

The Determinants of Family Owner-Managers' Affective Organizational Commitment

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Abstract:

Affective organizational commitment is an important predictor of the willingness to contribute to organizational goals and is of particular relevance to family firms, as these firms often rely on long-term involvement of family members through transgenerational succession. Drawing on organizational commitment and ownership attachment theories, we probe the influence of family firm dynamics (i.e., family harmony and relationship conflict) on work-family conflict and family owner-managers' ownership attachment, which in turn impact affective organizational commitment. On the basis of a study of 326 family firms, we introduce ownership attachment as an important antecedent to affective organizational commitment. We find that ownership attachment is positively affected by both family harmony and work-family conflict, whereby work-family conflict is influenced by relationship conflict. We also find that work-family conflict affects ownership attachment.

Keywords: affective organizational commitment | family harmony | family owner-managers | ownership attachment | relationship conflict | work-family conflict

Article:

According to Buchanan (1974), organizational commitment of employees is essential for the survival and effectiveness of organizations. The underlying emphasis on the retention of employees and their willingness to contribute to organizational goals makes affective organizational commitment (i.e., identification with, involvement in, and emotional attachment to the organization; Allen & Meyer, 1996) particularly important for family firms, as they rely on the long-term involvement of family members in transgenerational succession and success (Sharma & Irving, 2005). Unfortunately, however, we do not know enough about the antecedents of affective organizational commitment.

To fill this gap, we explore the effects of family harmony and relationship conflict as two components of family dynamics (Barnett, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2009; Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007; Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2004, 2006) on family owner-managers' willingness to affectively commit to the organization. We also explore the role of ownership attachment and work-family conflict between the family dynamics and family owner-managers' affective organizational commitment. As such, we explore the mechanisms through which family-firm-specific dynamics impact the affective commitment of family owner-managers. To this end, we draw on ownership attachment and affective organizational commitment theories and test our model on a sample of 326 family firms.

This study contributes to the family firm literature in several important ways. As a first study, we provide family-firm-specific insights into the antecedents of affective organizational commitment. Identifying the antecedents of affective organizational commitment contributes to the advancement of the theory of the family firm given the pivotal role of family members' involvement in these organizations' success (Chrisman, Chua, Pearson, & Barnett, 2012). Second, we empirically investigated the impact of ownership attachment (Ball & Tasaki, 1992; Zellweger & Astrachan, 2008) on affective organizational commitment given the repeated conceptual assertions that attachment to family firm ownership may severely bias decision making in family firms (e.g., Sharma & Manikutty, 2005). We found ownership attachment to be an important mediator between family dynamics and affective organizational commitment. Lastly, this article contributes to research on ownership attachment theory by proposing and testing a model that translates how ownership attachment forms a bridge between unique family firm factors and affective organizational commitment of family owner-managers. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of our hypotheses.

Figure 1 Conceptual Model



Theoretical Overview

Affective Organizational Commitment

In their seminal article, Meyer and Allen (1991) proposed that individuals can become bound to organizations in different ways and that the implications for occupation-relevant behavior like citizenship, turnover, and performance can be quite different depending on the type of

commitment. Next to normative and continuance commitment, Meyer and Allen have coined the term “affective commitment,” which is induced by work experience, in terms of comfort and competence; personal dispositions (e.g., need for achievement, locus of control); and organizational structures (e.g., decentralization of decision making or formalization of policy and procedures).

Although affective commitment by organizational members is a success factor for any type of organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010; Meyer & Allen, 1991), it is of the utmost relevance in the family firm context. Given that family firms are distinguished from their nonfamily counterparts by continued involvement of family members in ownership and management (Chrisman et al., 2012), sustained affective commitment of family owners and managers is a pivotal prerequisite for the prosperity and, in the long term, the very survival of this type of organization. Accordingly, Sharma and Irving (2005) proposed that successors' affective commitment is a critical factor for the motivation and fit of potential successors to take over the baton from their parents. Also, family firms face limitations in the labor market in hiring and maintaining nonfamily business members owing to generally less career advancement opportunities and pay (Carney, 2005), which increase their reliance on the family labor pool and their commitment to the firm. We lack a deeper understanding about the family-firm-specific aspects that may drive affective organizational commitment, however. In our study, we explore how family harmony and relationship conflict may affect ownership attachment and work-family conflict, in turn leading to family owner-managers' affective organizational commitment in family firms.

Work-family conflict and affective organizational commitment

A particularly relevant family specific factor with potential impact on affective organizational commitment through work experience is the experienced work-family conflict. Work-family conflict is “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). Hence, work-family conflict reflects the goodness of fit between work and family life (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 2000). Work-family conflicts arise when participation in the family role becomes difficult owing to the participation in work role and vice versa (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000). Accordingly, an empirical study by Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, and Keough (2003) showed that work-family conflict is driven by role conflict and role overload. Frone et al. drew attention to the bidirectional and reciprocal characteristics of the conflict relationship between work and family.

Most managers encounter work-family conflict owing to the multiple roles and activities that emerge from acting as members of the family and members of the business (Greenhaus, Allen, & Spector, 2006). Work-family conflict is, however, potentially even more complex in family firms given the extended number of overlapping roles family managers can occupy in the family firm context (e.g., owner, manager, mother, sibling, daughter), making management of work-family conflict in family businesses a highly complex endeavor (Barnett et al., 2009), ultimately diminishing the quality of the work experience and reducing affective organizational commitment. For work-family conflict in family firms, we therefore expect the following.

Hypothesis 1. Family owner-managers' work-family conflict is negatively associated with their affective organizational commitment.

Ownership attachment and affective organizational commitment

Even though the above arguments on drivers of affective commitment among family managers are conceptually appealing, it is questionable to what degree such commitment is solely tied to the work experience. In fact, it has been proposed that affective organizational commitment can be seen as a form of affective attachment to a given organization (Solinger, Van Offen, & Roe, 2008). In a similar vein, it has been said that organizational members display affective bonds through attachment to the ownership and hence perceived control, as opposed to management and work experience (Belk, 1988). Sharma and Manikutty (2005) noted that ownership attachment may form as a result of social and psychological ties and nostalgia to the ownership stake that may inhibit timely divestment. Furthermore, Zellweger and Astrachan (2008) suggested that because of the individualized owner-possession interaction, owners may develop attachment to their ownership stakes, which creates an emotional value to the owners.

In family firms, family firm owner-managers tend to consider their organizations as extensions of themselves (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005), given that in these firms the names of family members are identified with the organization, often even represented by identical family and company names (Dyer & Whetten, 2006). Thereby, ownership can be a major contributor to and reflection of identities by highlighting the relatedness to the family and distinguishing self from others (Belk, 1988; Thomson, 2006). Also, because family owners often do not have to buy their ownership shares on the anonymous market for corporate control, but often receive their shares as positive affective gifts from parents or other relatives, affective attachment to the firm results from the symbolic representations or reminders of interpersonal ties incorporated by the ownership stake (Grayson & Shulman, 2000; Richins, 1994). Hence, family business owners have more than a material stake (e.g., emotional returns and emotional costs) in their business in the long run (Zellweger, Kellermanns, Chrisman, & Chua, 2012).

Therefore, affective organizational commitment may also form as a result of ownership attachment and perceived emotional value (Zellweger & Astrachan, 2008). As a complementary argument to the work-based reasoning introduced above, the higher the levels of ownership attachment experienced by family owner-managers, the higher the levels of experienced affective organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 2. Family owner-managers' ownership attachment is positively associated with their affective organizational commitment.

Work-family conflict and ownership attachment

Within the context of family firms, family business members have the dual identity and role of being a family member and a family firm owner-manager, complicating the responsibilities of fulfilling both family and business expectations. Family firm members may hold family firm objectives higher than their individual objectives (Davis, Allen, & Hayes, 2010). Hence, family

business roles, serving the greater collective, are likely to be more salient or central than the family roles, serving the self and the immediate family, to the family business members' self-concepts.

As a result, however, “high career role salience” with “the insistence that the family accommodates the needs of the business, instead of the other way around” (Barnett et al., 2009, pp. 42–43), time primarily devoted to the business, and rigid adherence to the behavioral expectations at work may lower family owner-managers' ownership attachment through imposing pressure on them. Indeed, autonomy in the form of freedom from pressure is one of the key elements in the development of ownership attachment (Richins, 1994; Thomson, 2006). Work-family conflict can also harm family owner-managers' perceived control, continuity, stability, and security, which are integral to ownership attachment (Kleine & Baker, 2004).

Hypothesis 3. Family business owner-managers' work-family conflict is negatively associated with their ownership attachment.

Whereas ownership attachment and work-family conflict are representative of the family-to-business interface and are therefore seen as direct antecedents of organizational affective commitment, we suggest that positive family dynamics may provide further insight into the mechanisms supporting affective organizational commitment. Therefore, we also investigated the impact of family harmony on family owner-managers' ownership attachment and work-family conflict in family firms that can consequently lead to family owner-managers' affective organizational commitment.

Family Harmony

Organizational affective commitment literature purports that the attitude toward the target, that is, the family firm, may be supported by affective experience from being involved in the target (Solinger et al., 2008). Given the overlaps between family and business in the family firm context, positive affective experiences in the family carry over to the business context and ultimately impact affective organizational commitment (Meyer, Becker, & Van Dick, 2006; Zahra, Hayton, Neubaum, Dibrell, & Craig, 2008). Family harmony may be one such affective experience on the side of the family with potential spillover effects to the business sphere through supportive relationships. Thereby, the resulting family harmony represents the trust, unity, and mutual protection among all members of the family group involved in the firm (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998), which may influence family owner-managers' ownership attachment and work-family conflict. We first examine the link between family harmony and ownership attachment.

Family harmony and ownership attachment

Next to being representative of the owner's self-identity, ownership attachment has been said to form as a consequence of affective interpersonal ties the ownership stands for. For example, when organizational ownership is representative of the harmony between family members, ownership may develop more than a financial meaning to owners. The sense of shared control (Belk, 1988; Kleine & Baker, 2004) of the firm tends to create a relational glue and fosters

harmony among family business members. In the creation of family harmony and in turn ownership attachment, trust is playing a key role because trust is the central element in generating collectivity. Shared history, experience, identity, and rituals facilitating interpersonal trust and commitment to the welfare of the family can be even to the point of self-sacrifice (Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Sundaramurthy, 2008). As the family business is passed on across generations, trust can be further increased by open, honest, and consistent communication (Salvato, Chirico, & Sharma, 2010; Sundaramurthy, 2008).

Also, the affective relational dimension deriving from family business harmony can lead to associability (i.e., collective goals, actions, and emotional support) as well as information access (Pearson, Carr, & Shaw, 2008). In turn, family harmony is nurtured by trust that has been built across time through the shared family business history, just as the feeling of collectivity among family members may singularize the relationship between family members and their ownership in the firm. Indeed, the family business member-family business relationship is loaded with positive emotional affect and is representative of harmonious bonds, mutual trust, cohesion, and a feeling of being involved and needed. In such a context, the ownership of the firm is seen as more than an economic commodity, it is a representation of harmonious family ties (Richins, 1994). Accordingly, family harmony can elevate the sense of past, purpose, worth, and belonging that are critical in the development of ownership attachment (Belk, 1988). Family harmony also enhances the proximity, contact, and transfer of tacit knowledge that engender ownership attachment (Belk, 1988).

Hypothesis 4. Family harmony is positively associated with family owner-managers' ownership attachment.

Family harmony and work-family conflict

Family harmony is characterized by supportive relationships within the family. In some family firms, interpersonal disagreements are often worked out through the guidance of patriarchal principles for the sake of harmony (Au & Kwan, 2009). High levels of family harmony can diminish work-family conflict through reducing role pressures, producing fewer time demands, less strain, and more flexible expectations for in-role behavior (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Thereby, family harmony involving supportive relationships tend to provide a “buffering effect” in coping with work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 86; Martins, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002). Additionally, the perceived control over the work situation in a supportive work environment can diminish work-family conflict (Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Voydanoff, 1988).

Family firms are characterized as a supportive working environment fostering a family-oriented workplace with greater employee care and flexible work practices (Habbershon & Williams, 1999). A harmonious family firm climate allowing employee involvement and empowerment, flexible scheduling, and supportive leadership can increase the extent of control family business owner-managers have on their work as well as lower time and stress associated with work activities. Hence, family harmony is expected to decrease work-family conflict.

Hypothesis 5. Family harmony is negatively associated with family owner-managers' work-family conflict.

Aside from the investigation of the impact of family harmony on ownership attachment and work-family conflict, we also investigated the impact of relationship conflict, which is a negative component of the family firm context.

Relationship Conflict

Relationship conflict is defined as an awareness of interpersonal incompatibilities, including affective components such as tension and friction (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Relationship conflict is a dysfunctional conflict type, unlike task-related conflict with potential positive effects (Jehn, 1995, 1997). Despite its ubiquitous presence, relationship conflict seems to be a particularly prominent characteristic of family firms and can harm the decision-making process, firm development, and performance (e.g., Au & Kwan, 2009; Danes, Zuiker, Kean, & Arbuthnot, 1999; Eddleston, Kellermanns, & Sarathy, 2008). Here, we first examine the impact of relationship conflict on family owner-managers' ownership attachment and then we investigate the impact of relational conflict on work-family conflict.

Relationship conflict and ownership attachment

It is a common observation in relationship conflicts that with arousing conflicts, goodwill and mutual understanding among individuals suffer (Jehn, 1997), and disappointment, resignation, and sadness rise (Simons & Peterson, 2000). In family firms, such relationship conflicts may be nurtured by parents who may not be willing to share power with the next generation and rivalry between siblings and between branches of the family tree that may spark feelings of disillusionment and disappointment (Danes et al., 1999). In consequence, what has been an affect-rich ownership stake to which the owner used to display positive emotional attachment (Ariely, Huber, & Wertenbroch, 2005) may incrementally lose its appeal and nimbus of legacy and tradition. Owners may then see their ownership more as a utilitarian asset and experience disillusionment and frustration with regards to ownership.

Such withdrawal and disattachment tendencies following emotional strain have also been documented in psychology literature. Keltner, Ellsworth, and Edwards (1993) stated that conflict may induce sadness just as frustration, which evokes the implicit goal of changing one's circumstances. This pattern of behavior is consistent with the predictions of the coping perspective, suggesting that people seek to escape from the unpleasant emotions that are associated with the relationship conflicts. Put differently, relationship conflict may induce negative affective emotion leading to lower ownership attachment because lowering emotional bonds prepare one to change one's circumstances in order to overcome the imbroglio induced by relationship conflict. This suggestion corresponds with the prototypical emotion congruency argument that the presence of a negative affect decreases ownership appraisals and attachment (Bower, 1981).

Hypothesis 6. Relationship conflict is negatively associated with family owner-managers' ownership attachment.

Relationship conflict and work-family conflict

Next to reducing ownership attachment, relationship conflict may also aggravate presumptions of work-family conflict. If relationship conflict is the disagreement and incompatibility among group members about personal issues that are not task related, such disagreement may well be related to the role family members play in the family and the business context. Interrole conflict from the family and the business domain may be particularly difficult to resolve in the case of relational animosity. In such litigious situations, it may be particularly challenging to sort out a fit between work and family life (Frone et al., 2000) because the detrimental relationship conflict directs effort toward avoiding or resolving the relational matters, for example, with other family members involved in the firm, rather than the efficient management of the interface between the firm and the own nuclear family (Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007; Ensley & Pearson, 2005; Jehn, Chadwick, & Thatcher, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2004). Also, relationship conflict may be harmful to efficient communication, information exchange, and ultimately role definitions. On the one hand, when communication channels are open and information asymmetries are lowered (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997), individual roles are expected to be clearer for family business members, excessive role expectations can be prevented or reconciled with open communication, and, consequently, work-family conflict can be diminished. On the other hand, relationship conflict blocking communication channels can generate ambiguity about work and family roles, elevating work-family conflict.

Hypothesis 7. Relationship conflict is positively associated with family owner managers' work-family conflict.

Method

Cross-sectional data were part of a wider data set and obtained from three mailings of our questionnaire sent to a sample of family firms in Germany, resulting in a response rate of 8.7% with 349 responses. The response rate is lower than we would have desired, but is comparable to similar studies (e.g., Chrisman, Chua, Kellermanns, & Chang, 2007). The 349 questionnaires all stem from family owner-managers, representing 326 distinct privately held family firms, as 23 of the firms in our sample had two top management family members who responded to the survey. Because the CEO is considered a reliable key informant who minimizes the informational and motivational biases (Glick, Huber, Miller, Doty, & Sutcliffe, 1990), we utilized CEO respondents in our analyses. Following Westhead and Cowling (1998), these organizations are classified as family firms because the respondents themselves indicated they see their firms as family firms and asserted that one family dominates management and ownership.

Measures

Our constructs were adapted from previously validated scales; however, modifications were made to account for the setting of family firms. All the scale items, except for the relationship conflict variable, were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The relationship conflict variable was measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *a lot/always* to *none/never* to touch on the intensity and frequency of conflicts, as proposed by Jehn (1997) and applied by Eddleston and Kellermanns (2007). The average of the items was used to represent the variables.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable, affective organizational commitment, was measured via a 4-item scale. One of the questions asked of respondents was whether they “really feel as if this family firm's problems are their own,” adapting the items by Allen and Meyer (1990). Alpha was 0.90.

Independent Variables

Family business harmony

We measured the components of family business harmony via a 4-item scale. One question asked was whether they “have a trust based work environment.” We adapted these items from Beehr, Drexler, and Faulkner (1997) for this measure. Alpha was 0.87.

Relationship conflict

We measured relationship conflict via a 4-item scale. We asked respondents four questions such as, “How often do family members get angry with each other while working in your family firm?” We adapted these items from Jehn and Mannix (2001) and Kellermanns and Eddleston (2006). Alpha was 0.89.

Mediator Variables

Ownership attachment

We measured the components of ownership attachment via a 9-item scale. One of the questions asked was whether they “would feel irritated, if someone ridiculed the firm.” We adapted the ownership attachment scale from Ball and Tasaki (1992). Alpha was 0.88.

Work-family conflict

We measured the components of work-family conflict via four items following Frone et al. (2000) and Martins et al. (2002). For example, respondents were asked whether “their work kept them from their family activities more than they would like.” The first two items measured work interfering with family and the latter two measured family interfering with work given the bidirectional and reciprocal features of the work-family conflict (Frone et al., 2000). Alpha was 0.79.

Control Variables

We included control variables such as family ownership and firm size (Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2006), and they are used as observed rather than latent constructs. Family ownership measures the percentage of the business owned by the family. This measure was inserted because higher levels of ownership and control may support ownership attachment and thus affective organizational commitment (Zellweger & Astrachan, 2008). Similarly, firm size may have an impact of affective organizational commitment given that in larger firms communication is often

more formalized and personalized bonds with the firm more difficult to maintain (Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007), with negative impact on affective organizational commitment. The firms in the sample ranged from 0% to 100% of family ownership, with an average of 88.77%. Firm size was measured by the number of employees. The firms in the sample ranged from 6 to 35,000 employees, with an average of 530.80.

Construct Validity and Examination of Potential Biases

We used several approaches to test for construct validity and to examine and control for potential biases. First, we estimated a measurement model (CFA). To assess the fit of our model, we used multiple fit indices. Specifically, we used the chi-square statistic, comparative fit index (CFI), incremental index of fit (IFI), and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI). Larger values CFI, IFI, and TLI (.90 or above) denote an acceptable fit of a model to the data. Additionally, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) for the models was investigated. A RMSEA lower than .08 is suggested to indicate good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1995; Mulaik et al., 1989).

A five-factor measurement model (including family harmony, relationship conflict, ownership attachment, work-family conflict, and affective organizational commitment) was compared to other models of parceled scale items; that is, a one-factor model (one construct over all scale items), two-factor model (one construct for family harmony, ownership attachment, and affective organizational commitment and the other for relationship conflict and work-family conflict), and three-factor model (one construct for family harmony and ownership attachment, one for affective organizational commitment, and one for relationship conflict and work-family conflict). The five-factor model [CFI = .928, IFI = .928, TLI = .918, RMSEA = .061, and $\chi^2(265) = 586.124$] yielded a better fit to the data than the three-factor model [CFI = .670, IFI = .672, TLI = .636, RMSEA = .129, and $\chi^2(272) = 1749.971$], two-factor model [CFI = .577, IFI = .579, TLI = .536, RMSEA = .146, and $\chi^2(274) = 2171.374$], and one-factor model [CFI = .410, IFI = .413, TLI = .356, RMSEA = .172, and $\chi^2(275) = 2919.083$]. Thus, the data presented support treating the scales as separate constructs. The five-factor model test results suggest a lack of common method bias because multiple factors were extracted and no single factor accounted for the majority of the variance.

To test for potential nonresponse biases, responses were divided into early and late respondents based on the time the respondents returned the questionnaire. There were no statistically significant differences between the responses to first, second, and third mailings on the variables of interest to this study. Because relative to early respondents, late respondents are likely to be more similar to nonrespondents (Kanuk & Berenson, 1975; Oppenheim, 1966), the tests suggest that nonresponse bias is not a significant concern in this study.

Last, we conducted tests for endogeneity to ensure that our results were not an artifact of the potential reverse causality between our independent variables and mediators. Following Walter, Kellermanns, and Lechner (2012), we utilized instrumental variables for both family harmony and relationship conflict in regressing ownership attachment and work-family conflict, respectively. This approach, namely, the two-stage least-square regression (Hamilton & Nickerson, 2003), provides an opportunity to test for causality between predictor(s) and predicted variable. In particular, nonsignificant *F* and chi-square statistics in a Durbin-Wu-Hausman test indicate that the independent variables in question are exogenous, hence providing

support to the hypothesized causal relationship (Davidson & Mackinnon, 1983). When we used task conflict, family ownership, firm age, firm cash flow, and past firm performance as instruments, the resulting test for the link between family harmony and ownership attachment ($F = .003, p = .957$ and $\chi^2 = .003, p = .956$), between family harmony and work-family conflict ($F = .282, p = .597$ and $\chi^2 = .301, p = .583$), between relationship conflict and ownership attachment ($F = .163, p = .686$ and $\chi^2 = .176, p = .675$), and between relationship conflict and work-family conflict ($F = .575, p = .451$ and $\chi^2 = .610, p = .435$) were all insignificant, meaning that causality is less likely to be a concern in this study.

Results

We analyzed the data using AMOS 16 and SPSS 16.0 and used structural equation modeling with maximum likelihood estimation to test our hypotheses. The correlations, means, and standard deviations are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Affective organizational commitment	6.51	0.83						
2. Family ownership	88.77	23.32	.15 ^D					
3. Firm size	530.80	2,560.68	-.03	-.08				
4. Family harmony	5.58	1.15	.40 ^C	.15 ^D	.00			
5. Relationship conflict	2.69	1.16	-.10 ^a	-.08	.08	-.45 ^C		
6. Ownership attachment	5.60	1.02	.52 ^C	.01	.00	.38 ^C	.02	
7. Work-family conflict	4.45	1.51	.14 ^a	-.08	.05	.02	.23 ^C	.27 ^C
<i>N</i> = 326.								
a $p < .10$,								
b $p < .01$,								
c $p < .001$.								

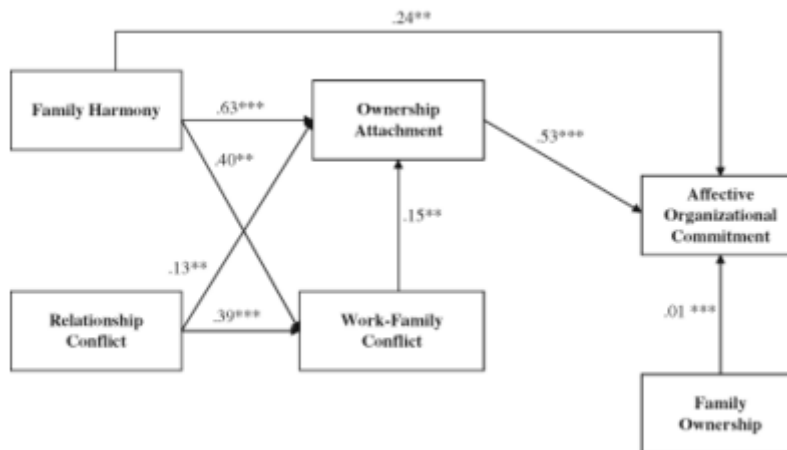
In structural equation modeling, all relationships are tested simultaneously, thus affording us with the opportunity to test if the portrayed relationships in Figure 1 constitute full or partial

mediation. Our findings widely support partial mediation. We first tested our hypothesis model with a full mediation model in which links between two independent variables and the dependent variables were absent. Findings were $\chi^2(317) = 763.710$, CFI = .901, IFI = .902, TLI = .890, and RMSEA = .066. We then compared the fit of the full mediation model with our hypothesized partial mediation model in which both family harmony and relationship conflict have links with affective organizational commitment. Overall, the model represents a reasonable fit such that $\chi^2(315) = 754.035$, CFI = .903, IFI = .902, TLI = .892, and RMSEA = .065. Nevertheless, the link between work-family conflict and affective organizational commitment ($\beta = .01$, $p = .891$) and the link between relationship conflict and affective organizational commitment ($\beta = .04$, $p = .284$) were not significant. The link between firm size and affective organizational commitment was also insignificant ($\beta = .00$, $p = .644$). Excluding the nonsignificant relationships found in the previous model further improved overall model fit such that $\chi^2(292) = 715.912$, CFI = .906, IFI = .906, TLI = .895, and RMSEA = .067. In our final model, we then correlated some of the error terms. Findings were $\chi^2(188) = 422.567$, CFI = .942, IFI = .943, TLI = .929, and RMSEA = .062. We report our findings pertaining to the final model with one partially mediated relationship in more detail below. $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(292 - 188) = 715.912 - 422.567 = 293.345$ indicates that the final model has significantly improved ($p < .001$). Standardized path loadings, estimated via maximum likelihood estimation, are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Standardized Path Loadings for the Final Model.

† $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.



Our first hypothesis, arguing for a negative relationship between work-family conflict and affective organizational commitment, was not supported. The second hypothesis, claiming a positive relationship between ownership attachment and affective organizational commitment, was supported ($\beta = .53$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 3, arguing that work-family conflict is negatively related to ownership attachment, was not supported ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$); instead, the relationship was positive and significant. Our fourth hypothesis argued that family harmony is positively related to ownership attachment, which was supported ($\beta = .63$, $p < .001$). The fifth hypothesis,

which argued that family harmony is negatively related to work-family conflict, was not supported, as family harmony had a positive and significant relationship with work-family conflict ($\beta = .40, p < .05$). Also, the sixth hypothesis, which argued that relationship conflict is negatively related to ownership attachment, was not supported, as relationship conflict had a positive and significant relationship to ownership attachment ($\beta = .13, p < .05$). Finally, we found support for the positive relationship between relationship conflict and work-family conflict ($\beta = .39, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 7. Additionally, although not hypothesized, we found a positive direct relationship between family business harmony and affective organizational commitment ($\beta = .24, p < .05$), suggesting a partial mediation relationship between family business harmony and affective organizational commitment through ownership attachment.

Overall, the squared multiple correlation of affective organizational commitment, which equals R^2 in structural equation modeling (e.g., Straub, Limayem, & Karahanna-Evaristo, 1995), equaled .438, suggesting that 43.8% of the variance of affective organizational commitment was explained in our model. Furthermore, we replicated our final model without correlating error terms. The results of the robustness test remain similar to our primary analysis regarding both the direction and magnitude of estimated coefficients. Lastly, as has been suggested in prior literature, some validation of the responses was desirable (e.g., Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007); thus, we calculated the coefficient of agreement (rwg; e.g., James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1993). All values for our multi-item constructs were acceptable, $r_{wg} > .81$ (r_{wg} -Family Harmony = .97, r_{wg} -Relational Conflict = .92, r_{wg} -Ownership Attachment = .91, r_{wg} -Work-family Conflict = .82, and r_{wg} -Affective Organizational Commitment = .91; Eddleston et al., 2008).

Discussion

Following a recent conceptual assertion about the relevance of ownership attachment on firm level outcomes in family businesses (e.g., Sharma & Manikutty, 2005; Zellweger & Astrachan, 2008), this first study develops and tests a model that integrates the literature on ownership attachment and affective organizational commitment. Our findings provide support for the applicability of ownership attachment and affective organizational commitment theories of family firms. We found that family dynamics indeed nurture ownership attachment and affective organizational commitment. More specifically, we have shown that family business harmony directly and indirectly impacts affective organizational commitment of family business owner-managers through their ownership attachment. We also found a positive link between family business owners' relationship conflict and their work-family conflict.

Interestingly, we did not find a negative relationship between family harmony and work-family conflict; instead, we observed a significant positive relationship. Also in contrast to our expectations, we found a positive relationship between family owner-managers' work-family conflict and their ownership attachment. Aligning these two positive links suggests that the effect of family harmony on ownership attachment is positively and partially mediated by work-family conflicts. First, the positive relationship between family harmony and work-family conflict may be owing to harmonious families' higher expectations concerning family responsibilities. Family members may attach more salience to family when there is harmony. Having to meet higher family expectations, however, may place more pressure and guilt on a family owner-manager when he or she is faced with high levels of work demands. When high family expectations are

not met, harmonious family members may react relatively more harshly than less harmonious family members owing to feelings of betrayal of trust, elevating work-family conflict. Hence, harmonious families' elevating work-family conflict may be more acute. Second, the positive link between work-family conflict and ownership attachment may be owing to the attainment of family firm goals serving the satisfaction of the family owner-managers' higher order needs such as self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and self-enhancement. Although this strong proclivity to support the firm may lead to unmet family role expectations and low family satisfaction at home (Frone et al., 2000), work-family conflict rooted in overinvolvement at work can also help satisfy the individual's need to be in charge and have control and mastery, which can facilitate ownership attachment (Belk, 1988). High workloads and resulting work-family conflict may not only create stress and withdrawal, but also contribute to one's self-concept of greater capabilities for doing and being and provide a sense of purpose and worth, which can elevate ownership attachment. Future research can further shed light on the link between owner-managers' work-family conflict and their ownership attachment in family firms.

Additionally, we did not find a negative relationship between relationship conflict and ownership attachment. Instead, we found that relationship conflict had a positive and significant relationship to ownership attachment. In alignment with the positive link between relationship conflict and work-family conflict and the positive link between work-family conflict and ownership attachment, overall results suggest that work-family conflict positively and partially mediates the relationship between relationship conflict and ownership attachment. This interesting result may be an indication of the fact that attachment forms not only as a result of positive emotional affect, such as family harmony. Instead, both positive and negative ownership experiences, including work-family conflict, may help narrate one's life story and reflect one's life, establishing one's self-concept and elevating ownership attachment. Also, ownership attachment represents a combination of affiliation and past, present, and future orientation, suggesting why individuals take the bitter with the sweet. Moreover, our finding indicates that in litigious family contexts, owner-managers may become attached to their possession and feel stuck with the ownership owing to sunk cost effects. Individuals tend to mentally account for their efforts and personal investments in the escalating relational conflict. Then, in contrast to withdrawal behavior, with conflicts gaining in ardor and severity, attachment may form as a motive to protect against the loss of conflict-related investments. As such, we introduce ownership attachment (Ball & Tasaki, 1992; Belk, 1992) to the affective organizational commitment and family business literatures and show that ownership attachment needs to be seen as an important mediator between family dynamics (i.e., relationship conflict and family harmony) and affective organizational commitment. We have shown that such attachment may form as a result of two effects. The first driver of attachment, family harmony, is rooted in positive family dynamics. The second driver of attachment, work-family conflict, may be seen as a negatively valenced source of attachment given the associated role conflicts and the positive ties of relational conflicts to work-family conflict. In consequence, we highlight ownership attachment as a dual-faceted antecedent of affective organizational commitment.

Limitations

Our study has several limitations. First, our study was cross-sectional and, therefore, we can infer but not determine causality (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1995). Thus, longitudinal studies of how

family firm factors (family business harmony and relationship conflict) can affect ownership attachment and work-family conflict that can influence affective organizational commitment as a result are needed. Second, we utilized single-source, self-reported data. Even though we tested for common method bias and the results did not suggest any significant concerns, multiple data sources are encouraged in future studies. Cultural setting can also affect the observed relationships and generalizability, as our study was conducted in Germany.

Future Research Directions

Turning to the future research directions, aside from the unique family firm factors (family harmony and relational conflict) affecting family business owner-managers' affective organizational commitment, there may be other antecedents of affective organizational commitment, such as organizational tenure, age, and education (Mayer & Schoorman, 1998). Future research might also investigate whether family business members' affective organizational commitment varies according to other unique family-firm-specific factors such as family life-cycle stages or family firm culture. Another avenue for future research is investigating the organizational outcomes of affective organizational commitment in family firms. Whether affective organizational commitment enhancing the retention of family business members will also facilitate exerting more effort and productivity that can potentially increase firm's profitability and growth is another area that calls for research attention. Furthermore, it seems promising to further investigate the aspect of ownership attachment given that this aspect of family control has been advocated as being an important driver of family firm behavior (Sharma & Manikutty, 2005) and antecedent to the creation of emotional value (Zellweger & Astrachan, 2008). The conceptual assertion that ownership attachment may impede timely divestment of underperforming activities has never been subject to an empirical test (Sharma & Manikutty, 2005). Also, it seems warranted to empirically investigate the relationship between ownership attachment and organizational performance. Do high levels of managerial ownership attachment really convey negative performance outcomes, as implicitly suggested in most family business and management research (e.g., Sharma & Manikutty, 2005)?

In conclusion, this study draws on ownership attachment and affective organizational commitment theories to explore affective organizational commitment in family firms. Given the relevance of the topic to the prosperity and survival of family firms, we hope our study will inspire further efforts to inform researchers, just as family firm owners and managers, on how to create a family firm environment that fosters family harmony, ownership attachment, and affective organizational commitment.

Note

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