



The Family That Prays Together Stays Together: Toward a Process Model of Religious Value Transmission in Family Firms

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Abstract

Research indicates that religious values and ethical behavior are closely associated, yet, at a firm level, the processes by which this association occurs are poorly understood. Family firms are known to exhibit values-based behavior, which in turn can lead to specific firm-level outcomes. It is also known that one's family is an important incubator, enabler, and perpetuator of religious values across successive generations. Our study examines the experiences of a single, multigenerational business family that successfully enacted their religious values in their business. Drawing upon intergenerational solidarity and values-based leadership theory, and by way of an interpretive, qualitative analysis, we find that the family's religious values enhanced their cohesion and were manifested in their leadership style, which, in turn, led to outcomes for the business. Our findings highlight the processes that underlie the relationship between religious values and organizational outcomes in family firms and offer insights into the role of solidarity in values-based leadership.

Keywords Religious values · Intergenerational solidarity · Values-based leadership · Family business

Introduction

While the moral landscape of contemporary businesses is continually changing, religion¹ remains an important source of values that inform the decisions of business leaders (Karakas 2010; Vasconcelos 2010). In fact, religion is known to have a powerful influence on leaders' work behavior, attitudes, and perceptions (Lynn et al. 2011; Regnerus and Smith 2005). For example, improved strategic decision-making, the alignment of values and corporate vision, and virtuous leadership ethics have all been positively correlated

with higher levels of religion in the workplace (Benefiel et al. 2014; Cavanagh and Bandsuch 2002).

However, while 'religious values' (i.e., values that correspond with religious orientations and involvement) are known to influence business and management practices, there is little understanding or theoretical framing of the underlying processes and dynamics by which this influence occurs. Since religion has been, and still is, an important source of core values for business leaders (Vasconcelos 2010), it is important to understand how religious values manifest within organizational groups and how such values translate from intra- and interpersonal convictions into established workplace practices.

The alignment of religious values with workplace practices is particularly relevant in the context of *family*-owned businesses, that is, those that are owned and/or operated by a family unit (Tagiuri and Davis 1996). The often ambiguous delineation of boundaries and roles between business and family can lead to a complex interplay between moral commitments and subsequent business outcomes (Sorenson 2013). This interplay can be especially noticeable when

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¹ Following Worden (2005, p. 521), *religion* can be defined as "a particular institutionalized or personal system of beliefs, values and practices relating to the divine—a level of reality or power that is regarded as the 'source' or 'ultimate', transcending yet immanent in the realm of human experience."

religious values are a prominent source of the practices that define a family's culture (Fletcher et al. 2012). One possible avenue for religious values to affect family business outcomes is through intergenerational family interactions, which shape values at a family level, as well as influence firm-level leadership practices based on those values. Consequently, a family business context offers a useful opportunity for exploring the role of religion in contemporary business leadership.

Our study therefore asks: *How do religious values influence family and business outcomes in family firms?* We seek to answer this question by linking 'intergenerational solidarity' theory with a 'values-based leadership' perspective, which we contend jointly explain the translation of a business family's religious values into firm-level outcomes. According to the literature, intergenerational solidarity (i.e., the closeness of kinship relations across multiple generations) shapes the structure of family cohesion (Silverstein and Bengtson 1997). In turn, a cohesive business family can collectively espouse and enact their convictions when interacting with the firm as values-based leaders (i.e., those with an underlying moral and ethical foundation).

We apply these perspectives to the experiences of the Kiobassa family, an openly devout Catholic, third-generation business family that founded and has owned the Kiobassa Provision Company (KPC) across a history of nearly 70 years. Our primary data consisted of eight in-depth interviews with multiple generations of family members and non-family employees. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyze these interviews to see how KPC was influenced by the religious values of its family owners. Based on this analysis, we ultimately propose a conceptual model illustrating various processes that facilitate the transmission of individual religious values to the broader family and business as a whole.

Our contribution to the literature is twofold. First, by applying the solidarity and leadership perspectives, we bridge an important conceptual gap and reveal the processes by which religious values are institutionalized in family firms. For example, our data show that religious values facilitate a closer, more cohesive family unit. With respect to their interaction with the firm, we observe how these same values are fundamental to the family's leadership approach and ultimately the firm's behavior. In particular, we contend that our IPA approach enables inferences about the religious antecedents of family cohesion, leadership, and business behaviors that are not possible through other (more objective) qualitative analysis techniques. Second, by shedding light on how religious values are cultivated across multiple generations in business families, we contribute to the understanding of important antecedents of values-based leadership which complements the extant literature that mainly focuses on its consequences (Kalshoven et al. 2011).

In the next sections, our literature review introduces intergenerational solidarity theory and links it to values-based leadership as well as key characteristics of religious values. We then describe the KPC case and outline our IPA research methodology. After that we present our findings and discuss our analysis and resulting conceptual model. We conclude with a discussion of the main contributions and limitations of the study.

Theoretical Considerations

Religious Values and Family Firms

Values² play a central role in a firm's culture, strategy, and behavior (Ives and Kidwell 2019). This is especially relevant in family business (Fletcher et al. 2012). Given that family firms are at the point of intersection between the family and business systems, it is not surprising that they can be particularly values-oriented (Distelberg and Sorenson 2009). In fact, an emphasis on values is an important feature that can distinguish family firms from other types of businesses (Rau et al. 2019). Further, as religious practices are socially constructed (Wach 2019), we contend that the influence of core social institutions, such as family, are crucial to fully understanding how religious values in particular can influence businesses (Sorenson 2013). This argument deems family firms a useful research context for our study.

One of the primary theoretical perspectives on how values are transferred from individuals to organizations is through the mechanism of 'values-based leadership,' that is, leadership practices that are imbued with moral and ethical foundations (Copeland 2014). Values-based leaders seek to influence others by espousing, enacting, and being guided by the values they prioritize (Anderson 1997). There are, of course, many sources of values, however, given our research question, we acknowledge *religion* as an especially powerful source (Pepper et al. 2010; Worden 2005). In fact, religion has been a prominent source of social values throughout human history (Ives and Kidwell 2019). With that said, scholars, philosophers, and theologians have debated the terminology and classification of what constitute 'religious values' for centuries (Roccas 2005). Although there are many perspectives, the social psychology literature has made important progress in identifying specific values associated

² The extant literature defines 'values' as beliefs that guide the evaluation of behavior and events with respect to desired goals. Values can be applied in multiple situations, which serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or a group (Schwartz 1992).

Table 1 Intergenerational solidarity dimensions

Intergenerational solidarity	Description ^a
Structure	The 'structure' dimension relates to the physical proximity of the group. For example, geographic distance may constrain or enhance interaction between family members
Association	The 'association' dimension relates to frequency of social interaction. For example, how often family members are in social contact and share activities with each other
Affect	The 'affect' dimension relates to feelings of emotional closeness, affirmation, and intimacy between family members. For example, the degree of trust and care family members have for each other
Consensus	The 'consensus' dimension relates to actual or perceived agreement in opinions, values, and lifestyles between family members. For example, mutual valuing that consolidates diverse opinions into a shared purpose
Function	The 'function' dimension relates to resource sharing. For example, exchanges of instrumental and financial assistance and support between family members
Norms	The 'norms' dimension relates to the strength of obligation felt toward other family members. For example, the shared expectations that family members have of each other

^aAdapted from Jaskiewicz et al. (2017) and Silverstein and Bengtson (1997)

with religiosity (e.g., Roccas and Schwartz 1997; Schwartz and Huismans 1995).³

Regardless of their definition, one common feature of religious values is their social aspect and resulting capacity to bind people together (Vasconcelos 2010). Interestingly, the word 'religion' itself is derived from the Latin '*religare*,' which means to bind (Barnhart and Steinmetz 2006). Religion has been called a social institution that helps to integrate the structure of families and society as a whole (Lynn et al. 2011). This discussion alludes to how religion can influence an interesting, but overlooked, concept in the family science literature called 'intergenerational solidarity,' that is, the strength of intergenerational family bonds (Silverstein and Bengtson 1997). We contend that intergenerational solidarity is inherently linked to religion, yet this connection has not been explicitly made in the contemporary business literature.

Religious Values and Intergenerational Solidarity

Intergenerational solidarity theory, developed by Bengtson and Roberts (1991) and Silverstein and Bengtson (1997), has its origin in social psychology and family psychology studies. It relates to the degree of generational ties in families and considers both family and societal factors when examining group behavior over time (Hammarström 2005). The application of intergenerational solidarity theory to organization studies has demonstrated its usefulness for understanding organizational behaviors from a family dynamics perspective, such as effective teamwork and resilience (Ajrouch 2007; Collins and Smith 2006; Karakas 2010).

³ Outlined further in our Methodology section, we adopt one of these approaches for the purpose of our study.

Intergenerational solidarity is founded on six dimensions of parent-child cohesion and engagement (Garcia et al. 2019; Jaskiewicz et al. 2017), which reflect the "complexity and contradictions of family life" (Silverstein and Bengtson 1997, p. 432). These dimensions are listed and further described in Table 1.

Despite the apparent connections, only a few studies link the solidarity dimensions listed in Table 1 to a family's religious values. For example, Regnerus and Smith (2005) explore the influence of religious participation and salience in people's lives and find that religious salience is a consistent predictor of better family relations. However, the authors do not investigate business-owning families and thus do not consider the outcomes that religious values can additionally have for family businesses. On that note, Sorenson (2013) contends that shared values in general hold business-owning families together across generations, psychologically and behaviorally, thereby helping them achieve and sustain their economic objectives over time. However, exploring the influence of religion and religious rituals, as an important *source* of moral values in family firms, was not within the scope of Sorenson's study.

These studies allude to the notion that religion is a catalyst for family solidarity via shared norms, experiences, rituals, values, and beliefs. Solidarity, in turn, can lead to cultural identity and consistency in group behaviors (Collins 2011). Thus, it can be argued that religious values can contribute to maintaining a cohesive family over generations (Fort 1995; Hammarström 2005). We contend that intergenerational solidarity theory therefore provides an important lens to view the social mechanisms that underlie the connections between an owning family's religious values, their subsequent leadership behavior, and the resulting impact on their business's behavior. In the remainder of this article, we use these concepts to frame our empirical study.

Table 2 List of interviewees

Interviewee	Generation (relationship with founder)	Position in KPC (at the time of study)	Length of interview
Bobby	2nd (son)	Former CEO	55 min
Linda	2nd (daughter-in-law)	Shareholder	55 min
Barbara	2nd (daughter)	Board Secretary and Treasurer	1 h 47 min
Jim	2nd (son-in-law)	Former Board Chairman	1 h 47 min
Sandra	2nd (daughter)	Board member and Vice President	1 h 17 min
Michael	3rd (grandson)	President and CEO	1 h 19 min
Rusty	4th (great-grandson)	Potential successor	48 min
Michael J.	Non-family employee (since 2007)	Director of Brand Growth	33 min

Methodology

Case Description and Selection

The Kiolbassa family has owned and operated Kiolbassa Provision Company (KPC), a Texas-based sausage manufacturing company, since 1949. The case was chosen to study religious values and business behavior for two main reasons. First, the Kiolbassa family was deeply religious and all the family members involved in the business practiced their Catholic faith with considerable devotion. The family also explicitly presented themselves as a religious family in the public sphere, for example, through radio interviews and on their website. This enabled us to study the religious and relational characteristics of the family from direct observation and discussion. Second, at the time of our study, the business had been under the ownership and management of the one family for nearly 70 years and across four generations. KPC was governed and led by the second and third generations, respectively, while the fourth generation was being groomed to enter the business. Three generations of the Kiolbassa family were interviewed providing us with a multigenerational database that spanned the entire history of the company. This offered the opportunity to study intergenerational and intrafamilial processes where family members were inducted into the culture of the family and its business.

Interviews and Data Collection

Data collection was undertaken using semi-structured interviews. Interviews began with the open-ended invitation to “tell us the story of your life and how it relates to KPC, with all the events you can recall.” This type of opening is commonly used by sociologists and anthropologists in ‘life-story’ research (McAdams 2008) and offered participants an opportunity to narrate their most important recollections of themselves in the context of the family firm’s history. We followed by prompting questions using a predefined

interview guide.⁴ It is important to note that our interviews were not designed to capture the religiosity of the family. Therefore, we did not prime our interviewees to speak of their religious values, or how they influenced their family and business. Rather, these concepts became apparent after we started to analyze the transcripts.

Interviews were conducted during a four-day visit to KPC’s headquarters in San Antonio, Texas. The research team was given a tour of the plant and attended a top-executive strategy meeting where further notes were taken. The first author, along with a research assistant, conducted all interviews which were selected to reflect a wide variety of business involvement and to represent all three living generations of the family. Eight of these interviews (see Table 2) were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

To triangulate our interview material, we also collected newspaper articles, radio interviews, and company brochures, as well as reviewed the company’s website, as evidence for a public narrative of the family venture. We further collected supplemental materials to cross-check facts, such as company financial statements and industry-based reports.

Identification of Religious Values

We adopted Schwartz’s values theory to assess the standing of religious values for the family. Schwartz’s (1992) theory of human values offers a typology of ten personal values that are recognized across cultures and explain their underlying priorities (Regnerus and Smith 2005). This typology has also been widely utilized to identify the specific values associated with religiosity (Roccas 2005; Roccas and Schwartz

⁴ The interviews were conducted under the auspices of the “Successful Transgenerational Entrepreneurship Practices” (STEP) Project. This project, administered by STEP partner universities and led by Babson College, compiles case studies which explore the transgenerational entrepreneurial practices of successful family businesses across the globe. An outline of the STEP framework can be found in Habbershon et al. (2010).

Table 3 Value types and their correlation with religiosity

Value types	Associated values	Underlying motivations	Relationship with religiosity ^a
Power	Social power; authority; wealth; public image	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources	Negative
Achievement	Successful; capable; ambitious; influential	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards	Negative
Hedonism	Seeking pleasure; enjoying life	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself	Negative
Stimulation	Daring; a varied life; an exciting life	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life	Negative
Self-direction	Creativity; freedom; independent; curious; choosing own goals	Independent thought and action—choosing, creating, exploring	Negative
Universalism	Broad-minded; wisdom; social justice; equality; a world at peace; a world of beauty; unity with nature; protecting the environment	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature	Negative/positive ^b
Benevolence	Helpful; honest; forgiving; loyal; responsible	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact	Positive
Tradition	Humble; accepting own portion in life; devout; respect for tradition; moderate	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide	Positive
Conformity	Obedient; politeness; self-discipline; honoring parents and elders	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms	Positive
Security	Family security; national security; social order; clean; reciprocation of favors	Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self	Positive

^aRelationships are consistent with Roccas (2005), Roccas and Schwartz (1997), and Schwartz and Huisman (1995)

^bThe extant literature presents mixed results with respect to the direction of the correlation between universalism and religiosity. This may be due to the contrast with the in-group focus of benevolence values, that is, universalism values derive from survival needs of individuals and groups, but people do not recognize these needs until they encounter others beyond their extended primary group (Pepper et al. 2010)

1997; Schwartz and Huisman 1995). We adopted the conclusions of these previous studies in order to more precisely observe how the Kiolbassa's religious values manifested throughout their family and business.⁵ Table 3 outlines the ten value types as well as how the extant literature associates each with religiosity (either positively or negatively).

⁵ It is important to note that the value types mentioned in Table 3, and their correlations with religiosity, have been identified using various denominations of Christianity, including Catholicism (Schwartz and Huisman 1995). Although there are important nuances (Cavanagh and Bandsuch 2002), we contend that Schwartz's value types listed in Table 3 which are positively (or negatively) correlated with religiosity correspond closely to what are known as Catholic 'virtues' (or 'vices'). However, rather than link our data directly to the Catholicism, we opted to utilize the terminology of the more universally accepted value types associated with religiosity, with the caveat that not all who demonstrate (or avoid) certain values will be motivated by religion. With that said, our data strongly support the notion that the religious values being demonstrated by the Kiolbassa family are indeed grounded in their strong identification as Catholics.

Data Analysis

We utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and corresponding narrative notes to analyze and present the interview data. IPA is "an approach to qualitative, experiential and psychological research which has been informed by concepts and debates from three key areas of philosophy of knowledge, that is, phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography" (Smith et al. 2009, p. 11). We followed the basic IPA process of moving from a descriptive to an interpretative analysis (Brocki and Wearden 2006; Kempster and Cope 2010). This process involved taking both an emic (inside) and etic (outside) perspective. Specifically, we "read from within the terms of the text" to take an interpretive position outside the text (Smith et al. 2009, p. 37). This means we did not only focus on the participants' spoken words but also endeavored to understand the underlying subjective meaning behind those words (i.e., an emic perspective). Our narrative notes supplemented the IPA by focusing on the use of specific language to bring the reader closer to the phenomenon being studied (Bansal and Corley 2011). These notes highlight how the specific religious values listed in Table 3 materialized within our case study. Presented in the Findings

section, we used direct quotes from the interviewees and presented interpretations of their “world” as we understood it to be (i.e., an etic perspective).

An IPA approach warrants small samples but this also inhibits generalizability (Kisfalvi 2002). We therefore explored each participant’s individual experience through an in-depth analysis before trying to find any generalized group theme (Shotter 1997). Performing the IPA involved two steps. First, we interpreted the interview transcripts of our eight participants separately. This helped uncover how each participant was influenced by their own religious values as individuals. Second, we identified how interviewees viewed each other interdependently by taking all the transcripts into account. This procedure cross-checked the individual stories and provided insights into how the Kiolbassas behaved as a family. It also added a layer of richness to the interpretative analysis, as the complexity and dynamism of the family’s social interactions, and the different links that connected individuals within and across generations, were considered (Leitch et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2009). This analytical approach is also consistent with the multilevel nature of religion as an expression of both individuals *and* groups (Cohen et al. 2005; Collins 2011).

It is important to note that we related concepts via a combination of inductive and deductive thinking by employing both a values-based leadership and intergenerational solidarity lens. This did not occur simultaneously, as we first interpreted the religious motivations (as outlined in Table 3) underlying the family’s leadership style, and the firm’s behavior, and later asked ourselves: what enabled this behavior? It was then that we revisited our data and came to the realization that family cohesion was an important prerequisite. We then employed the six dimensions of intergenerational solidarity (as outlined in Table 1) to interpret how religious values shaped our participants’ ideas, thoughts, and experiences which stemmed from their solidarity behavior. This additional analysis is presented at the start of the findings section. In sum, our narrative notes ascertain how religious values influenced (1) the family’s intergenerational interactions, (2) their leadership approach, and finally (3) their organization’s behavior.

In all stages of our analysis, interrater reliability was obtained by two authors producing separate analyses, and subsequently using joint meetings among all authors to resolve any discrepancies. In the following section, we offer our explanation of these overarching dynamics and present our narrative notes using selected quotes and our associated interpretations, which, taken as a whole, lead us toward a process model of how religious values are transmitted within family firms.

Findings

Religious Values and Intergenerational Family Interactions

Intergenerational Solidarity

Our data indicate that religious values were foundational to the solidarity of the Kiolbassa family. For example, their ongoing commitment to their Catholic faith was a cornerstone of the family’s activities, as Sandra stated:

We’re all active, in our churches and our families are too... [so is] the next generation.

The above suggests that the value of *tradition* led to a common mission that increased the frequency of the family’s interactions and emotional closeness, enhancing their *association* and *affect*, respectively. We also see evidence of this emotional closeness linked to the family’s faith when Rufus, the founder of KPC, tragically passed away. Sandra explained:

It was devastating, to say the least, it made us closer and we spent a lot of time in prayer, and we figured out that we’re a real religious and prayerful family.

The above shows that prayer itself drew the family together during their time of mourning. Through this collective expression of faith, prayer strengthened the family’s *affect* for one another and helped them to realize the value of *security* as a group.

Family members specifically attributed their solidarity to their religious faith. For example, Barbara reflected on her upbringing when her father was building the business:

We didn’t see him [Rufus] a whole lot... but we always, you know we were close in the family and - I think the key to the whole picture is that we’re a Catholic family but the whole picture is that God is with us the whole time. There were struggles [but]... we didn’t focus on a lot of those things. We focused on just being together when we could.

The family actively sought solidarity via their *association* and *structure* with respect to physical proximity. Yet, due to their understanding that God was “with us,” the family demonstrated a God-directed rather than *self-directed* value. The above quote also shows how an emphasis on “being together” reduced the burden of the family’s “struggles” and heightened their sense of *security*.

Further to this logic, the family’s unity, attributed in part to God, seemed to be an obligation for the group. For example, Linda, Bobby’s wife, explained how, after Bobby’s mother passed away, they found her hand-written

will instructing her children “to be good to each other.” This message of unity suggests that the values of *security*, *conformity*, and *benevolence* were foundational to the solidarity of the Kiolbassa family. These were explicitly connected with sanctity when Linda stated:

We’ve been blessed that there haven’t been any divisions [in our family].

After the above sentiment was expressed, Bobby, reflecting on the last 60 years of business, repeated, “I think that God has really blessed our family.”

Consistent with the family’s faith in God, strong bonds were formed to maintain the intergenerational harmony expressed above. The family’s value of *conformity* led to an obligatory *norm*, an important dimension of solidarity, which was emphasized by the first generation and reinforced in subsequent generations. For example, rooted in their collective religious values, a normative expectation of *benevolence* led to *consensus* within the family group. This shared expectation was broadly explained by Michael who told us of his family’s philosophy on how to treat others. He stated:

Your word is your bond. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Interestingly, Michael quoted the ‘golden rule,’ as specified in biblical and other religious texts, as being “something that my dad instilled in me.” Keeping with this *tradition*, Michael instilled these expectations in the fourth generation. For example, when asked about his own worldview, Rusty responded:

My dad’s very religious and, yes he has definitely influenced me in my spiritual belief.

Religious values connected the family to their heritage. For example, Barbara spoke of the family’s sense of “legacy”:

You [we] always felt that connection that deep-seated - it was part of you. It was a part of your legacy... I think all of our children feel that same passion... I think it’s just you either have it or you don’t. I think it’s in you. I think they get [it] from us I guess. I think it’s a tradition. It’s an example or a, I said tradition, but it’s just passed down. I think it was passed from my dad to us kids, to our kids, and so on.

Their sense of legacy possessed a *functional* dimension that supported the sharing of resources, alignment of goals, and pursuit of joint endeavors that served to achieve long-term business objectives. Barbara’s own words portray their passion as an important *tradition* that had been “passed down” from one generation to the next and show the enduring nature of the family’s values and the role they played in developing their cohesion.

Family Cohesion

The previous section illustrates that the family possessed high levels of all six solidarity dimensions. Facilitated by shared religious values, the family’s solidarity enhanced cohesiveness between its members. Referring to Bobby’s family, Linda talked about the tight-knit interpersonal relationships of family members and how they supported each other:

They’re [a] very close family... There’s not any fighting. There’s no jealousy... he [Bobby] supported their mother for how many years before she died... I think mainly because of that closeness... Everybody’s happy for everybody’s success. That’s a rare thing to find in general.

The closeness among family members did not result solely from the absence of conflict, but from a mindset of positive regard for each other. Her words reflect the religious value of *benevolence* and also imply a sense of *security* among the family as they supported each other. It is evident that the Kiolbassa family is one which values *tradition* and *conformity* and that these values united them. In fact, during our interviews, Linda unambiguously mentioned “faith” as being a “constant thread throughout the family.”

Enacted Religious Values Through Values-Based Leadership

Decision-Making

To understand how the Kiolbassa family led KPC, we first examine how decisions were made among the family group. We observed the family’s cohesiveness as a catalyst for enacting their religious values. For example, Michael referred to his family’s sense of solidarity when he mentioned that all shareholders exhibited similar characteristics as if they were a single cohort, rather than four different individuals. He recalled:

It’s easy to build a consensus among those 4 shareholders, not just the fact that there are only 4, but it’s the makeup of those 4. You know I talked about the humility. I talked about no egos. I talked about putting the best interest of the company first.

Michael’s comments illustrate that the value of *conformity* was practiced when making key decisions. The family led with modesty and selflessness (i.e., “humility” and “no egos”), all of which are positively linked to religiosity, as they are negatively associated with the values of *power*, *achievement*, and *self-direction*.

The family's solidarity along with their shared value of *conformity* played an important role in their mutual faith in one another, which is evident in Barbara's comment:

Even though we [the 2nd generation] had shares in the business we trusted him [Bobby] so much and we were so close in it that we knew he was doing the best he could for everybody, not only as for him.

The above also illustrates that Bobby was regarded as a *benevolent* leader in the eyes of his siblings. Akin to their solidarity, the value of *conformity* exhibited in the family's leadership approach persisted into the third generation, as Michael pointed out:

We all grew up together... and we are very close... so I never had second-guessing from any cousins. Although they haven't always been involved in the business, their shares have always been voting... and they have always agreed.

Employee Management

Especially noticeable was the family's emphasis on transparency and autonomy when managing their employees. This is evidenced in Michael's reflection on his "open-book management" style, which is a management approach where employees are provided with the firm's financial information to enable decision-making. As a result, employees were educated, engaged, and empowered, which, as Michael implied, helped them to identify with the organization and its vision:

So educate [employees]... engage them... so that will have taught [employees]... to do something with this knowledge... [so that] the guy sweeping the floor knows that the better he does... the more our yield goes up, and more money goes to them.

Michael's approach to empowering people through fostering autonomy recognizes mutual success and reflects the value of sharing *power* and *achievement* with others. Also, by applying this management style to the entire team, KPC placed no differentiation between family and non-family members demonstrating the family's value of *benevolence*. Specifically, the practice contributed to a working environment that promoted honesty and responsibility for *all*.

KPC's leaders extended their family's value of *security* toward their employees. For example, when referring to long-serving employees, Barbara commented:

[We have] got a lot of the older people who've been there forever... you have to be careful... [and] make them feel that they're needed or worth something.

The family's values of *benevolence* and *conformity* influenced their respect for and appreciation of "older"

employees. Sandra revealed how their attention to wellbeing and empowerment yielded employee loyalty over the years:

We have very loyal employees through the years... we've always been good to them, starting with Daddy's [Rufus] attitude and of course Bobby and Michael... we've always tried to pay a higher pay scale than maybe others in the industry do, so that we can maintain good help... it's personal.

Reflecting the religious value of *benevolence*, Sandra's sentiments demonstrate the gratitude and loyalty that the business showed toward its employees, and how that loyalty was reciprocated. Interestingly, Linda reinforced this gratitude in a spiritual manner by explaining:

We were very blessed with employees, very low turnover. All those years he [Bobby] had the same employees that Daddy had. They were a big help.

This last comment alludes to the influence that the family's (religious) values-based leadership had on the firm as a whole. Our observations indicate that, instead of being individual expressions of values, the family's gratitude and faith in God were translated into broader organizational outcomes.

Organizational Outcomes That Reflect Religious Values

Organizational Culture

It was apparent to us that the source of KPC's organizational values was ultimately the Kiobassa family's religious values. For example, Barbara's remarks establish a strong link between the family's culture and the organization's core values.

I think the culture of the family is reflected to [in] the business. We were writing a kind of mission statement, the board and all the shareholders... it's based on honesty, integrity, faith... good basic core values.

In her description, Barbara highlighted how the family's religious values were translated into KPC's corporate values. Barbara's words signal the family's religious values of *benevolence* (i.e., "honesty"), *security* (i.e., "integrity"), and *tradition* (i.e., "faith"). As they were incorporated into KPC's mission statement, these values not only guided the internal operational environment and relationships with employees, but also communicated them in a transparent way to customers and the wider community.

Similarly, as Michael J. (a non-family Director) suggested, the family's values originated from the first generation, persisted over time, and were eventually adopted by the firm.

A lot of culture comes from Bobby, I have never got to meet Rufus... [who was] hard working very mindful of assets and expenditures, loyal to the community, giving... We have signs in our office that talk about the continuous improvement, integrity, teamwork and commitment and those are core values that we have developed.

Here, Michael J. acknowledged the family's values of *tradition* (i.e., "hard-working"), *security* (i.e., "mindful of assets and expenditures"), and *benevolence* (i.e., "loyalty" and a "giving" attitude) as being present in KPC since the beginning. These were translated into organizational values by making them visible to the employees.

Product Quality and Customer Care

The Kiolbassa's values also extended to KPC's interactions with customers. The following comment demonstrates how the family recognized the emotional attachment that consumers have with KPC's products. Sandra stated:

[We are] passionate about it... It's something to be proud of. If we made bricks or something, I don't know if we'd be quite as passionate about it... it's something, you see and you hear people's reaction, it impacts their lives, it affects them personally.

Sandra's passion represents the value of *benevolence*, as it came from the family's sense of responsibility to fulfil the needs of others. Here, Sandra implied that food was an intimate experience for people and making sausages that could impact people's lives was the real purpose that KPC pursued. The pride expressed above builds on the family's value of *tradition*. For example, Sandra recalled earlier times when she reflected on her father's struggle:

When he [Rufus] was peddling meat... he was determined when he started making it that it was going to be [of the highest quality]... I tell everybody 'read the label'... And ours is meat, you know, actually pork.

Sandra drew attention to "read the label" out of her honesty and sense of responsibility and an overall *benevolence* toward customers. Her words also provide evidence of the origins of KPC's emphasis on quality.

KPC's policies similarly reflect the family's values of *benevolence* and *tradition*. For example, KPC's "money-back guarantee" policy ensures that customers receive a full refund if they are not completely satisfied with their purchase. It is evident that Rufus had passed these values to Bobby, and then Michael, who commented that integrity was "something that was drilled into me... if you say you're going to do it, you do it." Michael's words refer to many different values associated with religion, including *security*,

tradition, and *benevolence*. However, what makes a real difference is his usage of his name when he said:

There is really someone on the other end of the line, a 'Mike Kiolbassa', who will actually honor his guarantee.

The above quote highlights Michael's sense of responsibility toward customers. The values of *benevolence* and *tradition* were enacted when Michael honored the company's guarantee, and his family name.

Community Engagement

The family's *benevolence*, and perhaps a broader *universalism*, were reinforced across generations. For example, Bobby mentioned that his father, Rufus (KPC's founder), "always preached [that] you can't just take... we always try to give." These values were reproduced in organizational activities that served the wider community. Specifically, the family felt committed to performing charitable works that "give back" to society. Sandra, for example, was willing to help people in need as she acknowledged that the community had made KPC what it is today:

[We] help people in need... especially in business; community is what made us what we are today. And whatever opportunity we have to give back to them in whatever way we can through donations... It's been a great opportunity to do that.

Sandra's comments reveal that her participation in charities was a beneficent symbol of the gratitude she had toward the wider community. Her giving back to society was an "opportunity." Similarly, when commenting on the charitable activities the family engaged in, Bobby thanked God for such opportunities, and commended his own parents, indicating a sense of *conformity*. Michael also attributed his business's success to his faith, which is reflected in his son's comment. Rusty stated "He's [Michael] always told me he gives a lot of the credit to God." The family's feelings of gratitude toward God are consistent with their gratitude toward the wider community. Their conviction that God is always present defined the firm's values, which influenced KPC's attitude and behavior toward the community. This attitude is explicitly communicated in the firm's stated vision: "to enrich the lives of others," which is prominently mentioned on their website.

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the KPC case reveals that religious values play a key role in family dynamics, leadership styles, and ultimately organizational behavior. Specifically, our

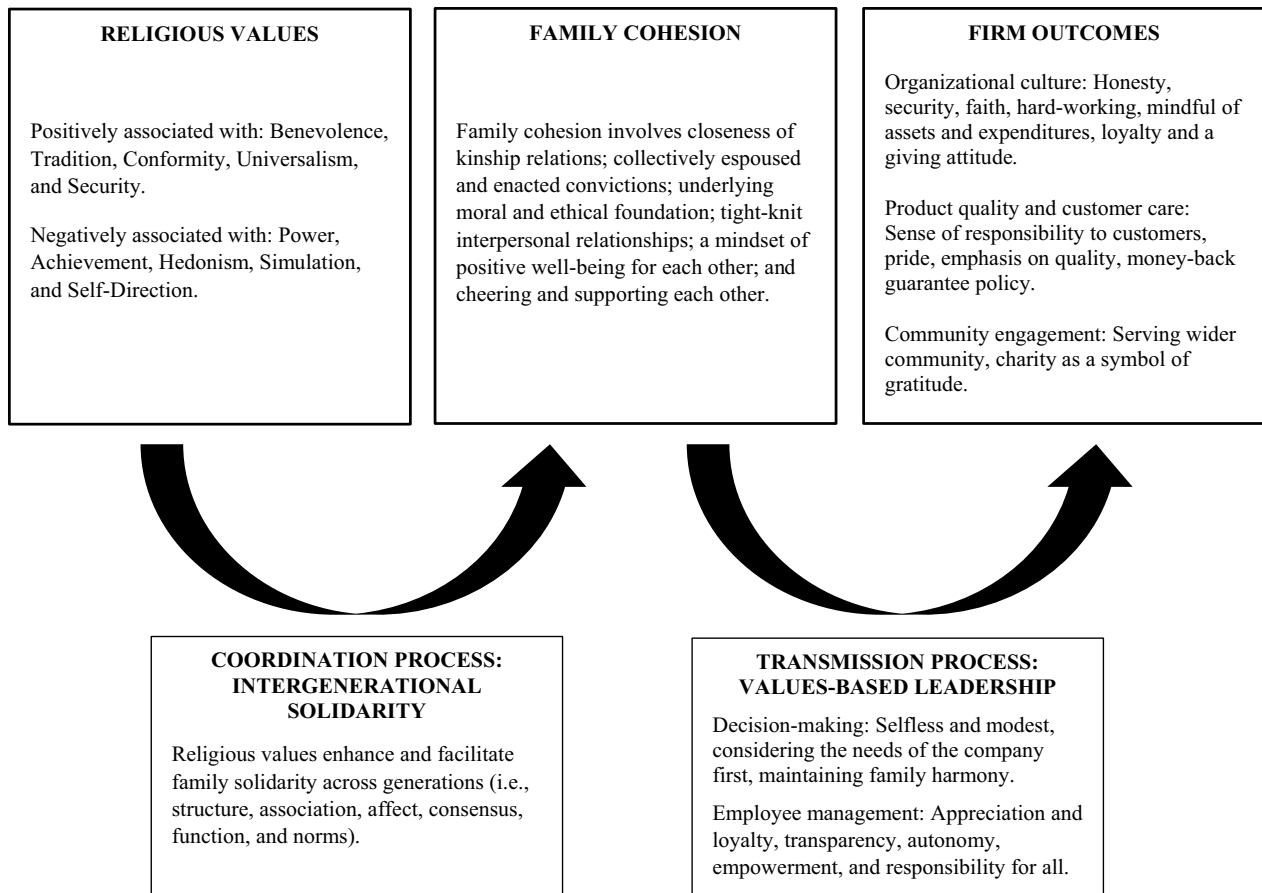


Fig. 1 A process model of how religious values translate into firm outcomes in family firms

narrative notes show that religious values translate from the personal to a more collective level (via solidarity), and then from implicit beliefs to explicit practices (via values-based leadership). Our study, therefore, highlights two important processes by which a family's religious values shape their business practices: (1) the coordination process via intergenerational solidarity, which leads to intrafamilial cohesiveness, and (2) the transmission process via values-based leadership, which leads to general workplace practices and firm outcomes that reflect the family's shared values. With the caveat that we generalize data from a single case study, Fig. 1 summarizes our findings and highlights the underlying social processes through which the transmission occurs.

Referring to the first process, intergenerational solidarity helps family owners to coordinate their efforts around shared purposes and consensual decision-making. Such coordination occurs when family members' interpersonal relationships exhibit strong loyalty and cohesiveness. Our data show how the religious values of the Kiolbassa family underpinned a shared sense of solidarity between them. In particular, this solidarity was enhanced both within and across family generations and led to a cohesiveness based

on religious convictions that shaped a "tight-knit" family structure (Jaskiewicz et al. 2017). We assert that their common religious values led to the family's cohesiveness at the interpersonal level and, in turn, enabled them to collectively enact their convictions via a values-based leadership approach.

Referring to the second process, shared religious values serve as a source of guiding principles for tight-knit business families that aspire to ratify their values into real practices. A values-based leader seeks to influence others according to his or her underlying moral and ethical foundations (Cope-land 2014). The Kiolbassa family were indeed values-based leaders, as they led KPC, by word and action, in accordance with their religious values. In particular, we observed manifestations of their religious values in the family's approach to quality control, decision-making, and stakeholder engagement. As the Kiolbassa family's religious values were cultivated and reinforced within and across generations, their leadership style consistently reflected these values within their business. In particular, solidarity and cohesion were also qualities evident in KPC's business culture, in its interactions with customers, and engagement with the wider

community. The framework presented in Fig. 1 contributes to our understanding of values and outcomes in family firms and has important theoretical and practical implications.

With regard to theory, our study contributes to understanding the role of intergenerational solidarity as a precursor to values-based leadership. First, we contend that religion is an important basis for intergenerational solidarity. Relating this understanding to family firms, where collective actions are known to be based on shared beliefs (Habbershon and Astrachan 1997), solidarity can be an important antecedent (and for multigenerational family firms, possibly a key enabler) of values-based leadership. This finding also enhances our understanding of the relationship between values-based leadership and family firm behavior. While religious values can serve as powerful inspirations and guides for values-based leaders (Gundolf and Filser 2013), solidarity theory explains the cohesion required to establish shared ethical commitments and expectations of values-based behavior on a group and organizational level (Anderson 1997; Luthans and Avolio 2003). Thus, solidarity not only orients a family's personal values but also enables them to diffuse and promote those values throughout the organization.

Our findings also have practical implications. Values known to be positively associated with religiosity, such as benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security, can have real benefits for family businesses. A clear example of this can be seen in the way KPC's leaders dealt with their employees. Where family management showed an ethical commitment to their staff, the workers repaid that commitment with great loyalty. In line with both the purposes of religious services (Longenecker et al. 2004) and the principle of group solidarity (Collins and Smith 2006), our case family demonstrated other- as opposed to self-centered values. This led to a sharing of power and achievement that seemingly promoted trust with both internal and external stakeholders. For example, there were financial guarantees of quality to customers, practical supports for ensuring the security of long-term employees, and exchanges of social and emotional resources within the family that created a corporate culture of cohesion and mutuality. However, as our study only scratches the surface of firm-level outcomes, more research is required to fully understand any performance implications related to our findings.

Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

The use of a single case may be viewed as a limitation of our study. Yet, we had rich, in-depth interview data from multiple individuals, including family and non-family members across multiple generations. The qualitative and interpretive

focus of the study allowed a deep exploration of the micro-processes that underlie the relationship between the family's religious values and firm-level outcomes (De Massis and Foss 2018). With that said, we hope that future studies utilizing more generalizable data will test the concepts we put forth here, as well as further explore the factors that affect the occurrence of religious values in families and subsequently the development of intergenerational solidarity and values-based leaders in firms.

Related to the above limitation, we also focused more on data derived from the family, rather than the business system. Given our observation of strong family solidarity in our case firm, our interview responses may be somewhat biased toward a favorable interpretation of the influence of religious values on business practices. With that said, we believe that the main contribution of our study is to establish the thesis that religion and solidarity affect family values formation and transmission. In our attempt to develop a broader framework, we show how these factors affect both family behavior and ultimately business behavior, but to separate the two in our case firm is not as clear-cut as one might expect. As with many family firms, the lines between family and business can be quite blurred, for example, as the Kiolbassa family owns, manages, and controls KPC, their management and leadership style is enmeshed with the culture of the firm. Interestingly however, most studies on this topic focus on the firm rather than the family, so in the context of the extant literature, we believe our approach represents a useful contribution.

Finally, like other bivalent qualities of family firms (Taguri and Davis 1996), we also acknowledge that there are potential risks to unbridled solidarity in business family groups. For example, strong emotional commitment can also lead to conflict avoidance, hiding legitimate concerns to safeguard solidarity. Conformity to traditional values can lead to an uncritical acceptance of potentially ineffective routines and practices. Demands for consensus can silence the voicing of other values and concerns and lead to rationalizations that potentially hinder performance. Further, the presence of strong norms does not ensure that those norms are ethical or conducive to firm performance, and proximity and closeness can lead to a lack of objectivity and reflective decision-making on otherwise unquestioned activities or norms. With these risks in mind, further research is needed to more clearly illuminate the 'dark side' of how religious values can influence practices in family firms.

Despite this, our study demonstrates that a sense of solidarity and shared identity can be powerful factors in guiding leadership practices that are needed for running a successful family business. Businesses today face a great variety of challenges in the complex markets and social environments in which they operate. The spiritual bond and positive moral direction that religious values can provide enable

family business owners and leaders to navigate through that complexity.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest All authors declare that he/she has no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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