

# Together for the cause

## FAMILY BUSINESS

Dr Ian Smyth

IT'S widely suggested that employees who are committed to an organisation are not only happier and more fulfilled within themselves, but also demonstrate more positive performance outcomes such as greater levels of service, motivation and innovation.

What about commitment when in the midst of a crisis and what does this mean for family firms?

Keen to explore the impact of Covid-19 on family businesses, DCU's National Centre for Family Business along with Ulster University, Harbinson Mulholland and University of Central Florida conducted an all-Ireland study exploring this issue.

One of the central themes emerging from the study showed that heightened com-



COVID-19: Employees displayed loyalty and dedication throughout the pandemic

mitment of employees to their work and the organisation was evident. Employees displayed loyalty and dedication to their organisations and even acted as ambassadors for their company throughout the pandemic.

There are undoubtedly different types of commitment

(Allen and Meyer 1990). Unsurprisingly, we found that employees were more concerned than leaders about the potential impact of the pandemic on livelihoods (44 per cent employees concerned about threat to their job vs 33 per cent of CEOs). As a consequence, one might assume

that such employees are only demonstrating continuance commitment, i.e. only committed because their livelihood depends on it.

Our findings, however, suggest that an additional type of commitment being displayed here, namely "affective commitment" – a strong emotion-

al attachment to the firm and with employees being committed because they want to be.

This is reinforced by the fact that the study surveyed both CEO's and non-family employees, which confirmed three key points:

1. In the face of crisis, it's all hands on deck: Dramatic changes to ways of working forced employees to quickly adapt and find new ways of performing their day-to-day roles. This dedication and commitment to teamwork was commended by their leaders: "It hasn't been an easy ride and our success through it will be a testament to the commitment of all our staff", stated one CEO. Another non-family employee noted that "there has been a sea change in attitude, we all need to do whatever it takes to attract new work and be more agile as a company".

2. Maintain hope in the face of uncertainty: Whilst employees are concerned about the threat to their jobs, they also indicated equal concern for their organisations. Where possible, leaders need to recognise and reward employees for their hard-work and loyalty alongside embedding employee wellbeing into the culture and management of employees.

3. Crisis brings appreciation instead of entitlement: Our findings demonstrate an increased sense of gratitude from those employees that have remained employed throughout the pandemic. "Employees appreciate their jobs more and are keen to upskill where necessary," according to one non-family employee in the hospitality sector.

Another employee stated, "Covid has resulted in a shift from entitlement to a job to appreciation of a job."

As family firms continue to navigate the new normal, it is imperative that they fervently guard the affective commitment that may have been strengthened during the pandemic and seek to build on this to maintain competitive advantage moving forward.

For more on the findings of the survey and the work of the NI Family Business Forum, alongside podcasts and resources, please visit <https://www.harbinson-mulholland.com/> or Ulster University Business School across social media.

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