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EMPLOYEES' ORGANIZATIONAL PREFERENCES: A STUDY ON FAMILY BUSINESSES

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ABSTRACT. Favouring family members, family businesses are often labelled as 'traditional' in technology, 'conventional' in business focus, 'less energetic' in development and 'less exciting' in change. Yet, the choice of potentially having a non-family employee to work in a family firm is critical and the career path of such employees is often uncertain. Accordingly, this study focuses on identifying and examining the factors behind organizational preferences of non-family employees working in family businesses in Sri Lanka. The survey data covering 145 employees working in 15 privately held family businesses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and stepwise logistic regressions. The results indicate a negative influence of the marital status of the employees and also in the degree of personal rewards whilst job status, the labor market experience, influence from family members and recognition in business from the society have shown a positive effect on being employed in family business as a non-family employee.

Keywords: employee behavior; family business; organizational preference; person-organization fit theory; Sri Lanka.

Introduction

Person-organization (P-O) fit theory (Kristof, 1996) focuses on the compatibility between an organisation and an employee. According to this theory, association between organizations and their employees exist on the basis of fulfilling the requirements of each party. The unique characteristics of each party plays a huge role in shaping the relationship between organisations and their employees. Meanwhile, family-owned businesses which are partly or fully managed based on blood relationships or kinship are identified as separate type of business as they have unique characteristics. Complying with person-organisation fit theory, previous studies have adequately discussed the characteristics unique to family businesses, while Poza *et al.* (1997) emphasised on the business culture of these businesses. In terms key features of the family business employees the findings of the previous studies have brought much confusion concerning the compatibility of employees and such organisations. This issue becomes even more sensitive when employees join family firms coming from non-family firms (Block, 2016). Elaboration of organizational behavioral aspects concerning employees' compatibility with family businesses have become an important societal and research problem.

Previous studies have found evidence which supports the compatibility that one party (employees or organisation) providing for the needs of the other party or mutual needs of family businesses. Some studies have found there is more stability for employees in terms of job security and in the work environment (Bassanini *et al.*, 2013; Block, 2010) in case these employees join family businesses. Generosity which is an essential element enhancing employee's commitment and loyalty is also more evident in family businesses as opposed to non-family businesses (Van Willigen, 2000). Teamwork, employee engagement, employee job satisfaction were all identified as being more powerful in family businesses (Kuruppuge and Gregar, 2017). All these evidences supports the idea there may be mutual benefits between organizations and their employees.

On the other hand, a study by Bassanini *et al.* (2013) observed that employee's package of family business is lower as compared to non-family businesses. Further, family businesses are labelled as traditional in technology, are more conventional in their business focus, less energetic in development and less exciting in change (Astrachan Binz, 2014; Allio, 2004; Poza *et al.*, 1997). High potential for conflict in decision-making and favouring family members has become a common characteristic which is the result of family members' involvement in business matters (Ensley and Pearson, 2005).

There are also contradictory conclusions concerning the compatibility between employees and family businesses: supporting this compatibility are the results provided in (Bassanini *et al.*, 2013; Block, 2010; Van Willigen, 2000; Kuruppuge and Gregar, 2017) while challenging this compatibility are (Astrachan Binz, 2014; Allio, 2004; Poza *et al.*, 1997; Ensley and Pearson, 2005). This has created some sort of puzzle of fit of person and organization. In addition, it is also a known fact that family businesses are suffering from the survival problem in the long run (Salvato & Leif, 2008). These two aspects in their theoretical contradiction lead to a knowledge gap concerning the organizational behavioral aspects of family businesses and practical uncertainty concerning job security of employees working long-term for family businesses.

A simple question to ask after looking at the above information would be: why does a potential non-family employee choose to work for a family business after all? This question becomes fair enough as previous literature confirms that individual occupational decisions are taken based on the employment status (wages, job security) and public image of a potential employer (Van Willigen, 2000). Limited studies have provided empirical finding on the occupational choice of individual employees. Specifically, very few studies have addressed this concept in the highly specific context of family businesses. Since there is an obvious research gap detected here, this study intends to identify the probable determinants and their relationships with employee's individual characteristics when these employees make up their decision to work for family businesses.

This paper consists of five parts. The second part discusses the relevant literature and theoretical lens of the study. The methodology of the study is discussed in part three. Part four presents the data analysis and discussion, and the final part provides the conclusion of the study also describing practical implications along with the limitations of this study.

1. Literature review

This study analysis the personal characteristics such as socio demographic, job, organisational over the employee preference to work in family businesses making the personal-organisation fit stronger. Specifically, the characteristics related to family businesses have been looked at from the perspective of entrepreneurship orientation, which most of the scholars in the area of family businesses are keen on in today's studies (Randerson *et al.*, 2015). The Authors of this article are trying to build the argument that the employees'

preference for organisations is determined primarily by the employee's personal, occupational, and organisational characteristics. The preference further strengthened with the congruence of values between an employee and the organisation. Accordingly, the brief literature review of this study explores the person-organisation fit theory, socio-demographic, the occupational characteristics of employees and organisational characteristics.

1.1. Person-organisation Fit Theory

The congruence of values between an employee and his or her organisation is emphasized by P-O fit theory (Velez and Moradi, 2012). The theory posits that in return for what a person contributes to an organisation, such as skills, knowledge, and competencies, the organisation gives him/her benefits, such as values, competencies, and perspectives. Such congruence of values between the organisation and the employees motivate the employees to adjust their skills, abilities, and competencies according to the employer's requirements (Jex and Britt, 2008). If this relationship is not interrupted by other matters, the employer can consider this fit a factor that is more effective than salaries and promotions in attracting employees and keeping them in the organisation for longer periods of time. Further, the P-O fit theory has been widely used by scholars in understanding the employees' allegiance to organisations (Block *et al.*, 2016).

1.2. Socio-demographic, Occupational and Organisational Characteristics towards Employee's Preference to Work in Family Business

The literature pertaining to family businesses contains several studies on one's willingness to work in family businesses. Analysing the general view of the public about the brand image of family businesses, Krappe, Goutas, and Von Schlippe (2011) observe that family businesses are believed to be socially attractive and sustainable but inflexible when it comes to change. A study by Astrachan Binz (2014) explores the general perceptions regarding family businesses, and the findings suggest that people perceived family businesses as traditional in performance, inefficient in development, but trustworthy in terms of the employee's job security and welfare.

Similarly, a more detailed analysis regarding the relevance of the family business brand and how it is perceived investigates whether the presumed superior reputation of family businesses (e.g., trustworthiness; long-term orientation) translates into a competitive advantage. The findings suggest, among other things, that individuals do indeed perceive family businesses as more traditional, trustworthy, and less profit-oriented. Yet, they are also associated with a lack of professionalism and limited career opportunities than publicly owned businesses. There is also a comparatively large amount of literature analysing the customer's perceptions of family businesses. For example, Astrachan Binz, Hair, Pieper *et al.* (2013) have shown that a family business 'image' can positively influence business performance. This is primarily because it attracts customers, thus increasing sales. Similar results are obtained by Zellweger, Kellermann, Eddleston, and Memili (2012) and Craig, Dibrell, and Davis (2008), all of whom attribute the performance enhancing effect of family business 'image' to the fact that a family-based brand identity enhances the business' ability to attract customers. Finally, Orth and Green (2009) have shown that consumers evaluate family businesses (grocery stores) more positively in terms of service, trust, and benevolence, but more negatively in terms of the price or value. Accordingly, *Figure 1* summarises literature review of this study and provides the conceptual framework for data analysis.

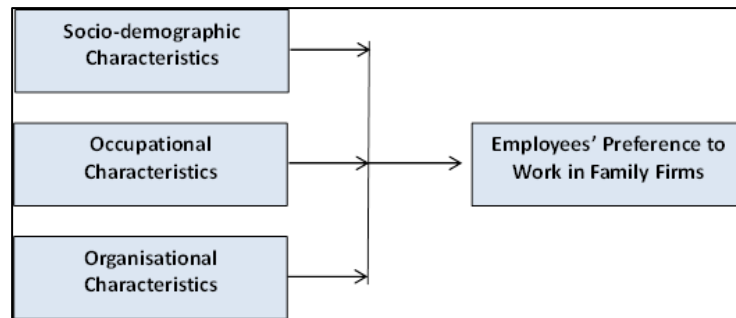


Figure 1. Main characteristics that influence employees' preference in family firms
Source: Developed by the authors based on literature.

2. Methodological approach

In order to test the conceptual model, a survey involving a group of employees working in privately held family businesses in Sri Lanka was conducted in 2016. Geographically, the survey covered all three Districts in Western Province, namely Colombo, Gampaha, and Kaluthara. Ultimately, an author and enumerators could manage to visit and collect data from 17 family businesses, of which 12 businesses were mostly oriented towards manufacturing and the rest oriented towards both manufacturing and services. A sample of 145 senior employees who have had at least five years of work experience in the respective businesses were randomly selected using a stratified random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool. All measurements validated by previous research on the four indicators of the conceptual framework were adapted to the questionnaire.

The outcome variable (the preference to be employed in a family business) of this study is a dummy variable. The status of the employee's preference was measured using the question, 'If you got a chance to be employed somewhere with similar benefits, where would you select to be employed?' possible answers included, 'family business like my organization' (coded as 1), 'non-family businesses, privately held sole-proprietary businesses or listed companies' (coded as 0). The predictor variables of the model were demographic characteristics, individuality, organizational characteristics, and occupational characteristics. Demographic characteristics included gender (female) as dichotomous variable (female = 1 or otherwise '0'). The respondent's age was taken in years as a scale measurement. Marital status (married) served as a dichotomous variable indicating '1' for married and '0' otherwise. The size of each respondent's family was also determined by the number of family members in the family as a scale measurement. The education of the respondents was also a dummy variable (1 = tertiary, 0 = otherwise). The level of income from the business for family and personal requirements was also considered. The respondents were asked whether the income from their job is adequate in satisfying their basic personal and family requirements. The answers were coded as '1' if the response was 'can manage with basic needs of a month'. If the responses were otherwise they were coded as '0'. The status of the job was considered as a dichotomous variable with the code '1' for managerial and code '0' for non-managerial positions. Ten years of labour market experience was counted as a turning point. While less than 10 years of experience was coded as '0', more than 10 years was coded as '1'. A dummy variable was created for the orientation of the job. The respondents were asked to mark the orientation according to their wish. The answers were either technical, or manual, or both technical & manual. The combined technical & manual orientation was coded as '1' and the other responses as '0'. As far as career development prospects were concerned, '1' was used

if the respondents were happy, and '0' was used otherwise. Dummies were created to represent the variables of the degree of personal rewards from the organisation, the influence of family members, and the extent to which the business is recognized by society. Finally, the development of the business during the last five years was used as a dichotomous variable. If the respondents had seen a development in the business during the last five years, the answer was coded as '1' (see *Table 1* for more details).

Table 1. Variables and their scale of measurement

Dependent variable	Scale of dependent variable
preference to be employed in family firms	dichotomous variable; 1 = if there is a chance to be employed in another firm with similar benefits, but still willing to stay with the current firm or be employed in another family firm 0 = otherwise
Independent variables	Scale of independent variable
Socio-demographic characteristics	
- Gender	dichotomous variable; 1 = female, 0 = otherwise
- Age	scale variable; age of the respondent (years)
- Marital status	dichotomous variable; 1 = married, 0 = otherwise
- Size of family	scale variable number of family members in the respective family
- Education	dummy variable; 1 = tertiary, 0 = otherwise
- Income from the job	dichotomous variable; 1 = can manage basic needs of the month, 0 = otherwise
Independent variables	Scale of independent variable
Occupational characteristics	
- Job status	dichotomous variable; 1 = managerial, 0 = otherwise
- Labour market experience	dichotomous variable; 1 = more than 10 years, 0 = less than 10 years
- Job orientation	dummy variable; 1 = skilled and professional , 0 = otherwise
- Carrier development	dummy variable; 1 = happy, 0 = otherwise
Organisational characteristics	
- Degree of personal rewards from the organisation	dummy variable; 1 = happy, 0 = otherwise
- Influence of family members	dummy variable; 1 = appropriate, 0 = otherwise
- Recognition of the firm by society	dummy variable; 1 = happy, 0 = otherwise
- Development of the firm during last five years	dichotomous variable; 1 = happy, 0 = otherwise

Source: Developed by Authors based on available literature.

The data collected from the field was analysed employing quantitative data analysis techniques. Descriptive statistics and stepwise logistic regression provided the necessary statistical rigor. Stepwise logistics regression was initially used with the binary dependent variable, and later the model was recognised to be effective when both categorical & continuous variables represented the model as predictor variables (Reed and Wu, 2013). The logistic model of this study contains 14 predictor variables of which two are scale and the rest are dichotomous variables. The coding of the outcome of the logistic model is interpreted $Y=0$ or $Y=1$ indicating the presence or absence of an incident. When ‘Pr’ denotes the probability of the event being present. The following notions show the technicality of the development of the model.

$$\text{Logit}(\text{Pr}) = \log\left(\frac{\text{Pr}}{1 - \text{Pr}}\right) \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Pr}_i = E\left(Y = \frac{1}{X_i}\right) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-\left(\alpha_0 + \sum_i \alpha_i X_i\right)}} \quad (2)$$

$$\text{Pr}(\text{event}) = \frac{e^{\left(\alpha_0 + \sum_i \alpha_i X_i\right)}}{1 + e^{\left(\alpha_0 + \sum_i \alpha_i X_i\right)}} \quad (3)$$

Further, the expected probability of the outcome is represented by ‘Pr’, the coefficients are represented by α_n and the independent variables are given as x_i . The outcome is the estimated ln of the odds. The outcome is undertaken in Eq. 4.

$$\ln\left(\frac{\text{Pr}}{1 - \text{Pr}}\right) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 X_1 + \alpha_2 X_2 + \alpha_3 X_i + \dots + \alpha_n X_n \quad (4)$$

Finally, a dichotomous outcome variable of employee’s preferences to work in family firms was regressed over 14 predictors of dichotomous and dummy variables.

3. Conducting research, results and discussion

The data analysis process began with descriptive statistical analysis of the responses obtained by the sample of 145 respondents with the aim of identifying the probable determinants and the relationships between the employees’ individual characteristics and the nature of their occupation in the family businesses. The sample contained 86 male participants and around 50 percent of all respondents is unmarried. 50 percent of the employees in the sample had been educated up to the tertiary level. A total of 91 out of the 145 respondents reported that they prefer to work in family businesses rather than in non-family businesses. According to *Table 2*, the average age of the employees is 28 years. The average family size, regardless of the marital status of the employees in the sample, is four members.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of responses

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Preference for working in family firms	0	1	.62	.48
Gender	0	1	.59	.49
Age	18	49	27.7	6.7
Marital status	0	1	.76	.42
Family size	1	8	3.77	.92
Education level	0	1	.49	.50
Income from the job	0	1	.51	.50
Job designation	0	1	.52	.50
Experience in the job market	0	1	.35	.47
Job orientation	0	1	.57	.49
Career development	0	1	.35	.47
Degree of personal rewards from the firm	0	1	.62	.48
Influence of family members	0	1	.59	.49
Recognition of the firm by society	0	1	.69	.46
Development of the firm in the last five years	0	1	.76	.42

Source: Developed by Authors based on primary data

Table 3, which presents the variable correlation analysis of the independent variables, proves that inter-correlation is not a problem in further analysis of data in the case of the 14 independent variables in the model. Almost all correlations between the variables were reported as less than 0.8. Inter-correlation between personal rewards and job status, the influence of family members and job status and the recognition of the business by society is reported as -0.742, 0.717 and 0.719 respectively. All other correlations reported minimum values.

Table 3. Correlation analysis of independent variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Gender	1.00													
2. Age	-.061	1.00												
3. Marital_status	.083	.070	1.00											
4. Size_of_family	-.054	.029	-.272	1.00										
5. Education	-.149	-.234	-.078	-.011	1.00									
6. Income	-.101	.118	.301	-.023	-.045	1.00								
7. Job_status	-.163	-.300	-.437	.193	.419	-.033	1.00							
8. Experience	.123	-.701	-.409	.257	.219	-.114	.489	1.00						
9. Job_orientation	-.162	.090	-.068	.319	-.199	.048	-.044	-.059	1.00					
10. Carrier_dev	.204	-.047	.288	-.135	.034	-.168	-.100	-.230	-.039	1.00				
11. Pers_rewards	.378	.170	.077	-.090	-.568	-.249	-.742	-.172	-.128	.142	1.00			
12. Influ_family	-.168	-.126	-.488	.293	.042	-.116	.717	.288	.147	-.129	-.520	1.00		
13. Recog_firm	-.132	-.128	-.468	.218	.364	-.244	.719	.240	.079	-.021	-.585	.691	1.00	
14. Devo_firm	.076	.062	.334	-.436	-.122	.069	-.404	-.260	-.137	-.140	.190	-.349	-.348	1.00

Source: Developed by Authors based on primary data.

According to the stepwise logistic regression, which highlights the socio-demographic, occupational, and organizational characteristics of the employees comprise Model 1, Model 2 and Model 3 respectively against the employees' preference for working in family businesses.

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However, the analysis aims to identify the determinants of the preference of the individual employees to be employed in family businesses based on the results of Model 4, which is a comprehensive model that includes all the variables.

Table 4. Logistic regression results for employee's preference to work in family firms

Characteristics	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	β	(t-stat)	Sig.	β	(t-stat)	Sig.	β	(t-stat)	Sig.	β	(t-stat)	Sig.
<i>Socio-demographic characteristics</i>												
Gender of the employee	-.157	.146	n.s.							-.220	.052	n.s.
Age of the employee	.000	.000	n.s.							-.108	1.27	n.s.
Marital status of the employee	-.303	.384	n.s.							-3.26	3.89	*
Size of the family of the employee	.396	2.69	n.s.							.998	2.83	n.s.
Education level of the employee	1.69	15.6	*							2.29	3.54	n.s.
Income from the job of the employee	.454	1.21	n.s.							-.373	.142	n.s.
<i>Occupational characteristics</i>												
Job status				1.43	7.07	*				6.2	9.72	*
Labour market experience				2.19	7.66	*				3.8	4.54	*
Job orientation				1.12	4.48	*				.83	.77	n.s.
Career development				.15	.090	n.s.				-.72	.49	n.s.
<i>Organizational characteristics</i>												
Degree to personal rewards from the organization										-5.2	6.28	*
Influence of family members										4.3	9.44	*
Recognition of the firm by society										6.5	19.7	n.s.
Development of the firm during the last five years										-1.8	2.43	n.s.
<i>Chi-square value</i>		28.6*			54.2*					144*		144*
<i>Nagelkerke pseudo R²</i>		.244			.426					.861		.861
<i>Cox & Snell R²</i>		.179			.312					.631		.631
<i>Classification accuracy</i>		72.4			75.2					94.5		94.5

N.B: *significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

Source: Developed by Authors based on primary data.

According to Model 4 given in Table 4, only the marital status of the employees has recorded significant negative results. Married people have not shown their willingness to be employed in family businesses compared to their fellow unmarried employees. The odds ratio of -3.26 indicates that the odds for the preference for working in a family business increases by 32.6% if the respondent is not married. This concludes that individuals who are not married are more willing to work in family businesses. At the same time, a strong influence could be observed in the area of occupational characteristics. Two characteristics, namely job status and labour market experience, have positively influenced the employees' preference for working in family businesses. The odds ratio of job status confirms that 6.2 odds for the

preference for working in family businesses increases by 62% if the respondent has a managerial position. This means that those who have managerial positions, as opposed to those who do not, are more likely to work in family businesses, and this finding is in agreement with the findings of other studies across the world (Block *et al.*, 2016). As far as labour market experience is concerned, it has shown that those employees who have more than ten years of work experience are more likely to work in family businesses, as opposed to those who are less experienced in the job market. The odds ratio of 3.8 indicates that the odds for the preference for working in family businesses increases by 38% if the respondent has more than ten years of work experience in the labour market.

The majority of organizational characteristics have shown a significant role in determining the employees' preference for being employed in family businesses. Three out of the four characteristics – the degree of personal rewards from the organization, the influence of family members in business activities, and the recognition of the business by society – are more likely to have an impact on one's decision to be employed in family businesses. However, the degree of personal rewards from the organization has recorded a negative impact as far as employment in family businesses is concerned. The minus odds ratio of the degree of personal rewards from the organization (-5.2) indicates that the odds for the preference for working in a family business increases by 52% if the respondent is not happy about the personal rewarding system. This finding could be controversial, yet the results indicate that personal rewards are not a main factor that individuals take into consideration in choosing employment in family businesses. The odds ratio concerning the influence of family members in business activities, which indicates a positive effect, confirms that 4.3 odds for the preference for working in family businesses increases by 43% if the respondent thinks that the family members' influence in business matters are fairly sufficient. Similarly, the respondent's opinion about the social recognition for the business has a substantial impact on their decision to be employed in family businesses. The odds ratio of the social recognition of the family business confirms that the preference for working in family businesses increases by 65% if the respondent is of the opinion that the particular family business is well recognized in society. It also follows that individuals are more likely to work for those family businesses, which are recognized to be 'one of the best firm' by the broader society, than for other family businesses.

The data analysis reveals the influence of the socio-demographic, occupational, and organisational characteristics in an employee's preference to be employed in a family business. Out of the fourteen characteristics, only six were found to have a significant influence in shaping an employee's preference for working in a family business. Accordingly, marital status as a socio-demographic characteristic has shown a negative effect, while the occupational characteristics of job status and labour market experience have shown a positive influence. Three out of the four characteristics of organisational characteristics – the degree of personal rewards from the organization (negative influence), the influence of family members on business activities (positive), and the degree to which the business is recognized by society (positive) – indicate a significant impact on one's preference for being employed in a family business.

Showing a wide spectrum of characteristics in different domains concerning the employees, this analysis concludes that organizational characteristics are more important than socio-demographic and occupational characteristics in determining one's preference for working in a family business. Socio-demographic characteristics have emerged the least important in this regard. Among all, the social recognition for a given business remains the most important factor that determines one's choice to work in a family business, while the degree of personal rewards from the business has emerged the least important factor.

Conclusion

The scholarly debate surrounding the drawbacks of family businesses, such as nepotism, unprofessionalism, and stagnation in development, has made the choice of a potential non-family employee to work in a family business critical and challenging as the career path of such employees are uncertain. This study aimed at identifying and examining the factors behind the willingness of non-family employees to work in family businesses in the Sri Lankan context. Organizational characteristics were identified as the most important factors and socio-demographic characteristics as the least important factors that determine one's preference for working in family businesses. Among all, the social recognition of the business was found to be the first priority in the employees' choice to work in a family business, while the degree of personal rewards from the business emerged the least important. Thus, this study has presented a clear and complete view of the employees' perception regarding employment in family businesses, and the contribution of this study for the theory and practice and future research in the field would be remarkable.

This study brings several implications for practice. It examines in detail the existing studies on the individuals' preference for working in family businesses and the effect of socio-demographic, occupational characteristics, and organizational characteristics that determine this preference. This study provides new insights into the preference of the employees for working in family businesses. The employees' preference has shown a more holistic approach as previous studies have not adequately concluded the same phenomena. For example, identifying the preference of the employees who are working in family businesses and their individual characteristics. Specifically, this paper's suggestions about the types of employee characteristics and organizational characteristics which are favourable for employment in family businesses can direct to get better management decisions. Accordingly, the findings of this study would assist businesses in their decision making process that encompasses recruitment, promotion, training, and development. Policy makers in human resource management and family business activities would also benefit from the findings of the study.

This study contains several limitations with regard to the interpretation of the findings. As Hauswald *et al.* (2015) point out, the findings of a study cannot be easily generalized, as the sample on which the findings are based is from a limited context. Therefore, instead of generalizing these findings to family businesses across the world, it would be meaningful to interpret them with the primary goal of developing economies like Sri Lanka. At the same time, the sample size itself is a limitation, even though the sampling process was done randomly. Accordingly, these findings could be interpreted only in relation to privately held family businesses and not in relation to public companies (listed in Stock Exchange). All the measurements of the questionnaire were in the form of the Likert scale, and the questionnaire was a structured one. Therefore, the individual employees did not have a chance to express their opinions. As a result, all responses are confined with the contextual constrains. Accordingly, rather than deploying only quantitative methodology for this kind of research, it is better to use mixed-methodology, implementing different methods, such as interviews and surveys for data collection. Such methods would enable the researchers to derive more accurate interpretations of employee behaviour. Future research that avoids the limitations of the present study would be able to provide new insights into the nature of employee behavior and family businesses.

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