:

greater tolerance of disagreement;

less fear around authority;

wider behavioural choices;

different expectations of trust;

less compulsion to control;

a changed meaning of loyalty.

A systems therapist might describe interruption of an intergenerational pattern.

A psychoanalyst might describe altered internalised relationships.

Yogananda could understand the change in terms of karmic development.

Different languages.

Similar observation:

breaking a pattern in one generation may alter the range of possibilities available to subsequent generations.

This is especially important in family businesses, because succession transfers far more than shares.

It can transfer ways of controlling, trusting, fearing, loving and belonging.

Yogananda's Father and the Problem of Succession

Autobiography of a Yogi contains a particularly useful family example.

Yogananda's father, Bhagabati Charan Ghosh, held a senior position with the Bengal-Nagpur Railway.

Yogananda portrays him as disciplined, financially careful and deeply responsible (Yogananda, 1946).

He had succeeded professionally.

Understandably, he imagined a conventional future for his son.

A respectable executive railway position was available.

It promised status, security and income.

His son declined.

He wanted the monastic life.

The episode could easily be relocated to a contemporary family business.

The founder says:

There is a good place for you here.

The child hears:

My life has already been decided.

The parent experiences opportunity.

The child may experience obligation.

When a Gift Becomes a Debt

Family businesses often contain an unspoken sentence:

One day this will all be yours.

The founder may intend generosity.

The business represents decades of work, risk and sacrifice.

But a gift can become a debt if accepting it becomes the price of belonging.

Yogananda's father eventually visited the school his son had established at Ranchi.

Seeing his son's work allowed him to revise the meaning of the earlier refusal.

The choice no longer needed to mean waste or rejection.

His son had found another vocation (Yogananda, 1946).

Several traditions can describe this.

A psychoanalytic account may consider separation between father and son.

A systems account may emphasise a shift in the relational pattern.

Yogananda interprets the episode within his spiritual development.

The Human Map offers a simpler description.

The father changed the meaning of the son's choice.

When meaning changed, the relationship acquired new possibilities.

For family-business succession, this leads to a useful principle:

Passing on an opportunity is generous. Assigning another person's life is different.

Lahiri Mahasaya and the Integration of Ordinary Life

Another figure in Yogananda's autobiography is particularly relevant.

Lahiri Mahasaya is presented as a spiritual teacher who remained within ordinary family and working life.

Rather than renouncing worldly responsibilities, he continued to fulfil family, civic and occupational duties while pursuing spiritual practice (Yogananda, 1946).

This is crucial.

Spiritual development is not placed in a sealed compartment.

Family life.

Business life.

Civic responsibility.

Inner development.

They belong to the same person.

This provides a useful challenge to compartmentalisation.

Sunday Morning and Monday Morning

Consider someone attending a religious or spiritual centre.

He hears about compassion, humility, honesty, forgiveness and responsibility.

He agrees sincerely.

On Monday morning his son challenges a business decision.

His brother disputes the dividend policy.

A customer withholds payment.

An employee makes an expensive error.

Compassion becomes harder to locate.

The obvious explanation is hypocrisy.

Sometimes that may be correct.

Systems thinking offers a richer possibility.

Different relational contexts activate different patterns.

The individual in the religious setting may experience little threat to status, identity or authority.

The same person in a business involving a competitive brother, an increasingly independent son and a company intertwined with personal identity may enter a very different state.

A psychoanalyst asks what internal material has been activated.

A systems therapist examines the interaction.

Yogananda might argue that the difficult context exposes precisely where development remains incomplete.

Serenity while sitting alone may reveal less than the ability to remain humane when a successor rejects the life one has planned for him.

The Human Map would describe this more neutrally:

A value available within one context may not yet be reliably available within another filter, relationship and pattern.

The problem is therefore not simply that Sunday and Monday contain different beliefs.

They may evoke different organisations of the person.

The Inner Balance Sheet

Family businesses usually develop sophisticated measures of the visible organisation.

Revenue.

Margins.

Property.

Debt.

Cash.

Headcount.

Market share.

Enterprise value.

These are indispensable.

But another balance sheet exists.

What is the business doing to the people who belong to it?

Does it produce capability or dependency?

Does ownership increase freedom or obligation?

Does succession create opportunity or entrapment?

Does the founder retain the business because it remains productive, or because personal identity has become inseparable from control?

How much wealth is enough?

Does fairness require equality?

At what point does stewardship become fear of change?

Accounting cannot answer these questions.

Systems analysis can examine likely relational effects.

Psychoanalysis may illuminate emotional meaning.

Law can define ownership.

Economics can model incentives.

Philosophy is still required when the question becomes:

What are we trying to accomplish, and why should that goal matter?

The Dangerous Appeal of Intuition

Steve Jobs brings the discussion towards intuition.

Jobs valued intuition strongly, and his experiences in India and subsequent interest in meditation formed part of his own account of how he approached the world (Isaacson, 2011).

A simplistic business lesson would be:

Trust your gut.

That would be unsafe.

Expert intuition can compress years of experience.

An experienced restaurateur may recognise a failing dining room before consciously identifying why.

A designer may recognise that a prototype is wrong before articulating the defect.

A broker may sense that a transaction is beginning to collapse despite favourable documents.

Yet intuition can also contain fear, prejudice, habit, wishful thinking and ego.

A founder may be certain that the eldest son represents the natural successor.

Perhaps he does.

Or perhaps the founder is looking through a succession filter so familiar that it no longer appears to be a filter.

A more useful rule is:

Use intuition to decide where to look. Use evidence to discover what is there.

Then examine the system.

What happens to other siblings?

What happens to non-family managers?

What happens if the founder remains physically present?

Who holds authority when employees disagree with the successor?

An apparently individual decision enters a relational system and produces consequences.

Respect the Founder Without Becoming the Founder

Benioff's account of Jobs also contained an observation relevant to succession.

Apple's later leaders, he argued, needed to respect Jobs without merely imitating him. They needed to discover who they themselves were (Perez and Ha, 2013).

The parallel with family business is obvious.

A daughter does not honour her mother by becoming an impersonation of her.

A son does not require his father's desk, mannerisms, preferred customers and historical management practices.

Nor must successors destroy the past merely to prove independence.

Good succession asks:

What did the founder understand which remains valuable?

What has changed?

What happens to the wider system when authority moves?

And what kind of person does the successor actually wish to become?

The first questions belong partly to business strategy.

The last returns us to philosophy.

The Company Is a System, but the Owner Is Still a Person

Systems thinking corrects an important error.

Problems do not always reside inside the individual identified as problematic.

The "difficult son" may participate in a difficult relationship.

The "controlling founder" may exist within a family that has become dependent upon his control.

The "warring siblings" may continue their conflict partly because another family member repeatedly restores the old triangle.

Yet systems language has its own risk.

People can disappear into diagrams.

Father becomes *Founder*.

Daughter becomes *Next Generation*.

Brother becomes *Sibling Shareholder B*.

Their lives become arrows and feedback loops.

The diagram may be useful.

The people still experience life from the inside.

They love.

Fear.

Regret.

Envy.

Hope.

Age.

They ask whether their lives have been well used.

A systems diagram may help a father see why the same argument with his daughter keeps recurring.

It cannot finally determine whether winning that argument is worth losing the relationship.

Another language remains necessary.

One Map, Several Legends

The aim of this paper has not been to merge Yogananda, Hoffman, psychoanalysis and family systems theory.

Their ontologies, methods and aims differ significantly.

Science asks questions through methods of evidence and testing.

Hoffman uses scientific and mathematical reasoning to challenge assumptions about perception, spacetime and consciousness (Hoffman and Prakash, 2014; Hoffman, Singh and Prakash, 2015; Prentner and Hoffman, 2024).

Systems theory examines interaction, feedback, context and recurring relational patterns (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974).

Psychoanalysis examines unconscious conflict, internalised relationships, defence and repetition (Freud, 1958 [1914]; Freud, 1955 [1920]).

Yogananda places individual experience within a spiritual account of consciousness, karma, non-separation and liberation (Yogananda, 1946).

Haley's analysis adds a methodological qualification.

The observer's theory affects what becomes visible in the first place (Haley, 1969; Capps, 2004).

The Human Map does not resolve these disagreements.

It merely permits several legends to be placed beside the same territory.

A father releases control.

A daughter fights less fiercely for independence.

She leads differently.

Her children later encounter a different form of authority.

Something changed.

Systems theory can map the relational reorganisation.

Psychoanalysis can explore changed internal meanings.

Psychological science can investigate behaviour.

Yogananda can place the episode within spiritual and karmic development.

Hoffman contributes something different.

He asks whether even the physical stage upon which these events appear to occur should be treated as ultimate reality.

Haley reminds us that, whatever theory we choose, we are still looking through a lens.

Several Forms of Intellectual Humility

These traditions may therefore contribute different forms of humility.

Science says:

Show the evidence.

Do not mistake sincerity for proof.

Allow cherished explanations to fail.

Systems theory says:

Look beyond the identified individual.

The symptom may belong partly to a pattern.

Psychoanalysis says:

Do not assume that you fully know why you do what you do.

Unconscious meaning matters.

Hoffman says:

Do not assume that the interface provided by perception reveals fundamental reality.

Haley's work suggests:

Do not assume that the categories supplied by your theory belong to the phenomenon rather than to your way of viewing it.

Yogananda says:

Do not assume that ordinary consciousness reveals the deepest truth of who you are.

These statements are not equivalent.

Together, however, they encourage the same preliminary action:

Look again.

Conclusion: Perhaps That Was the Point of the Brown Box

We cannot know precisely what Steve Jobs intended every guest at his memorial to find in *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

Benioff interpreted the gift as a call towards self-realisation (Perez and Ha, 2013).

Different readers will take different things from the book.

Some will accept Yogananda's spiritual claims.

Some will find the philosophy valuable while remaining sceptical of the miracles.

Some will regard parts as metaphor.

The significant point is that a man associated with sophisticated technology repeatedly returned to a work asking questions technology could not answer for him.

Who am I?

What is consciousness?

What matters?

How much of what appears obvious is produced through the way I perceive?

What is the relationship between the individual and everything around them?

What is all this activity ultimately for?

These questions matter greatly in family business.

Family firms become very good at measuring the visible world.

Their less visible balance sheet concerns the humans inside the enterprise.

What do they repeatedly do to one another?

Through which filters do they see one another?

Through which filters do we, as observers, see them?

Which patterns arrived from earlier generations?

Which are they sending forward?

Which could end here?

Does the business create purpose or captivity?

Are children becoming capable adults or permanent heirs?

Does the founder own the company, or has the company begun to own the founder?

Do the values expressed in religious or philosophical life remain available when money, authority and inheritance are at stake?

How separate are the participants' interests really?

No single framework can provide a complete answer.

Science can investigate parts of the process.

Systems thinking can describe recursive patterns.

Psychoanalysis can examine inner meaning and repetition.

Hoffman can ask whether the physical and perceptual interface within which we locate the problem is itself fundamental.

Haley can remind us that the observer's lens also shapes what appears to be the problem.

Yogananda can ask whether the apparent separateness of the people involved is the deepest reality of their existence.

Wisdom may begin by resisting the attempt to make one language describe everything.

We can examine the person.

Examine the filter.

Watch the relationship.

Recognise the pattern.

Study the context.

Ask what it means.

Then ask what our own chosen lens may be making difficult to see.

Finally, we can remain curious about what becomes possible next.

The person changes the relationship.

The relationship changes the person.

The filters through which each experiences the other can change.

The observer's filter may change too.

And what changes between them may alter what becomes possible for the next generation.

Systems thinking maps part of that movement.

Psychoanalysis explores part of its inner meaning.

Science can investigate aspects of its mechanism.

Hoffman asks whether even the stage on which it seems to occur is as fundamental as it appears.

Haley reminds us that every account of that stage is already an interpretation.

Yogananda asks the most radical question:

What if, beneath the filters through which we experience ourselves and one another, the separateness that seems so self-evident is not the final truth about what we are?

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