

She Always Gives Her All to the Family Firm -- but He Follows the Leader

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It's been proven that dedicated employees who go above and beyond what the job specifies help their companies be more efficient and keep customers happy. Other research has shown that leaders can have a role in inspiring this devotion, especially when they are thoughtful and generous. These "altruistic" leaders inspire a feeling of trust and improve work relationships, both of which motivate employees to give their all and then some – a quality referred to as "organizational citizenship."

But in family businesses, as [our research reveals \(https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/08944865211008062\)](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/08944865211008062), other factors come into play. Our survey results confirmed that altruistic leaders do inspire people to go the extra mile, but gender and kinship changes things. We saw that female employees who were not related to the business-owning family value compassion, caring, and warmth, and they responded in kind to leaders who exhibit those qualities. However, we also saw that female relatives give their all to their family's business regardless of whether the leader is benevolent or not. Specifically, for daughters of the CEO and other female family members, the leader's altruism didn't matter – these women were supportive and dedicated to the family business no matter what.

In contrast, we saw that male relatives were only supportive organizational citizens under altruistic leaders. They withheld their citizenship behaviors when their leader was less altruistic – which is masculine behavior wired into parent/child dynamics and emotions. Thus, we also saw that male non-relatives were not affected by their leader's altruism. We feel that this is likely because men, who tend to value opportunities for advancement, may feel their chances for promotion are slim if they think family members will always occupy the top roles.

Our Survey

We gathered survey responses from 209 pairs of family business CEOs and their employees. The employees included a mix of non-family members and family members, including sons and daughters, and other relatives outside the immediate family. We asked the CEOs questions to gauge their organization's leadership style, such as the degree to which they "really care about their people," "do not punish honest mistakes" and are "kind and considerate toward the organization's workers, and when they are suffering, want to do something about it." We asked the employees questions to pinpoint their family relationship to the CEO, and we asked other questions that gauged their level of organizational citizenship, such as "Do you attend functions that are not required but that help the organizational image?"; "Do you defend the organization when other employees criticize it?"; "Do you take action to protect the organization from potential problems?"

Other Findings

Along with our findings related to male and female relatives and non-relatives, our study suggests that employees use organizational citizenship behavior as a way to "pay back" the leader for his or her support and compassion. We also saw stronger dedication among non-family employees in family businesses with stewardship cultures; that is, cultures with strong personal relationships and communication among family and non-family employees. It appears that non-family employees who identify with the family business can become trusted members of the "in-group," which encourages them to exhibit similar citizenship behaviors as family employees.

The Takeaway

Our findings have implications for family businesses, their advisors, and scholars who study organizational

behavior. We found that family businesses have their own dynamics that can affect how much a supportive and generous leader will motivate others in the firm. Here are some things to think about:

- While a kindhearted leader may inspire employees to go the extra mile, there is no “one size fits all” approach. Family business managers and advisors must recognize that employees’ motivations and behaviors are different, based on their kinship with the boss and their gender.
- Family businesses may need to implement professional practices that demonstrate to male non-family employees that they have a path to success and status if they are to encourage greater citizenship behaviors from them.
- Family businesses may need to instill more confidence in female family employees by encouraging them to fulfill more professional roles, beyond being dedicated nurturers.
- The family business community should more fully recognize the contributions of female family employees, who are often “unsung heroes” of their family businesses.

Learn More

Madison, K., Eddleston, K. A., Kellermanns, F. W., & Powell, G. N. (2021). [Kinship and Gender in Family Firms: New Insights Into Employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/08944865211008062), (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/08944865211008062>) Family Business Review, 34(3), 270-295.