

## **WOMEN BEHIND THE SCENES IN FAMILY BUSINESSES**

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### **Abstract**

The success of family businesses is largely due to a circular relationship in which three intangible factors enhance each other: love for the family business, trust among different business factors, and freedom of behaviour for family members (Gallo et al., 2001). These values are the cornerstone on which family members base their commitment to the business. But how can family members of advanced generations, especially those who are not active in the business, become more committed to the success of the family business? And are there gender-specific roles, as the literature on this subject seems to indicate?

The research outlined in this document seeks to enlarge the current pool of knowledge, offering the results of a study involving 98 Spanish family businesses, in which a total of 200 non-active family members responded to a questionnaire about their relationship with the family business and their associated relatives.

The main results confirm the existing literature by revealing that women are expected to play certain roles such as managing the household and child-rearing. Even though these roles are not clearly defined, women perceive numerous obstacles when attempting to assume roles beyond the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, our results confirm that, regardless of the degree of women's direct participation in the family business, their strong commitment towards the business as well as their other qualities can permeate the family relationship to the point of affecting the business performance by influencing the entrepreneur's motivation and business-related decisions. Through her passion for the family she provides the business with a powerful asset: the strong "family glue".

**Key words:** family business; family ownership; male and female agents of commitment.

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## INTRODUCTION

Given their position in the spotlight, family businesses are facing the challenge of becoming part of the new economic revolution. In order to retain the peculiar idiosyncrasies involved in being a family firm they seek to blend highly innovative behaviour based on family traditions. (Ward, 1999). Several years ago, researchers already pointed out that the fundamental difference between family and non-family businesses lies in the extraordinary level of unity and commitment which family members pour into their business. Successful family businesses are those that improve their business results through judicious use of this distinctive strength.

Hence, a family business is built upon a community of people that includes owners, managers, family employees and people hired from outside. Satisfying all of them is not an easy task, but as the statistics have shown, it is a necessary one.<sup>2</sup> Given the complexity of roles and interests, maintaining unity depends on the level of commitment that family members are able to share between the business on the one hand and the family members on the other.

How can we expect family members to be motivated to do so? If we look particularly at non-active family members, it is important to note that their commitment level not only depends on economic links but also on emotional links and the cultural environment, which results from both education and value transmission over generations.

The research outlined in this document therefore seeks to extend the present pool of knowledge, as described in the preceding paragraphs, by offering a better understanding of how family members evaluate their level of commitment towards the family business to which they belong. Some of the preliminary results of this study<sup>3</sup> are particularly interesting as they show the strong erosion in commitment observed over generations. The attitudes range from a fairly strong willingness to invest both effort and idealism in business ideas with the expectation of rewards (first and second generations), to a belief that the business owes rewards to family members without them owing anything to the business (second and third generations), and finally to a questioning of whether the business is still a family business (third generation and beyond).

These results clearly underline the fact that commitment cannot be taken for granted or expected to result naturally from pure self-sacrifice. It is therefore important to look for motivators and rewards that will help enhance the commitment of all family members towards the business. As such, the previous parts of this study highlighted different reward systems, as well as possible measures to increase the levels of “effort”, “loyalty” and “idealism”. Nevertheless, due to the fact that the results have indicated important differences in the level of commitment when comparing men and women, this study provides a better understanding of the different gender specific roles in family businesses and how they are distributed according to gender.

The scant literature on the role of women in family businesses indicates that women possess a sense of intuition and sensibility which can be particularly useful in fostering commitment

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics show that more than 60% of Family Businesses disappear, not because of bad management or governance, but because of family conflicts. (Dyer, 1998)

<sup>3</sup> Gallo, M. A. and Cappuyns, K. (2004) Effort, Loyalty and Idealism. Research Paper, N° 571 and Gallo, M. A. and Cappuyns, K. (2004) Why family members who do not work in the family business: How to enhance their “unity” and “commitment”. Research Paper N°570.

among family members. But as long as family businesses perpetuate a strong gender-specific role definition women are excluded from almost all roles.

Hence literature on family businesses suggests that family members become committed to the business through ownership and the possibility of participating in family councils or General Shareholder Assemblies, as well as through a strong feeling of responsibility (Carlock and Ward, 2001). Nevertheless, the results of the current study seem to indicate the opposite: namely, that even without having access to ownership, women still maintain a strong level of commitment.

In fact, in spite of the many obstacles that women encounter when making great efforts to encourage commitment among family members, they seem to be much more active behind the scenes than most men are willing to recognise. Through the analysis of the results we expect to highlight the very positive influence of women by providing financial resources to their husbands, by creating opportunities for other family members to express their opinion, and by educating their children to show respect for each other. With her passion for the family she provides the business with a powerful asset: the strong family glue.

This article starts with a review of the literature, followed by a presentation of the gender-specific results with respect to the levels of commitment to the family business. We then give a short description of the data collection process and the sample used, the research methodology, the main results and some conclusions, as well as proposed paths for further research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Over recent years, several authors have attempted to identify what lies behind competitive businesses that have been able to endure over time, whether these businesses have been specifically family businesses (Gallo and Amat, 2003; Koiranen, 2002) or otherwise (Collins and Porras, 1994). If one wants to maintain both competitiveness and good family relations within a family business, it is necessary to acknowledge that from the second generation onwards the number of family shareholders will expand and that these people will increasingly play non-business roles (Carlock and Ward, 2001; Gallo, M. A., Corbetta, G., Dyer, G. , Tomaselli, S., Montemerlo, D. & Cappuyns, K.; 2001).

As the business passes from generation to generation, its management and ownership will usually evolve, as does the family itself, and as a result of this growth, members from different generations will be obliged to coexist. In a recent international study of a group of 16 large family businesses in Spain, Italy and the United States that have survived through a second generation or beyond, Gallo et al. (2001) found that the successful businesses in their sample, as opposed to those that were unsuccessful, were notable for both their great family unity and for the *high level of commitment* shown to the company by the different family members. This study also emphasised the fundamental characteristics of both unity and commitment. These include the confidence that the family members have in the capacity and performance of those who have the greatest influence on the company's activities, and the love that everyone in the family must develop for the family enterprise (Gallo, et al. 2001).

Furthermore, other researchers have developed concepts such as "familiness," (Habbershon & Williams 2000) which includes a range of qualities not yet clearly defined, but generally conveys the idea that the family is harmoniously intertwined and involved in the implementation of certain group objectives. Finally, researchers have also defined the

characteristic of “belongingness” (Karlsson Stider; 2001), a strong sense of belonging to the family. This results from knowledge of past actions that have been carried out by other family members, sharing certain values which have evolved over time, and the transformations of homes and other physical places into symbols for people who share the same bloodline.

To some extent the amount of family participation is a tangible demonstration of the family’s commitment to the business, but it cannot be limited to a merely financial involvement. Instead, as some research suggests (Carlock and Ward, 2001) if one wants to preserve commitment, it is essential to maintain ownership and the intention to participate as a responsible owner. Since this responsibility is not automatically acquired with ownership, family members must be taught from the very early stages to become owners who are committed to the long-term continuity of the family business (Gallo et al., 2006).

The emergence of younger generations and in-laws represents valuable potential resources for the family firm, but since the level of unity among family members can be affected, there is an urgent need to clarify all the family members’ individual, family and management expectations. This clarification helps participants in the family business system develop a shared understanding of both goals and potential areas of conflict. Therefore, families strive for a commitment or “shared dream” that includes not only financial dimensions but also agreement on moral, emotional and family-related facets that will provide orientation for the strategic and competitive vision in the middle and long-term life of the company (Lansberg, 1999).

In addition, one should not forget that the family provides an ideal learning environment for assimilating these basic roots of commitment, given that during the course of their lives people generally spend more time in a family environment than anywhere else. The family context also provides certain exceptional conditions, such as loving feedback from other family members, which make it possible to build family relationships encouraged by a search for the good in each individual (Cappuyns, 2006 unpublished).

When dealing with the tasks of the family as an education environment, another issue immediately arises. Resulting from a very strong adherence to the traditional division of labour within the family, a family business may allocate domestic responsibilities to the wife and business responsibilities to the husband (Frishkoff and Brown, 1993; Lyman, Salganicoff, and Hollander 1985; Gillis-Donovan and Moynihan-Brandt, 1990; Moen, 1992). This situation persists even longer in family businesses, where neither men nor women are willing to upset this deeply entrenched balance of work and family roles, which is emotionally linked with their traditional male and female identities (Berk and Shih, 1980; Freudenberger, Freedheim, and Kurtz, 1989; Janeway, 1981).

Nevertheless, the limited literature about women in the family business field indicates that wives’ contributions to family businesses take several forms: from managing the household, working in the business, being employed by others, to working in the business and holding outside employment at the same time (Rowe and Hong, p. 3). At the present time, there are four groups of publications that can be clearly identified as dealing with the role of women in and outside the family business: the gender specific roles in family businesses, the lack of job recognition resulting in a low remuneration for women, the barriers against women’s collaboration, and, last but not least, the results of women working in family businesses.

In this particular study I will mention only the publications<sup>4</sup> that make reference to different roles attributed to women who are not active in the family business, with a special focus on how women from outside the business might have a privileged position to influence the commitment level of other family members. As Pramodita Sharma (2004) in a recent publication states, the huge majority of women in family firms continue to remain in the background, frequently occupying the role of a household manager and taking on the primary responsibility for the household and child-rearing tasks (Cole, 1997; Fitzgerald and Muske, 2002).

Most of these roles involve undervalued and unpaid housework, which is unformulated, and unexpressed, but taken for granted. This is true particularly of the gender-specific tasks, such as rearing and educating children, preparing meals, house-cleaning and washing clothes, taking care of the house, instilling values, caring for dependent children and sick or elderly family members, assisting in a spouse's work, managing family finances, etc. (Lyman, Salganicoff & Hollander, 1985 and Voydanoff, 1990).

But apparently a particular bias exists between the roles that women are "expected" to play and those that they "agree" to play (Cole, 1997). This is without doubt a reflection of today's world of family ambition and increasing gender neutrality, which has led to a new era in which being gender-specific is no longer the rule. However, this literature highlights an encouraging vision by showing the influence of spouses and wives in fostering commitment, with a few researchers even providing empirical results to underline this new concept.

One of the main challenges of the family business is its desire to embody, preserve, and develop some basic family values within its culture that give rise to characteristic strengths. Therefore, the wife's knowledge of how to ensure the conservation of these values and her profound desire to support her husband and family in making the correct decisions is much more important than her formal participation. There is no need to participate formally in the family business since these tasks can also be accomplished with the husband in informal meetings (Gallo, 1990, p. 19).

Roles such as family peace-keeper, or the "glue" that holds the different relationships together, appear in varying forms within the family firm, but are often undervalued. A mother educates her children to respect each other, to feel passion for the family and to avoid dominating over others, appreciating and respecting their siblings' talents and needs. Such a mother has strongly contributed to the family business' multigenerational survival even though she may not be active in the business (McClure, 2002). It is through these three different key elements that the mother contributes to the conservation of the family glue, and this is what maintains family relationships in good as well as in bad times.

Some literature goes even further, stating that strong spousal commitment can be a source of competitive advantage and facilitate the success of a family business (Harris, Martinez and Ward, 1994). It is likely to be associated with a willingness to deploy family-based resources to support the business. Spousal commitment may be especially important during the initial

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<sup>4</sup> I will not extend the other parts, nor the literature related to women working in the family business, as this goes beyond the subject of this paper. It is definitely an interesting and very much recommended issue for future research, especially the experiences and results of the first female entrepreneurs, which seem to implement a very different but at the same time efficient management style.

years of a new venture when financial challenges and chances of failure are the greatest. Spouses can provide active support in the form of personal or temporal resources (including financial and human capital). Alternatively, spouses can provide passive emotional support that alleviates financial stresses (Van Auke and Werbel, 2006).

Some women identify other roles: "I am the spiritual captain, the nurturer of love, respect and honor. I also bring the ability to see things in context." In another testimonial a spouse said: "I bring creativity, and some kind of glue. I also try to mention how important it is to focus on a distant spot, rather than focusing on pieces" (Poza & Messer, 2001).

These roles afford women the opportunity to take on certain family responsibilities, such as the creation of a family council, writing the family's history, hosting weekly or monthly family meetings, being the contact person for consultants, planning family vacations or organising multigenerational celebrations (Poza and Messer, 2001, p. 30).

Unfortunately, as most of these strengths are not highly visible, the role of women is still highly undervalued (Folker and Sorenson, 2002, p. 1). As a consequence, women encounter barriers. Not only are they kept away from the business but they also have no access to ownership, which results in a positive discrimination towards men. There has been clear discrimination from the male side to hold and retain positions of power in the business, due to the fact that they experience feelings of psychological ownership because they are in some way associated and familiarised with the business. As such they begin to think that the family business is theirs, when they really own only a share in its capital or, in some cases, nothing at all. (Garcia Alvarez, 2003).

Women seem to have endured many difficulties in family businesses, but finally some new streams of upcoming literature seeks to underline the strengths which women contribute to the family business. Hence, this new stream of research also insinuates that women who are not active in the family business are honoured for their noteworthy insights and inputs. Therefore, "common wisdom" now suggests inclusion rather than exclusion of spouses at family ownership meetings (Aronoff, 1998).

The findings of this research project are meant to present results that corroborate what most know but don't want to acknowledge: that most family businesses are built on the support and sacrifice of mothers, wives, grandmothers, sisters, and daughters (Astrachan and Bowen, 1999).

## **THE STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE**

Levels of commitment in the family business depend on a wide range of variables which can mainly be divided into three main groups: some are qualities inherent in the person, others relate to the family business or the family itself, while still others are based on value judgments that the person makes in certain situations or actions taken by the company or the family. As we know, opinions on family businesses are usually related to the characteristics of the person offering them (Poza, Alfred, & Maheshwari, 1997).

For this reason, the research is based on a closed two-part questionnaire, where the first part is based on information relating to personal data about the respondent, his or her knowledge about the business performance, and his or her level of integration in the family. The second part of the questionnaire defines 20 variables aimed at acquiring an understanding of the

relationship of the person with the family business which could then be cross-referenced to the answers provided in the 200 questionnaires. This last part was measured in a five-dimensional Likert scale, with a maximum of five points and a minimum of 0 points. The commitment of the respondent is determined by measuring levels of values such as “effort,” “loyalty,” and “idealism” parting from definitions which are commonly accepted by traditional philosophy and contained in a specific dictionary (Honderich, T. 1995).<sup>5</sup>

The very preparation of the questionnaire was quite an intensive process, and it was tested and revised several times until its content was easy to understand by the family members who do not work within the business, which in turn resulted in very few questionnaires being declared invalid.

## **THE SAMPLE**

The data collection process proceeded very slowly as we encountered a huge number of obstacles in getting the questionnaires into the hands of non-active family members. The questionnaires were sent to family members who were active in the business with a request to pass these on to four non active family members, so as to obtain different opinions about the same family business.

But on several occasions the active males flatly refused to distribute the questionnaires to the non active family women. Most of the companies that were experiencing economic difficulties or undergoing a management crisis such as strikes, etc., also refused to collaborate. Families undergoing a crisis did not answer either. These comments suggest a certain bias in the sample, which consists of a majority of people whose attitude towards their family business is more favourable than the average results would show.

The 200 valid replies reflected 98 family businesses and families. In 79 of the companies (67%) only one person received the questionnaire; in 14 of the companies (12%) two people received the questionnaire; in 10 companies (8%) three people received it; in 14 companies (11%) four people received it. In one company five people received it and in another company six people received it. Of the total 200 questionnaires collected, 107 were completed by men and 93 by women, with 67% being blood relations and 33% family members by marriage. None of these people were working in the family business at the time they completed the survey.

The range of data on the companies in the sample group suggests that the respondents came from a particular group of family businesses, as compared with most family businesses in the country, with 43% of the sample representing family businesses with a turnover of over 30 million Euros<sup>6</sup>. This perception is based on the size of the firm and its position within its sector, where 70% belong to the top 10 of their respective industry.

However, the special interest of the sample consists in the very strong presence of women who answered the questionnaire, as they represent 46.5% of the sample. Of these women, 75% are from the founder family, 67% of them have at least an undergraduate degree (in contrast to 46% of the males), 35% of them are shareholders (in contrast to 42% of the males), with the

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<sup>5</sup> “Effort”: Energetic application of understanding and willingness to reach an aim. Enthusiasm and courage. “Loyalty”: Fidelity to the fulfillment of promises. Reliability and precision. “Idealism”: Desire rooted in hope and confidence.

<sup>6</sup> These are Euros in 2003.

average percentage of shares owned by women (23%) being much higher than the shares owned by men (15%).

These are only some of the main differences that have caught our attention. These and other gender differences will be discussed in greater detail in the results section. More importantly, there are some interesting differences in the levels of commitment between males and females, a fact which might open up new paths of further research about the scarcely known role of women in family business and their special sensibility for keeping the family together.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Even though quantitative data had to be obtained in order to meet the objectives of this research, the qualitative processing of these data during the analysis procedures was vital in order to provide meaning to the results. Quantitative data were obtained by distributing questionnaires among family members who do not work in the business.

The data analysis process was carried out in three very different stages. In the first stage, the one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences among more than three independent groups. The key statistic in ANOVA is the F-test of difference of group means, testing if the means of the groups formed by values of the independent variable (or combinations of values for multiple independent variables) are different enough not to have occurred by chance. If the group means do not differ significantly then it is inferred that the independent variable(s) did not have an effect on the dependent variable. If the F test shows that overall the independent variable(s) is (are) related to the dependent variable, then *multiple comparison tests* of significance are used to explore just which values of the independent(s) have the most to do with the relationship. Main effects are the unique effects of the categorical independent variables. If the probability of F is less than .05 for any independent, it is concluded that that variable does have an effect on the dependent.

In the part below, the results only reflect the statistically significant data, or those with a F less than 0.5. In the second stage, a multivariate analysis carried out to synthesize the information led to the identification of the following non-correlated factors that explain more than 70% of the variance in each of the five groups of questions in the questionnaire.

In the third and final stage a cluster analysis identified four groups of persons with similar opinions about behaviour within the same group and with very different characteristics in relation to the first part of the questionnaire: personal data, knowledge of the business and relationship with the family. Consequently, the level of commitment was significantly different in the four groups with a more or less important degree of erosion in the level commitment over generations. This will be further illustrated in the results section.



## MAIN RESULTS

Firstly, the fact that women represent such a high percentage of the sample is at least an indication that the literature might be right in claiming that women still encounter major obstacles to stop them entering their family businesses. When first viewing the data there seems to be no direct indicators as to why they should be excluded; they have a high education level, an average age of 39, 75% are blood relatives, and 60% of them evaluate their family business as successful. Therefore, the main reasons have to be searched elsewhere, not referring to the lack of personal interest or capabilities, but rather on external circumstances.

It appears that the gender-split roles found in family business, which is the major barrier against women entering family business, was possibly also relevant to this sample. This barrier represents the struggle between the expected family role versus the expected business role (Dumas, 1990; Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990; Freudenberger, Freedheim, and Kurtz, 1989).

Apart from the specific gender role differences in family business, the literature also suggests other very specific barriers that have hampered women's entrance into the business. For instance, the decision for a woman to enter the family business seems to depend on external circumstances i.e. the good will of other people. As a consequence the role of the wife in the family business does not depend solely on her capabilities, motivations and personal circumstances. There seems to be a large number of external factors that in certain ways influence the final decision. These factors include the role of the husband in the family business, the kind of family business, ownership held by one or both members, and some characteristics of the family business the husband is working for, especially, its size and type of activity, its generational level, and the type of commitment and relationship that is established between the family and the business. Also, there is the situation of the husband with respect to the amount of company ownership he has (Gallo, 1990, p.17-18).

The first part of the results represent those data of the analysis where we found statistically significant gender differences in the first part of the questionnaire and which are divided into three parts: data related to the person, his/ her level of knowledge about the family business as well as the structure and participation within the family.<sup>7</sup> The second part of the results analyse the statistical differences with respect to the level of commitment of both gender groups as well as illustrating the cluster analysis, where one cluster group consisting of a female majority is contrasted with the three other groups.

### Family ownership

Regardless of the spouse's degree of direct participation in the business, spousal attributes, especially spousal commitment, permeate family relationships and can affect the business' financial performance by influencing the entrepreneur's attitudes, resources and motivation towards the business (Poza & Messer, 2001). Moreover this is an automatic consequence where, given the economic ties that result from marriage, a spouse becomes a critical stakeholder in the family business.

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<sup>7</sup> The one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences among more than three independent groups. The significance level used in hypothesis testing is either the 0.05 level (sometimes called the 5% level) or the 0.01 level (1% level). It

Only 16% of all the women in our sample are shareholders, compared with 22% of males. Women own, on average, more shares (23%) than men (15%). This is in line with data presented by Dumas (Dumas, 1998), who found that women do not have substantial ownership. However, this quantitative data sheds little light on the reason(s) for these differences. But the literature can help us discover these. There are some important differences that have an influence on whether these women will be shareholders or not.

Company management is generally divided into active and passive shareholders. Active shareholders are understood to be those who actually take part in the company's management, while passive shareholders are those who do not. However, owners who are not part of the management team impose limits in a more neutral way: there is a differentiation between shareholders who are "on the outside" and those who are "on the inside". Being on the inside means working in the company or sitting on its Board of Directors.

This distinction is important, because it establishes practical differences that relate to the levels of information handled and powers of influence enjoyed, and shareholders are aware that in spite of being on the outside, they can act in either a positive or negative way and bring value to the company or otherwise (Ercilia Garcia Álvarez, unpublished 2003).

Due to a large number of circumstances that relate to more than just a lack of education or interest, it seems that women are excluded from ownership. However the data offered here are not able to indicate the real underlying reasons for this.

**Table 1. Personal data and business evaluation.**

<b>I-PERSONAL DATA</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>
<b>1. Are you a shareholder?</b>	22%	16%
% of shares you own ( average)	15%	23%
<b>2. What is your relation with the family?</b>		
blood relation	65%	75%
intermarried	35%	25%
<b>3. How did you acquire the shares?</b>		
Founder	17.1%	18.9%
Inheritance	51.4%	24.3%
Transfer	28.6%	37.8%
Sales	0.0%	13.5%
Other	2.9%	5.5%
<b>II-BUSINESS EVALUATION</b>		
<b>1. How do you evaluate the position of the FB ? ( 1-5 scale)<sup>8</sup></b>	2.6	2.7
<b>2. How do you evaluate the results of the Board of Directors? ( 1-5 scale)</b>	2.61	2.31
<b>3. Are you a board member?</b>	16%	24%

<sup>8</sup> Within the scale 1= very low and 5 very high.

Nevertheless, being a shareholder does not always guarantee being the owner of family business shares, as we have found in some results relating to non-active shareholders in Spanish family businesses. Family ownership can be controlled by each family business in its by-laws and this can sometimes lead to very strange maneuvers such as those explained below. In her study of non-active shareholders, García Álvarez found evidence that a number of shareholders were actually only statistically shareholders by name, for tax purposes, for example, the transfer of shares on paper in life, with no real effect. Actual ownership is transferred, though beneficial ownership is retained. In other words, these people are at a legal level<sup>9</sup> listed as shareholders but in reality are no such thing. This “*status of shareholder without a role*” is occurring more and more frequently, since it can and has been used as a way of getting round fiscal regulations when managing businesses. The supposed “*shareholder without a role*” knows that he or she is in fact no such thing, and feels humiliated as a mere tool to be used for fiscal deductions (García Álvarez, 2003).

At the same time, the position of shareholders without a role has considerable negative emotional implications, since shareholders who are on the outside must bear the stress suffered by shareholders who are on the inside while being denied the ability to act and the power to influence company decisions. This gives rise to a clear feeling of powerlessness (García Álvarez, 2003). The very negative feelings that this can provoke, represents a trait of the group cohesiveness, as expectations are raised and then frustrated, because they are shareholders but at the same time they are not. (Davis & Herrera, 1998).

### **Knowledge about the family business**

Apart from ownership, the knowledge about business is able to create strong bonds with the family business. The importance of knowledge is directly related to the unity and commitment of the family business, as one of the fundamental bases of unity lies in one's love or positive need for the business project, though it is extremely difficult to love something that is not known. To know, therefore, in both a perceptual and an abstract way, it is necessary to participate (Gallo et al. 2006).

We make a distinction between two different sources: (1) the information about the business that is distributed to non-active family members, and (2) the knowledge acquired from visiting, family conversations, etc. and (3) special attention is paid to the information gained from previous work experience.

(1) Women feel they receive less economic/financial information than men about the family business, as is clearly shown in the first part of the table. Nevertheless, the women in this sample had all been educated to an advanced level, and most of them were active in highly qualified positions in other companies. This implies that the lack of information is not due to the fear that the information will not be properly understood by these women. In addition, women have shown a strong interest in collaborating with efforts to keep the family business healthy as long as necessary, even though they might have felt outsiders rather than insiders, given the low level of information they received.

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<sup>9</sup> In some owning families in Spain, the ownership of shares is transmitted in two separate parts to different people. One person is the material beneficiary of the dividends, and has the political power to vote, nevertheless a second person's name figures as being the owner in any legal documents.

**Table 2. Information distributed by the business.<sup>10</sup>**

<b>III- INFORMATION RECEIVED FREQUENTLY</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>WOME N</b>
4.1 Economic information ( % of each category that receives info)	65%	60%
4.2 Future plans ( % of each category that receives info)	78%	70%
(1-5 scale of frequency) Average frequency	2,73	2,35
4.3 Magazine ( % of each category that receives info)	34%	27%
(1-5 scale of frequency) Average frequency	1,05	0,78
4.4 New products (1-5 scale of frequency) Average frequency	1,63	1,24
4.5 Press information, TV, ...(1-5 scale of frequency) Average frequency	1,14	0,93

**Table 3. The main source of knowledge about the FB.<sup>11</sup>**

<b>IV- KNOWLEDGE ACQUIRED ABOUT THE FB</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>
5.1 CA	27%	39%
Average degree of importance (1-5 scale of frequencies)	1.07	1.61
5.2 Work in the FB	29%	41%
Average degree of importance (1-5 scale of frequencies)	1.08	1.65
5.3 Read information	57%	53%
5.4 What parents discussed	64%	59%
5.5 Family meetings	79%	70%
5.6 Company visits	88%	76%
5.7 Informal conversations	81%	68%

Moreover it could also be the consequence of some other family members who have experienced a strong sense of psychological ownership. In some families, the members find themselves in a situation in which, due to the fact that they are in some way associated and familiarised with the business, they experience feelings of psychological ownership. As such they begin to think that the family business is theirs, when they really own only a share in its capital or, in some cases, nothing at all. Hence, those who are on the inside, whether owners or not, see “those on the outside” as being people for whom information has to be controlled and “rationed”.

In another study about the role of the spouse in family business, Gallo warns of the risk that if a spouse is not informed about the business, she may try to gain access to whatever information she can by whatever means that are at hand. The most probable result is that she would discover negative aspects about the business and her influence would produce dissent within both the family business and the family (Gallo, 1990). As regards the younger

<sup>10</sup> Only the statistically significant values are mentioned in the table.

<sup>11</sup> Only the statistically significant values are mentioned in the table.

generations, they take a quite negative view of a lack of succinct information, as this may lead to disillusion when expectations are not fulfilled.

(2) As the results indicate, “Visiting the business” and “going to family meetings” are still the two most effective sources of knowledge about the family business, followed by informal conversations. Nevertheless, there are some slight differences for men who consider informal conversations a more important source of information than participating in family meetings.

An analysis of this data highlights the importance of the family’s responsibility to organise visits and family meetings, in order to ensure that family members are well informed about both the business and the family. The strength of these meetings depends on the way they inform family members. As this is seen as the most effective medium, families can discuss how to improve it and adapt it to individual family needs.

Here it is interesting to highlight the difference, were 41% of women have responded in a positive way compared to 29% men, when asking about the source of knowledge derived from having worked in the past. To a certain extent, this might confirm that women are in some way invisibly active on both fronts: family and business.

(3) Even though the questionnaire was completed by “Women who had worked in the past”, it was still very surprising to see that a significant percentage of women had worked, the average being 16 years. Among the replies there were several who had worked for close to 50 or even more than 50 years. This suggests that an important number of the women from our sample grew up with the business and worked in it as required, or as circumstances made it necessary.

The literature contains some evidence related to this subject, indicating that a wife’s role in the business doesn’t depend solely on her capabilities, motivations and personal circumstances; there seem to be a large number of external factors that to a certain extent influence this final decision (Gallo, 1990). Influential factors seem to be the role of the husband, the kind of FB, the share owned by each or both and the characteristics of the husband (Gallo, 1990). It can go further however, as Rowe and Hong (2000) found that a wife’s employment in the business was significantly related to the size of the family business, the husband’s self reported health status and the origin and type of the business enterprise in question (Rowe & Hong, 2000).

Even though, most of their work was not formally recognised and undervalued, they did feel that their contribution to the family business has been fruitful for a better understanding of the business.

On the other hand it is important to state that most women explain the main reason for leaving the business as being due to the development of other interests. Most of these women (daughters) had found opportunities on the labour market that seemed much more attractive to them, or they had developed a career in areas other than business.

**Table 4. Work experience.**

<b>V- HAVE YOU EVER WORKED IN THE FB</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>
YES/NO	17%	30%
Average number of years	7.6	16.5

The results of this sample seem to corroborate that women with respect to property and knowledge receive significantly less information and are more often excluded from property than men. Nevertheless, it seems that women keep very strong emotional links towards the family business. There is some research literature that found that women, even outside the family business are more likely to be educated, active and impassioned owners, whose insights are encouraged and honoured (Poza & Messer, 2001). These activities can serve to strengthen the social and emotional bonds, thereby fostering family cohesion.

### **Personal commitment**

One of the most important challenges for the family business is to embody, preserve and develop some basic family values within its culture that will give rise to characteristic strengths (Gallo, 1990).

Women have traditionally been seen as responsible for the family, performing duties such as education and child rearing, but they have also had a role as business advisor, and their position allowed them to provide a reminder of the balance between work and family. From their position behind the scenes, they have had a unique appreciation of interpersonal and developmental challenges. Furthermore, women are good at blending facts and feelings, especially on very delicate issues.

Some of these roles, such as the one of senior advisor and keeper of the family values, help to instill a sense of what the business stands for and what this means to the family. Not everyone knows this; it needs to be transmitted and conveyed, and a sense of the family's history and the proper history of the business needs to be nurtured. And the results in this study indicate that women have a stronger sensibility for three of the most important values: striving for excellence, labour ethics and austerity.

**Table 5. The ELISA values.**

<b>VI-ELISA VALUES<sup>12</sup></b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>
Excellence	4,45	4,56
Labor ethics	4,26	4,37
Austerity	3,78	3,79

Means of evaluation: 1 to 5 on a  
Likert scale

But to what extent can this commitment be measured in the family? Commitment is generally defined as the willingness to expend personal, temporal and psychological resources on behalf of a particular domain (Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley & Luk, 2001).

When measuring family commitment, Gallo et al (2001) defined it as the degree of devotion and loyalty family members give to the survival and development of the family business. Successful family businesses are defined as a healthy relationship between family business and

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<sup>12</sup> ELISA values: each initial stands for a specific value, Excellence, Labor ethics, Initiative, Simplicity (in life style) Austerity.

the family system. This healthiness comprises unity and commitment. Unity in this context is twofold: It is the bond among family members and the relationship of the family members with the business. In other words, family members are living this unity when they come together on a regular basis to nurture and care for the business and are not only committed to avoiding conflicts relating to decisions of limited importance but are also willing to make the sacrifices required in relation to very difficult decisions.

**Table 6. Commitment level.**

VI-LEVEL OF COMMITMENT	MEN	WOMEN
Dedicating hours	1,53	1,84
Propose solutions	2,7	2,83
Telling the truth	3,25	3,32
Commitment	3,69	3,76

Means of evaluation: 1 to on a Likert scale

The results of the study (Gallo & Cappuyns, 2004) also revealed that there were four different behavioural groups in terms of the level of commitment to the family business. This deserves our attention as there was one highly significant group that contained a majority of women and differed from the other three. It was clear that these groups represented a sort of natural evolution between the families and the family business.

The first group consisting of people from the first and beginning of the second generation who are devoted to effort and enthusiasm but expect compensation (Group I) seems to evolve into a second group of people that believes that “the company should compensate them while they owe nothing to the company” (Group II). And finally, (Group III) the third group consists of advanced generations who seem to have serious doubts concerning whether the business is still family-owned or not. This strong erosion process is especially interesting knowing that the sample does not contain family businesses that are passing crisis situations, and are apparently strongly committed.

Nevertheless, there was a last group, that had the attitude of “while the company lasts, I should help it without any strong commitment”, but without expecting anything back for the efforts made (Group IV). This last group was worthy of attention as it was the only one containing a majority of women, and only a small number of these (33%) were shareholders, of which 20% sat on the Board of Directors and were willing to invest their time and effort without expecting financial or other forms of compensation. Nevertheless, these results seem not to be isolated examples, as the literature shows others that follow along the same lines. It should also be stressed that women are generally very consistent in the values they rate most highly in the family business and the business family.

In the previous section dealing with values, we highlighted higher sensibility among women, particularly with regards to three values. This also has its consequences with respect to level of commitment, as women seem to be very consistent in their evaluation of how they perceive their degree of commitment towards the family business: They will do their best for the business (Excellence) and apply all the effort necessary (Labour ethics) to make the family business survive, without expecting any financial compensation (Austerity).

**Table 7. Comparing level of commitment males versus females.**

Table 7 shows the classification of the 200 people in our sample into the four different types.

		- Able to make an effort +		- Identify with the business +		- Trust the family business +	
+	Willing to make an effort	C ignorant 15,3 % F 6,6 % M	A agents of effort 33,7 % F 22,6 % M	+	Are active	C opposed 2,17 % F 3,74 % M	A agents of loyalty 63,4 % F 60,74 % M
		D passive 41,3 % F 57,5 % M	B demotivated 9,7 % F 13,3 % M			D passive 4,35 % F 7,48 % M	B lazy 30,43 % F 28,04 % M
-		D passive 41,3 % F 57,5 % M	B demotivated 9,7 % F 13,3 % M	-		D passive 4,35 % F 7,48 % M	B lazy 30,43 % F 28,04 % M

M = Males  
F = Females

In cells A and D of this classification, we can see two clear differences. First, the difference between the high percentage of “agents of idealism” (80,43% F and 73,83% M) and the very low percentage of “agents of effort” (33,7% F and 22,6% M). This difference may be partly due to the characteristics of the companies in our sample: compared to the universe of family businesses, they are exceptional, in size, rank, governance, and shareholder relations. Moreover, they are not suffering any crisis situation in the family, nor in the business. Even in the overall sample we have found that the family members are not very motivated towards making a considerable effort where needed. Given the fact that women are less informed and, kept at a certain distance from the business and are in many cases excluded from property, it captures our attention that they have a stronger representation than men in the group of “agents of effort”. The merit of this consists in the fact that in spite of being excluded from information about the business and its property, at least a group of them is willing to implement time and energy to show their commitment towards the business.

The “agents of loyalty” are in an intermediate position (63,4% F and 60,74% M), below the “agents of idealism” mentioned above. This is partly because the B group in the Loyalty matrix (“Lazy,” 30,43% F 28,04%M) is so much bigger than the B group in either of the other two matrices. Again, identifying with the company’s advantages and values is one thing; actively speaking one’s mind and offering solutions is quite another<sup>13</sup>. (Gallo & Cappuyns, 2004 ). The fact that such a high percentage of family members fall into the “lazy” category of the loyalty matrix should prompt the heads of family businesses to investigate the underlying reasons. Is it that only the loyalty of those who work in the business is appreciated? Is the loyalty of those who have chosen other professions not rewarded?

<sup>13</sup> This, too, is a truth embodied in popular wisdom. Consider the saying “practice what you preach.”



We should never forget, however, that being “idealistic” about a firm (loving the business, trusting in the organisation, etc.) is one thing that has a low cost. However, actually being capable of “making an effort” (being able to motivate other family members, contribute resources, take risks, etc.) is quite another (Gallo & Cappuyns, 2004). Business owning families should learn to trust its members, to come up with sound initiatives that cultivate a sense of belonging among its members. It is recommended that female members of the family be taken into consideration since, at least according to our sample, are professional, have high education levels and a passion for the business. It is likely, therefore, that they will make positive contributions without expecting anything in exchange.

Moreover, when trying to understand the underlying reason, the literature seems to extrapolate some of the characteristics by which women define themselves, such as: strong relationships with others, the ability to care, loving and sharing, maternal roles, perceived feelings of others, and relativity in moral judgments (Salganicoff, 1990).

Some of these characteristics can of course greatly contribute to the success of a family business, especially in the role of keeping the family united and committed to the business. This is not always an easy thing to do, especially when a crisis arises in the business, the family, or both.

But this and other related issues can be subjects for future research as we have more than reached the main objective of this study. We have illustrated with hard data that women definitely represent a strong interest and sensibility for keeping the family business united and its members committed.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The results presented in this third part are not intended to establish solid statistical arguments with respect to the role played by women in the commitment process. Nevertheless, this quantitative study has highlighted some interesting statistical gender differences that are worth taking into consideration, as a starting point for setting up new research projects that might examine the role of women inside and outside the family business.

This particular research project is only intended to illustrate a brand new issue that is worth investigating further, but given the main proposal of this study, the data collection process does not allow us to reach any major conclusions regarding the role of non-active females in the family business. Although the studies published so far are based on small convenience samples and provide an indication of the varying types of roles that women in family firms tend to adopt, they do not explain the reasons that prompt the adoption of these roles or the implications this may have on a firm's performance.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The relationships within families are very dynamic and shift constantly during the family business life cycles, therefore there is a need to find some people who can function as a family “glue”. That is why for the business owning families the role of the women behind the scenes, who are socialised to protect and nurture their families might represent a clue. Through her role as educator she will contribute to her children internalize certain family values such as mutual respect, which will be clue when they will all work together in the business, and apart

from their different point of view, must strive to keep the family united. In some difficult situations mothers used to play a very specific consolatory role. Furthermore, women are endowed with the ability to perform several roles simultaneously such as work, looking after household and family, and they can provide the pliable adhesiveness that holds these changing families together over generations. (Salganicoff, 1990).

But it must be said that the role of the spouse behind the scenes in a family business is still far away from being acknowledged and valued. Therefore, this study enhances family business knowledge by discussing some data from Spanish family businesses. Even though, this quantitative study does not allow us to dig into the reasons behind the gender differences, at least the results allow us to appreciate the fact that indeed women do have to struggle with a large number of obstacles. These include not only obstacles to entering the family business, but also gaining access to ownership, receiving a significant amount of information about the family business and its activities, taking part on the board of directors, participating in the family protocols, just to mention the most significant ones.

The danger exists that with the excuse of the traditional gender specific roles, a clear positive discrimination towards men is hidden, both at a family and at a business level. In contrast, male family members occupy professional positions in the company more frequently than do female members, regardless of their professional training or skills. Thus, they decide the rules about shares distribution, and many other issues, based on the inherent discrimination of women through the legitimisation of male domination. (García Álvarez, 2003).

Therefore, given the emerging reality that gender roles in family businesses are changing, and more women nowadays are foregoing a domestic career at home and pursuing a professional career instead of in the family business or elsewhere, it is about time that the relationship of women to the family business is seen as a possible win - win relationship.

However, it is worth for family businesses to recognise that it doesn't matter how much of a central role women play in the business, as they are primary contributors to building social capital in family businesses, which makes a family business unique (Folker, Sorenson and Hoelscher, 2002).

Therefore, it might be worth for family businesses striving for longevity to reflect on the following suggestions to integrate females into the family business. One important starting point for a large number of family businesses could be the changing of some rules and structures into ones that are based on fairness and on equality for both men and women.

Furthermore, and this is the second point, is that behind the scenes spouses often provide a reminder of the need for balance between work and family, or they may take on certain family responsibilities, such as the creation of a family council, writing the family's history, hosting family meetings, being the contact person for consultants, organising family retreats, planning family vacations, etc. From this family businesses have much to gain from the input of women, as many of the psychology and socialisation factors inherent in women enable them to humanise the work environment (Salganicoff, 1990).

A third and last point to take into consideration is that female family members, from their privileged position outside the business are often also able to influence positive business initiatives such as philanthropy. This is important because the commitment level of non-active

shareholders is not only involved in the process of social preparation within the family, but also depends on the actions of the company itself.

Hopefully, this study has been able to waken interest in the important asset that women who are backstage possess: the ability to foster long-term social ties, based on common beliefs and norms, better known as the family “glue.”

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