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Duo-ethnography as the Qualitative Inquiry in Small Family Business Research

1. Introduction

Leading several years of research aiming to understand the specifics of family businesses in various research projects in Poland we have gathered a number of comments and observations on the use of various cognition methods. One of the first projects conducted in 2001 pointed to significant restrictions on the use of quantitative methods, so in subsequent programs conducted in 2004-2005[1] and 2009[2], we developed experimenting with the use of qualitative methods, which was developed in the following years.

The restrictions in the research of small family businesses are similar to those associated with research of economic organizations based on primary sources in general, for example:
- it is difficult to reach the studied entities and encourage them to take part in the study,
- most of the information that is believed to be a source of competitive advantage and know-how is hidden,

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- the quality of the acquired research material is varied due to the different level of involvement of studied organizations,
- achieving representativeness is a big problem due to refusals to participate in the study,
- sampling poses problems because there are no reliable draw operates that could help identify family businesses.

In studies of small family businesses there are also specific problems characteristic of this kind of entities.

1. Due to the limited size of the business entity and a low degree of formalization there is little standardized documentation material allowing to develop research based on primary sources.

2. Conducting research based on representative samples of family businesses is highly difficult because there are no sampling frames covering only this type of entities. In each study it is therefore necessary to make filtering of general sample of small businesses or SMEs based on adopted definition of "familism". As is well known, in this area there is a significant variation and multiplicity of definitions based on various criteria such as: self-determination as a family business, planned or conducted family succession, ownership and management of family members of the business. In practice, it is very often difficult to verify the existence of criteria other than self-determination.

3. Experience presented by many researchers has shown a particularly sensitive area of research, namely the relationship between the company and the family ownership. For this reason, familist and nepotistic relations and practices as well as the flow of resources between the company and the family are usually camouflaged.

4. Due to the special emotional relationship of family members owning controlled economic entity, the description of the experience of a family business is often subjective and idealized.

5. For the functioning of the organizations the following are of key importance: social processes, identity, culture, values and norms related to the family nature of the entity, which can be reached only with the help of in-depth methods.

Studies of the social side of organization are particularly demanding methodologically and require methodological pluralism and triangulation of methods, which is often associated with qualitative methodology. The diagnosis of these key issues of research indicates that qualitative research can be particularly valuable from the cognitive point of view, which is supported by the experience of the authors of this publication.

The article is a reflection on methodological problems of cognition of small family organizations resulting from the analysis of the literature and from our own experience, as well as a description of the attempts to apply a relatively little-known method of qualitative research which is duo-ethnography.

2. Methodology of qualitative research

Qualitative research methodology refers to a rich portfolio of theories and research based on the interpretative-symbolic paradigm (Smircich 1983; Hatch&Schultz 2000; Geertz1973; Sulkowski 2009). Within this methodological approach a *tabula rasa* assumption is made, which means that hypotheses are not formulated at the stage of conceptualization, but only open and general research questions, which are aggravated in the cognitive process. The second premise is methodological triangulation which involves the use of several parallel data-mining techniques that are complementing each other (Turner 1983). The third assumption was reflexiveness, meaning subjecting the initial results to critical analysis and reflection not only by a researcher but also by the studies.

Auto-ethnography is an approach to research that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Holman Jones 2005). Auto-ethnography challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others by dominating subjective insights reflected in narration in first person (Spry 2001). Auto-ethnography is a form of critique and resistance that can be found in diverse literatures such as ethnic autobiography, fiction, memoir, and texts that identify zones of contact, conquest, and the contested meanings of self and culture that accompanies the exercise of representational authority (Neuman 1996). One can define auto-ethnography as a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts. Auto-ethnography is both a method and a text of diverse interdisciplinary praxes (Reed-Danahay 1997). Auto-ethnographic writing resists typical theorizing and the facade of objective research that decontextualizes subjects and searches for singular truth (Crawford 1996; Denzin 1997).

Duo-ethnography is a relatively new method of anthropological research which builds on the experiences of auto-ethnography. It is based on assuming the reflection carried out by insiders who then lead the dialogue and jointly create the narrative (Sawyer & Joe2012; Pithouse & al 2009). In the conducted study, the author, who is a member of the studied organizations, cooperated and conducted a dialogue with three other insiders (one in each university), creating their case studies.

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Cognitive usability of these research techniques is associated with the original and profound nature of the acquired data which include not only verbalized concepts but also feelings, intuitions and implicitly accepted the pre-concepts. Undoubtedly, the data collected are subjective, but they can be made inter-subjective by treating with communication and reflection.

3. Application of qualitative methods to research of family businesses

In a study of family businesses we are in favour of methodological pluralism which gives the possibility of combining quantitative and qualitative methods. It seems, however, that for the purposes of understanding social processes of management in small family businesses qualitative methods allowing in-depth, specific understanding of the complexity of the studied phenomena are more appropriate. We are here thinking especially of organizational anthropology methods such as in-depth interviews, participatory observation, auto-ethnography and case studies.

In the case study of small family businesses in-depth interview which can take many forms, including, for example, narrative or biographical interview will be the key method. The key problem is to induce the respondent to reflect and communicate with the researcher, which will reveal important and complex cultural processes, beyond the reach of standardized methods.

Another common method of studying small family businesses is participatory observation. The researcher taking on the role of a scholar or consultant is involved in the work of the family organization from the perspective of participatory or non-participatory observation. The data acquired with the use of this method relate primarily to the sphere of action and not just communication and declarations, as in the case of interviews.

A variation of the participatory observation method is auto-ethnography, which uses self-observation, that is one's own long lasting organizational experience allowing as a result to understand the social context of the phenomena. Therefore auto-ethnography is a research approach aiming to describe and analyze systematically the organization (graphy), but also a personal experience (self), in order to understand the cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis 2004) (Holman Jones 2005). It can be a good tool for testing one's own organization and can be extremely useful in this regard. However, such approach undermines the fundamental ways of doing research represented by other methods. (Spry, 2001). Auto-ethnography is often seen as a social constructivism project rejecting the rooted dichotomy between the researcher

and the studied. Research of this type is treated as politically and socially fair and as a socially conscious act (Adams and Holman Jones 2008). Researcher uses the assumptions of autobiography and ethnography to carry out auto-ethnography. Thus, there are both the process and the result in the auto-ethnographic way (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2010).

In various publications on interdisciplinary issues one can meet with the opinion that auto ethnography is a form of criticism and resistance and refers to the concept of ethnic community, autobiography, novels, diaries and texts that identify the contact zone, conquest and contested meanings of self and culture, accompanied by exercising power (Neuman 1996). Auto ethnography can also be defined as the narrative of one's self, where the researcher is, however, aware of his/her role, experiences and the influence on the ongoing research.

Auto ethnography is both the method and content of interdisciplinary practices applied or used in various branches of science (Reed - Danahay 1997). Auto ethnographic research oppose the typical theorizing and the facade of objective studies that take the object out of the context and seek a single truth. (Crawford 1996; Denzin 1997). This methodology is a subjective type but also a subjective ethnographic experience. An important advantage of auto ethnography is the possibility of an insight into the identity, cultural background and specificity of the family business and a better understanding by the investigator of the phenomena occurring in the studied organization and their individual experiences. Table 1 presents various approaches of researchers to the participative observation method, which is auto-ethnography.

Table 1. The variety of auto-ethnography concepts

Author(s) and Date	Concepts presented in the review of the research
C. Ellis (2004)	Auto-ethnographic forms include specific actions, emotions, embodiment, self-awareness and introspection presented in dialogue, scenes, characterization and narrative. Auto-ethnographic research is aimed at the description and systematic analysis of the organization (graphy), but also personal experience (auto), in order to understand cultural (ethno) experience.
S. Holman Jones (2005)	Auto-ethnography is a theoretical, methodological and (above all) textual approach that aims to experience, reflect and present - through the evocation - the relationships between oneself and culture, individual and collective experience and identity policy, and appeals for social justice. During the study of these relations, auto-ethnography combines personal narratives and socio-cultural exploration.

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T.E. Adams, S. Holman Jones (2008)	Auto-ethnography seen as a project of social constructivism rejecting the rooted dichotomy between the researcher and the researched subject. This type of research is treated as a politically and socially just and socially conscious act. This method uses a combination of personal experience with culture and cultural identity. Auto-ethnography, as a research method, tries to disrupt the traditional and dominant research ideas, in particular regarding what research is and how research should be conducted.
T. Spry (2001)	Auto-ethnographic representation makes us aware of how we „see" our realistic constructions. Interpreting culture through reflection and cultural breakdowns of identity is a characteristic feature of auto-ethnographic activity. It can be a good tool to conduct the study of one's own organization. However, this approach undermines basic means of conducting research represented by other methods.
C. Ellis, T.E. Adams A.P. Bochner (2010)	Auto-ethnography is an approach to research and writing, which aims to describe and systematically analyze personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno). The researcher uses the principles of autobiography and ethnography to write auto-ethnography. Thus, as a method, auto-ethnography is both a process and a product.
M. Neuman (1996)	Auto-ethnography is a form of criticism and resistance, which can be found in various literatures, such as ethnic autobiography, fiction, memories and texts, which contain information about contacts, conquests and the tested traits of self and culture that accompany the execution of representative power.
D. R. Reed - Danahay (1997)	Auto-ethnography is a postmodern construction synthesizing both postmodern ethnography, in which the realistic convention and the objective position of an observer of standard ethnography as well as postmodernist autobiography were questioned, in which the notion of a coherent, individual self was likewise undermined. The term has a dual meaning - it applies both to the ethnography of its own group and to the autobiographical record of ethnographic interests.
L. Crawford (1996)	Auto-ethnographic writing resists. Questions and answers for the world of research and development. In auto-ethnography or personal ethnography, observation and analysis techniques are applied to one's own experiences. The challenge in this type of research is objective self-perception, as fresh as possible worldview, and then the interpretation of the identified experiences in the light of the current theory.
N.K. Denzin (1997)	Auto-ethnography can be defined as auto-narration, which criticizes the positioning of oneself in other environments. Subjectivity of the researcher is an important part of the research process, and the socio-historical implication is reflected in the individual perspective of the researcher.

Source: according to the items listed in the footnotes

Both authors of this publication possess rich knowledge about the functioning of family businesses taken from the autopsy, i.e. work in a small family business. It is a deep knowledge, possible to acquire practically only by the insider, but also burdened with a high degree of subjectivity. It seems that it is the understanding of the links between the organization and the family is a key argument persuasive to use this research technique. At the same time ethical problems should be given special attention in qualitative research methods. In case of many of these methods, and in case of auto ethnography in particular it is not possible to maintain the anonymity of the studied organization.

The integration of multiple data derived from primary and secondary sources (e.g. written, web-based) can allow to develop case studies of studied small family businesses. They can be individual descriptions showing the problems specific to this type of organization or multiple case studies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) or even comparative analyses of case studies. Multiple case studies based on the emic methodology are focused on the identification of diversity, while comparative analyses lead to cautious generalizations according to the established comparative criteria.

4. Methodology of research

The study represented duo-ethnographic approach, where the two insiders together created a narrative about the relationship between the family organization and the founding family. The first of insiders, whose narrative is marked with the letter A, is a member of the founding family and manages the organization. The other of the insiders, whose narrative is marked with the letter B, is not a member of the founding family and occupies a managerial position in the studied organization. The method to create the narrative was the in-depth interview, which was conducted by the researchers and was then transcribed. Then, the two transcriptions were discussed by the insiders who agreed on a common version of the narrative. Then the narrative was subjected to a secondary interpretation by the researchers. The survey was conducted in November and December of 2015.

5. Case study – anthropological approach

The studied organization is a company formed in 1973. Since the beginning, it was located in a small town in central Poland. In more than forty-year history the company was active in two sectors. The beginning of the activity was the

production of soft drinks which lasted until 2004. However, in 1984, it extended the activities to the production of wooden articles. Initially, these were wooden slats for the interior and then, from 1998, the production of modern joinery. Dremar manufactures made to order wooden windows and doors to houses and residences and public buildings. The company has specialized in renovating the woodwork for historic buildings in accordance with the requirements of conservators. It also manufactures wooden benches and equipment for sacral objects.

The development and functioning of the company is strongly associated with the local environment where the owners and recruited staff live. The studied business subject is committed to supporting community-based initiatives. However, the sales market is broader and covers the area of central Polish and also includes export activities to Germany and the UK.

Currently, the company is owned by the second generation of the founding family, the son of the founder and his wife. The succession process of transferring the company to the next generation is being implemented. 15 people are employed in the studied organization, including four from two generations of ownership family.

It should be emphasized that the studied company is fully aware of its family identity. Since 2009 it belongs to the association of Polish family businesses. The business has clearly defined itself as a family and informs its environment and employees about it.

5.1. How was the organization created?

A: "The company was founded in 1973 by my father and his brother. The company was founded where they were born and where their parents lived, they themselves lived in a big city. One of the main factors of establishment of the company was the will to work on their own and to ensure financial independence. I remembered very well my father's words that he has had enough of coming to work at a factory whistle blow. He always wanted to ensure a good future for our family and working in the state owned company did not allow to realize this objective.

The idea to start his own business was due to the fact that in the village where my grandparents lived and the surrounding area there was not any drink manufacturer and one could start producing them for this market. They used the plot of their parents, and built a factory of carbonated beverages there. Since 1978 after his brother passed away my father, ran the company alone."

B. "As I started to work in Dremar I knew nothing about the origins of the company. I only knew that the company operated for a long time and that it belonged to some family. My father knew the owner and advised that I asked if they needed workers. As a child, I drank soda produced by this company. Now, after more than ten years of work, I know how it developed and by knowing the history of the company I understand its specifics.

Surely creating a private business in the 70s of the twentieth century required overcoming many difficulties. The political system prevailing at that time in Poland was not conducive to the development of private companies. The company's founder, at the time when he was frequently in the company often talked about the time when he created the company."

A: "I remember the beginnings of the company were difficult. My father worked very hard from morning till night, and my mother and I tried to help him as much as we could. It was difficult because we lived in a big city, and the company was about 40 km away. It was a very difficult time for both the company and our family and I respect my father that he was determined and took care of the business and the family.

I saw his involvement as a young boy when I spent a part of the holiday in Jeżów working in our company and helping dad. Over time, it was quite natural for me to realize that after I finish my studies I will join my dad. In 1984, I joined my father and became his partner. We started to work together and developed our company but not without trouble, because I had a lot to learn. With the course of time, I began to take more and more responsibilities and manage the business.

In 2002 my father retired and left the active running of the business. My wife, who resigned from her full-time job in 1998 and joined us after my father left, became the co-owner".

B: "I think that the process of creation of a family business never ends, because I see how the boss really cares about the development of the company and ensuring its continued functioning. Today it is difficult to keep the company. For some time he prepares us to take the company through successors. In the company I am responsible for contacts with customers and I increasingly see that long-term operation of the company and the fact that we are a family business helps us attract customers."

5.2. What are the relations between the founding family and the organization?

A: "Since the beginning, the company is owned by our family, which fundamentally determines our relationship. One could say that the company's

affairs and those of the family naturally intertwine. At home we talk about the company all the time, even at Christmas table. I'm used to this, because it was always like this as I can remember. From the family home I carried the principle that one should respect the money that was earned and not show off with it. I know the company will need it to develop. We can take money for the family only after we are sure that the company operates safely."

B: "The impact of family ownership is felt in all the activities of our company. One has the impression that especially the boss does not separate time for a private life and business, for him it one thing. Maybe it's because the house is next to the company. After years of work, I know that all important company decisions are made after a discussion by the family."

A: "Our family has always been entrepreneurial, probably this is why my dad dared to establish a company in times of communist Poland, it was easier for me because I had a good example. Entrepreneurship is best realized in one's own business and, as it turns out, with the family. Working together also means trust and a good relationship. I absolutely trust my wife, also my daughter and son-in-law never disappointed me. Working together in a company brings good results and we know how to act in different, even very difficult conditions."

B: "The positive effect of family-business relation is that we have a family atmosphere. There is no division between family members and employees. I admire their ability to be together and get up after tough situations. They are strong personalities, sometimes clash hard but can get on well with each other. I also think that family values influence the rules applied in the company, such as respect for the assets of the company, respect for customers, employees and suppliers, taking care of the company's image."

5.3. What were the reasons for the involvement of family members in the functioning of the business?

A: "In the initial period of operation they were economic reasons related to the need to ensure the functioning and development of the company, which was the foundation of bringing income for our family. Over time, other reasons took on more and more importance, such as personal development, awareness of working for ourselves and continuing the tradition of the family business. As a child I liked to work with my father. I liked what he was doing. When I was a teenager I worked part time working on the production during the holidays. My father prepared me to work in the company, so after graduation it was natural for me that I would work with him."

B: "I think the members of ownership family are involved in the company's operations, not only for financial reasons, they just live in the company. As I watch them, as I see that they put a lot of heart and time into the company also so that we as employees have a good job. The fact that the company is a family business makes us very connected with each other. The boss always says that the most valuable asset of the company are its employees."

A: "I am glad that my son-in-law wanted to work with us. I appreciate his commitment and joyfully prepare him to take over the company. I see that he appreciates autonomy and development opportunities offered by working together in his own company."

B: "In case of the boss, the commitment stems from a desire to be independent and do many new things."

5.4. What forms does the involvement of the family members in the functioning of the business take on?

A: "We are engaged in the activities of the company in different ways, we can say that each of us has their role. I deal with issues related to the organization and planning of the company's development and construction of its strategy. My wife handles the finances and human resources. The son-in-law is responsible for the company's ongoing operations in the production, assembly and supply of raw materials. My daughter, in turn, is the least involved in the company's operations, because still gaining experience elsewhere. But when we need it she helps us in dealing with different issues."

B: "The family is drawn into the business since I started working here. Everyone is very committed. The boss is responsible for key issues and leaves me and his son-in-law a lot of flexibility in operational management. He trusts us a lot. But as the need arises to resolve a problem he can always make a decision. His wife deals with the finances of the company. The daughter of the boss is the least committed but she is still probably looking for her way of life".

A: "Sometimes when there is a lot of work, we spend in the company ten hours a day and more and do what is necessary at the moment. But we are trying to work out ways of reconciling work and family privacy. Despite the heavy time load, we have a great satisfaction from the sense of independence and the effects that working in our own company brings."

B: "Boss's son-in-law works like all of us, there is no leniency. I know he is the future successor to the boss, who will take over the company in five years. I get involved in daily activities and problems that come to be solved. At work he is the partner for me. we understand and complement each other well.

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6. Discussion

The study was designed to verify empirically the effectiveness of applying duo-ethnographic method in the qualitative study of family businesses. The conducted study allowed us to determine the value of the use of duo-ethnography in the study of family businesses and to understand the nature of this study, giving us a chance to get to what both authors of the narratives are experiencing.

Using this method allowed the wake self-narration in both insiders, which allowed to complete the research, which was to reach the narrative way of organizing knowledge of the studied entity. The study allowed us to obtain additional information regarding not only the facts and their interpretation, but also the arrangement of these interpretations in the narrative structure. These objectives were realized through the use of appropriate set of questions and their incorporation in the interview.

While engaging in bringing about the self-narration we expected from both insiders to obtain specific diagnostic value in the form of excess information that appears in the narrative autobiographical data that could be used in further analysis. As the survey revealed, despite the fact that the narratives was based on facts related to the functioning of the studied entity, the narrative went beyond, not referring both to the past and the future. The study made it possible to carry out an in-depth reflection on the studied entity and identification "identity-creating" processes, determining the specifics of the subject. Surplus of information obtained thanks to the duo-ethnography shows that insiders often interpret the same experience differently but in the final phase of the study they come together in dialogue and determine the content and form of the spoken narrative.

As a result, we were able to recognize the experiences of both insiders and to penetrate the organization of the business in a manner in which it is experienced by the narrators. The study also allowed us to get to know the factors relevant to the culture of the studied business such as for example the system of family values. As we noted self narrative allowed us to understand the company's identity through following the history of its origin and development.

The applied method gave us space, through which we could develop intimate relationship between the investigator and the persons participating in the study difficult to achieve in the study of family business. The sessions that were organized were characterized by open communication, dialogue and full authenticity. Meeting those demands required a low degree of interview formalization.

Summary

Duo-ethnography as the Qualitative Inquiry in Small Family Business Research

The research methodology of family businesses is increasingly becoming the subject of scientific discussion that shows how difficult and complex task it is. Research area is located on the border of several disciplines, which raises significant methodological problems.

Qualitative methods are useful for studying the problems of small family businesses, in particular related to the sphere of issues of identity, culture, values and the relationship between the family and the company. Qualitative methods allow for more efficient acquisition of reliable data on 'sensitive' subjects in comparison with quantitative methods. It is equally important to provide information about the complex social processes that are better studied with open methods.

The methodology of qualitative research is not without its limitations. First of all, by definition it poses problems of generalization, and thus also theorizing. Research results are burdened with considerable subjectivity which can be transformed into inter-subjectivity by using different methods and perspectives.

In the qualitative studies of small family businesses methodological pluralism which allows the creation of mixed research programs can be postulated. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods in one research program may provide important, but not always commensurate results. One can also point to the need for methodological triangulation and therefore the use of different, complementary research methods and techniques that will allow to describe the studied small family company in its entire complexity. The example of duo-ethnography provides the possibility to achieve a high level of relational demands allowing for the creation of unique philosophy of the meeting, a deep entry into the unique history of the studied entity and ownership family and the adoption of prospects for the narrator and an expert person participating in the study.

Keywords: *management sciences, family business, research methods, qualitative research*.

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Streszczenie

Wykorzystanie duo-etnografii w badaniach jakościowych małych przedsiębiorstw rodzinnych

Celem artykułu jest przeanalizowanie możliwości zastosowania duo-etnografii w badaniach dążących do poznania charakterystyki i problemów firm rodzinnych. Autorzy opisują kluczowe problemy związane z badaniami nad tą grupą podmiotów. Analizę przeprowadzono w oparciu o refleksję nad metodami stosowanymi w poznawaniu małych organizacji rodzinnych, porównania metod jakościowych i ilościowych oraz odniesień do mniej znanych metod badawczych, takich jak auto-etnografia, analiza porównawcza i liczne studia przypadków. W artykule wskazano na konieczność stosowania pluralizmu metodologicznego i wykorzystania różnych dostępnych technik badawczych, dzięki czemu możliwe będzie opisanie całej złożoności małej firmy rodzinnej.

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