

An Examination of the Leadership Roles of Senior Generation Women in Family Firms: How Does Servant Leadership Apply?

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Women in family firms possess multi-faceted leadership roles. This study focused on senior generation women who provide extensive leadership expertise, which has been historically under-appreciated. We employed a qualitative case study approach involving 14 U.S. family firms with senior generation women in leadership positions. Utilizing servant leadership as a theoretical guide, our findings support four leadership roles for women in family firms: Next Generation Managers, Top Management Team (TMT) Executives, Matriarchs, and Dominant CEOs. Senior women commonly filled the roles of Matriarchs and Dominant CEOs. Both roles were highly associated with servant leadership characteristics with Matriarchs being very highly associated.

Keywords: leadership, family firms, women, servant leadership, roles, qualitative, case study approach

INTRODUCTION

Women have become increasingly involved in the leadership of family firms in the first two decades of the 21st century (EY & Kennesaw State University, 2014). Family firms are extremely important to the U.S. economy as they employ 60% of the nation's workers and are responsible for 78% of new jobs created (Gaebler, 2019). Therefore, the topic of women as family firm leaders demands researchers' attention. Previous family business studies have investigated women as CEOs (Chadwick & Dawson, 2018) or board members (Campopiano, Rinaldi, Sciascia, & De Massis, 2019). or daughters (Dumas, 1992) or spouses (Poza & Messer, 2001).; however, research examining the multi-faceted roles women perform in family firms throughout their careers is lacking. Women have been noted for their selfless attitudes and willingness to help others in the family firm. The traditionally feminine roles, such as nurturing, peacekeeping, and listening, have been shown to carry over from the family to the business and be helpful to both (Cole, 1997).

There is a gap in the literature in explaining the positive aspects that women bring to family firms. Servant leadership offers a powerful explanatory theoretical platform concerning self-sacrifice and placing the needs of others before oneself that resonates with the leadership roles of women in family firms (Greenleaf, 1970; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Spears, 1995). We focus on senior generation women who provide extensive leadership expertise. Many research studies have highlighted women successors in family firms (Ahrens, Landmann, & Woywoode, 2015; Cater, Kidwell, & Camp, 2016; and Nelson &

Constantinidis, 2017), but our study examines the leadership roles of senior generation women in family firms. To our knowledge, there are no studies in this under-researched area. We refer to the senior generation in family firms as the founders of the company or the incumbent generation leaders after the death or retirement of the previous generation. A family firm may be defined as a company in which the governance and/or management are controlled by one family or a small number of families and in which behavior in the firm reflects the vision and values of the controlling family or families (Chua, Chrisman & Sharma, 1999).

The literature reflects a lack of differentiation among the leadership roles of women in family firms. For example, researchers have reported two roles: (1) women who enter existing family businesses as ‘women managers’, and (2) women who start their own family businesses have been referred to as ‘women-entrepreneurs’ (Faraudello, Songini, Pellegrini, & Gnan, 2018). In the U.S., both types of women in family firms have grown tremendously in recent years. Women now own approximately 40% of all businesses in the U.S., or 12.3 million businesses, compared to only 402,000 in 1972, which was 4.6% of all firms (Women’s Business Enterprise National Council, 2019).

Women are making advances in leadership in family firms. For example, in terms of future CEOs, 70% of the respondent firms are considering a woman, and 30% are strongly considering a woman for the top position (EY and Kennesaw State University, 2014). In a recent survey, 24 % of family firms have a woman CEO; 31.3% of family businesses are considering a female for the next generation leadership; and nearly 60% have women in top management positions (Conway Center for Family Business, 2019). Over the past five years, women-owned businesses have increased by 37%, and there is a trend toward increasing numbers of family firms passed down to daughters (Gaebler.com, 2019).

Therefore, in this study, we assert that the leadership of women in family firms is multi-faceted because they perform in different capacities as leaders, including (1) CEOs, (2) Next Generation Leaders, (3) Top Management Team (TMT) Executives, and (4) senior generation advisors or Matriarchs (Holdsworth, 1988). In explaining the fourth role of women as leaders in the family firm, we turn to the theory of Matriarchy, which has interested sociologists for decades (Goettner-Abendroth, 2006). As the female head of the house, the Matriarch possesses motherly qualities (Holdsworth, 1988) and acts out of love and family honor to ensure the success of the business (Smith, 2014).

There is still a long way to go for women in family firms to achieve equal status with men, but progress has been made and the future for women leaders in family firms appears to be improving.

Specifically, we investigated the questions: (1) What are the leadership roles of senior women in family firms? and (2) How does servant leadership apply to senior women in family firms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the next section, we provide a conceptual grounding of the roles and leadership of senior women in family firms, moving the focus of the review from broader to narrower fields. We survey the broader field of women’s roles in organizations and then zero in on the roles of women in family firms. Next, we appraise leadership in family firms and then focus on women as family firm leaders. Finally, we postulate that servant leadership may provide theoretical underpinnings regarding the motivation for senior women leaders in family firms.

Women’s Roles in Organizations and Family Firms

The broader context of women’s roles in organizations is relevant to women in family firms. The glass ceiling, the most widely known concept concerning women in organizational leadership, was first introduced in a Wall Street Journal article in 1987. The glass ceiling is a metaphor for unseen, artificial barriers that inhibit women from obtaining top management positions (Belasen, 2012). Likewise, the terms glass elevator or glass escalator refer to situations in which men are promoted over women in female dominated fields, such as nursing and education (Broner, 2013; Casini, 2016). Additionally, women in senior management may be limited to staff or support areas, such as HRM and corporate

communication (Pichler, Simpson, & Stroh, 2008). Scholars have reasoned that the scarcity of women in corporate leadership is the result of a vicious cycle of discrimination and male gender bias, blocking women from upper management positions or, in other words, the glass ceiling (Mceldowney, Bobrowski & Gramberg, 2009). Bias and inflexible beliefs about women's roles and placement in the workforce continue to serve as barriers to senior leadership positions (Hamel, 2009). Other barriers include women's lower self-esteem than men (Belasen, 2012), a lack of support from family (Ng & Sears, 2017), work-life conflict (Arfken, Bellar, & Helms (2004), and lack of access to social networks (Klenke, 2017). According to a recent survey, the greatest advances by women have been made in marketing and human resources with nearly half (48%) of chief marketing officers and 62.2% of chief human resources officers are female (Darrow, 2016). Male domination persists although women have made significant progress in business leadership contexts (Klenke, 2017).

Women have played a variety of roles in family firms as reported in the literature during the past three decades. In a meta-analysis of women's involvement in family firms, Campopiano, De Massis, Rinaldi, and Sciascia (2017) reported three generations of studies corresponding to the decades of the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. The first generation of papers emphasized problems that women encountered in family firms, such as lack of recognition and invisibility (Dumas, 1998; Nelton, 1998). The second wave of papers highlighted the opportunities for women in family firms (Curimbaba, 2002). The third generation of studies involved empirical studies with large samples (Ahrens et al., 2015) and placed more emphasis on the context of women's involvement in family firms.

Women have been made to feel invisible, without influence in decision making, and not viewed in the same way as men in family firms (Dumas 1989, 1992; Hollander & Bukowitz, 1990). In early studies (Ward, 1997, Salganicoff, 1990), researchers observed that women served an emotional leadership role in family firms, describing them as "chief emotional officers." Often, women sustained communication among family members; however, they were given little, if any, recognition for this. Women provided supporting roles in family firms, such as mothers, wives, grandmothers, daughters, and sisters, but they rarely received acknowledgment for their contributions (Gillis-Donovan & Moynihan-Brandt, 1990). With role labels, such as mom, spouse, caretaker, sounding board, negotiator, and bookkeeper, women have been portrayed in secondary roles in family firms with low pay and little recognition (Danes & Olson 2003). However, traditionally feminine roles, such as nurturing, peacekeeping, and listening, often benefit both the family and the business (Cole, 1997). Also, Poza and Messer (2001) recognized that women play a key role in family firms, especially as spouses in succession and continuity of the company.

Women have been expected to play household and child-care roles to benefit the family business but have experienced obstacles against playing larger roles in the firm (Cappuyns, 2007). Likewise, Jiminez (2009) reported that women have played the roles of spouse, daughter, parent, in-law, and family leader, which are roles related to the family side of a firm rather than the business side. According to Rodríguez-Modroño, Gálvez-Muñoz, and Agenjo-Calderón (2015), women's work in family firms is hidden and their contributions considered invisible due to blurred boundaries between the market and home. Also, Nelson & Constantinidis (2017) noted a perceived negative impact on the roles of women in family firms, resulting from societal expectations that place women in low positions and lower levels of decision making.

Another role for women in family firms is the matriarch. Sociologists have studied matriarchs for many years (Goettner-Abendroth, 2006). The matriarch is the female head of the house, often a mother or grandmother (Holdsworth, 1988). While the male head of the family may hold the formal position of power in the family firm, family members often defer to the matriarch, who acts as a positive force to bring the family together. Smith (2014) introduced matriarchy to the family business literature, stating that matriarchs perform the roles of caring mothers, loyal wives, managers, problem-solvers, and entrepreneurs. Mutual respect exists between male entrepreneurs and their wives in running the family business. Matriarchs act out of love and family honor to ensure the success of the business. Further, the matriarch may perform a leadership role in crises and thus, fill voids.

Leadership in Family Firms

Leadership is a skill used to influence followers in an organization to work enthusiastically towards goals specifically identified for the common good (Cyert, 2006; Plsek & Wilson, 2001). In early family business studies, researchers focused primarily on leadership within the succession process (Barach & Gantisky 1995; Dyck, Mauws, Starke, & Mischke, 2002; Gersick, Davia, Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997; Handler, 1990) and the leadership of founders or incumbents within succession (Rogers, Carsrud, & Krueger, 1996; Sonnefeld & Spence, 1989). Leadership within succession remains an important topic in the family business literature (Gonzalez, Rodriguez, & Sossa, 2017), as recent studies emphasize the importance of the positive motivation of both incumbents and successors for successful succession (Gagné, Marwick, Brun de Pontet, & Wrosch, 2019). Scholars have also examined the roles of successors as leaders. For example, Cater and Justis (2009) traced the development of successors in family firms and their approach to the leadership of the firm. Researchers have also studied the dynamics of successor leadership teams and their roles in family firms (Cater, Kidwell, & Camp, 2016). However, the literature lacks studies on the leadership of senior generation women in family firms.

Studies in family firm leadership have progressed beyond the process of succession. Sorenson (2000) found five leadership styles, including participative, autocratic, laissez-faire/mission, expert, and referent in the family firm. Researchers have applied Bryman's (1992) new leadership theories, including transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970) to family businesses. Vallejo (2009) found that the leadership exercised in family firms was more transformational than in nonfamily firms. Transformational leadership occurs when leaders broaden or elevate the interests of their followers (Seltzer & Bass, 1990). Transformational leaders influence their followers to perform at the highest levels, transcending self-interest (Shoemaker, 1999). Transformational leaders stimulate their followers to change their motives, beliefs, values, and capabilities so that the followers' own interests and personal goals become congruent with the leader's vision for the organization (Goodwin, Wofford & Whittington, 2001). In contrast, servant leadership begins with the leader's desire to serve others first. Servant leadership was found to be conducive to the success of family firms where concern for others, especially family members, is important (Cater & Beal, 2015).

Family business leadership is also dependent on the environmental context of the family firm. In parts of Europe, paternalistic leadership is still prevalent. For example, Mussolino and Calabro (2014) found that paternalistic leadership may be benevolent and have a positive impact on successors' behavior or autocratic and have a negative impact on successors. In less developed countries, such as Indonesia, the family business leader may be heavily influenced by or the product of the societal culture (Efferin & Hartono, 2015).

Women's Leadership in Family Firms

In an early study, Adler (1997) reported that most women who become CEOs do so in either their family firm or a firm they start themselves. Barrett and Moores (2009b) found many similarities between the leadership of men and women in family firms and noted that family businesses may involve women more rapidly in leadership roles than other types of organizations.

Recent research reports growing numbers of women in the leadership of family firms as CEOs, top management team members, and board of directors' members. Women on top management teams in family firms have produced positive results whether they are family members or not (Montemerlo, Minichilli, & Corbetta, 2013). In a study of Italian family firms, Amore, Garofalo, and Minicilli (2014) found that the combination of female directors and female CEOs led to significant improvement in profitability. Proposing the contingency theory of leadership as a theoretical focus, Nekhili, Chakron, and Chtioui (2018) found that female leadership in family firms depends more on the organization and less on barriers and stereotypes. In a study of U.S. firms, Chadwick and Dawson (2018) found that family firms are more welcoming to women and that female-led firms outperformed male-led firms in both family and non-family firms in terms of non-financial performance as measured by corporate social responsibility actions. In another study, the presence of female board members in family firms has proven beneficial for CSR initiatives when the board members are non-family members and beneficial for philanthropic

engagement when the women board members are from the controlling family (Campopiano, Rinaldi, Sciascia, & De Massis, 2019).

Servant Leadership in Organizations and Family Firms

Greenleaf (1970) inspired a resurgence of interest in the ancient concept of servant leadership with his essay entitled *The Servant as Leader*. Greenleaf espoused the view that the servant leader is servant first, “It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first” (Greenleaf, 1977:27). According to Greenleaf (1977), the basis of servant leadership is to serve others first and the results will be judged in the growth of the followers. Servant leadership has Biblical origins in the person and teachings of Jesus Christ, who has been described as the greatest example of servant leadership (Amah, 2018; Ebener & O’Connell, 2010; Lanctot & Irving, 2010; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Greenleaf observed that certain personal values were essential to the servant leadership process and considered values to be the ultimate test in the governance of the individual’s life (Greenleaf, 1977). Consequently, the personal values of servant leaders distinguish them from other types of leaders. Honesty and integrity stand out as the most admired characteristics of leaders and are essential personal values for servant leaders (Russell, 2001). While recognizing the importance of achievement and distinction, Greenleaf believed that leaders should not be overly proud or consider themselves superior to their employees. Rather, servant leaders should follow the old Roman standard of “*primus inter pares* (first among equals)” (Buchen, 1998:129).

Servant leaders serve their followers by developing employees to their full potential in areas such as task effectiveness, self-motivation, and community stewardship (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Servant leadership creates a positive work climate that enhances employees’ commitment to their assigned roles and positively influences employee engagement and loyalty to the company (Carter & Baghurst, 2014; Parris & Peachey, 2013). Servant leaders exhibit behaviors that separate them from other types of leaders. Therefore, what makes a servant leader unusual or distinct? Spears (1995) compiled a list of ten critical characteristics of the servant leader drawn from careful study of Greenleaf’s writings. The list includes: (1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing (both for oneself and others), (4) awareness (in general and of oneself), (5) persuasion (rather than positional authority), (6) conceptualization (broad-based conceptual thinking or long-term dreams), (7) foresight (the ability to foresee the outcome of events), (8) stewardship (holding something in trust for another), (9) commitment to the growth of people, and (10) building community.

Most of the studies of servant leadership over the past 20 years have been quantitative (n = 156), compared to qualitative studies (n = 28) or mixed methods studies (n = 8) (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, van Dierendonck, & Liden, 2019). Most of the quantitative studies involve searches for antecedents and consequences of servant leadership. For example, in a U.S. study, Hunter, et al, (2013) found that leader agreeableness was positively related to servant leadership, while extraversion was negatively related. In two North American studies, first, Chiniara and Benton (2016) found that the servant leader’s focus on employees helped fulfill three basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Secondly, Chiniara and Benton (2018) found that servant leadership has positive effects on team cohesion and task performance in work teams. Although originating with Greenleaf (1970) in the U.S., modern day servant leadership is a worldwide phenomenon with quantitative studies, for example, from China (Newman, Schwarz, Cooper, & Sendjaya, 2017), France (Nekhili, Chakroun, & Chtiou, 2018), and Pakistan (Choudhary, Akhtar, & Zaheer, 2013).

Although less abundant, qualitative studies of servant leadership have been performed on a worldwide basis as well, for example in Australia (Liu, 2019) and the Philippines (Udani & Lorenzo-Molo, 2013). Liu (2019) challenged servant leadership theory, suggesting that it is subject to racial discrimination by whites against Asians in Australia. In contrast, Udani and Lorenzo-Molo (2013) portrayed the former Philippine president, Corazon Aquino, as an outstanding example of a servant leader with no question of racism. In qualitative studies in the U.S., McNeff and Irving (2017) investigated a network of family-owned companies and found a positive relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction. In a qualitative study of U.S. women entrepreneurs, Sims and Morris (2018) found that servant leadership may be more congruent and reflective of the leadership behaviors of women. Another

key finding in this study was that compassionate love may be central to the desire to serve among servant leaders. Winston (2004) defined compassionate love as doing the right thing for others and for the right reason. Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2014: p. 121) proposed that compassionate love was an antecedent for servant leadership, stating “compassionate love is foundational to servant leadership and is considered the cornerstone of the servant leader/follower relationship.”

Finally, in a qualitative study of U.S. family firms, Cater and Beal (2015) described six important elements of servant leadership. Servant leaders will (1) be actively engaged with their employees; (2) earn the respect of family members and employees; (3) master industry and company knowledge; (4) maintain agreement among employees and family members; (5) influence followers in the family firm in a balanced manner; and (6) be decisive in meeting challenges to the business. When these elements are present, servant leaders may well be rewarded with respectful, agreeable, and highly motivated employees who are willing to exert full effort to promote the success of their firm.

METHOD

Using a qualitative case study approach, we examined the dynamics of leadership among senior generation women in U.S. family firms. Data from a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews was analyzed using grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded Theory

The first proponents of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.1), originally depicted grounded theory as “the discovery of theory from data – systematically obtained and analyzed in social research.” Later, Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.12) described grounded theory as “derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process.” Glaser and Strauss developed differences in their approaches to grounded theory. Glaser (1978) held the strict view that the researcher should not have presuppositions and should allow the theory to emerge from the data only. Researchers later misconstrued this to mean that literature reviews were prejudicial and not necessary. Strauss (1987) replied that such a position was not practical and that the researcher should be familiar with existing research because preconceptions were inevitable. Suddaby (2006) proposed that grounded theory was not an excuse to ignore the literature and that maintaining blank minds and deferred reading of the literature were “misassumptions.” We followed Strauss (1987) and Suddaby (2006) as we performed our study with a working knowledge of both the family business literature and servant leadership theory. As we gathered data, transcribed the interviews, and thought about the subject, we began to formulate our theory working back and forth with the data. After reading the transcripts many times, we coded the data in the ATLAS.ti software program to organize it. This software aided and assisted us in the storage and retrieval of the data; however, as qualitative analysts we still had to make decisions in the coding and interpretation of the data (Patton, 2002).

The Case Study Approach

To gain an understanding of the leadership of senior generation women in family firms, we required a flexible research program. The case study approach is appropriate for research involving ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Eisenhardt, 1989) and focuses on involved participants (Howorth & Ali, 2001). The case study researcher seeks to express global significance from localized findings (Chenail, 2009). A case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009: 2). The investigator may employ case studies to explore such circumstances and to offer explanations leading toward theory building (Lambrecht, 2005).

According to Eisenhardt (1989), the case study researcher may purposively choose cases that are likely to replicate or extend the theory. The researcher may also select cases that illustrate applicable concepts (Patton & Applebaum, 2003). Therefore, qualitative samples may have the objective of developing theory, rather than testing it (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

Increasing the number of cases involved in a study adds confidence to the findings until the responses become repetitive (Yin, 2009). Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.143) described saturation as a point in which “no new properties, dimensions, or relationships emerge during analysis.” Yin (2009) compared the addition of cases to the addition of experiments, looking for replication. Eisenhardt (1989) proposed that researchers should continue adding cases in an iterative process until the incremental improvement is minimal.

Study Participants

The authors acquired formal permission from their university’s Internal Review Board to conduct research using human participants at the beginning of this project. We advised all respondents of their confidentiality and anonymity as participants in the study, and all names of people, places, and companies have been disguised. We randomly assigned numbers to the family firms and refer to them as Company 1 through 14. We refer to the respondents as Company 1, Respondent A or Respondent 1A, etc. In each of the 14 companies, the first respondent was a senior generation woman (for example Respondent 1A, 2A, 3A, etc.). We received assistance in finding respondents from local business leaders, university colleagues, friends, acquaintances, and students. The authors had no connection or involvement in any of the family firms contacted for this study. One of the authors served as an owner-manager in a family business, which provided some insight in the research process. We contacted approximately 40 prospective firms to ascertain if the companies met the requirements of (1) family firm, (2) multiple generations of family member involvement in the family firm, (3) at least one woman included in the senior generation leadership, and (4) willingness and compatibility to participate in the research project. We chose multigenerational family firms, not start-ups with family members involved or short-term family firms, because we desired to study family firms that have demonstrated by their multigenerational status that they are family firms and share the long-term orientation as such (Morris et al., 1997). We concentrated on the senior woman family leaders in each family firm, interviewing them and other family members and/or managers who knew them well. We collected data over a 15-month period and found a level of redundancy of responses (Merriam, 2009) with little new information forthcoming at the end of this time. A copy of the interview questions is available upon request.

Firms from different industries participated in the study, including eight service companies, four retail businesses, and two restaurant operations. The number of employees within the respondent firms varied from 6 to 52 with an average of 19. The respondent businesses ranged in age from 12 to 78 years, and generations of family participation was from 2 to 3. Each respondent company had from 3 to 8 family members in management and ownership. The respondent firms were in a Central U.S. state, and all remain in operation except for Company 11 which was closed after the interviews were performed (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENT COMPANIES

| Firm | Industry | Age of Firm | Number of Employees | Est. Sales U.S. \$ Annual | Number of Respondents |
|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Insurance Agency | 13 | 8 | \$2M | 2 |
| 2. | Hair Salon | 15 | 7 | \$700,000 | 2 |
| 3. | Hardware Store | 78 | 20 | \$4M | 2 |
| 4. | Event Planners | 21 | 8 | \$1M | 2 |
| 5. | Roofing Company | 30 | 15 | \$1.2M | 3 |
| 6. | Jewelry Store | 42 | 12 | \$2.9M | 5 |
| 7. | Dance Studio | 33 | 25 | \$3M | 2 |
| 8. | Real Estate Company | 37 | 15 | \$5M | 3 |
| 9. | Graphic Design & Printing | 33 | 10 | \$4M | 2 |
| 10. | Oil Field Company | 12 | 40 | \$7M | 2 |
| 11. | Health Foods Store | 41 | 15 | \$1.2M | 2 |
| 12. | Garden Center | 14 | 6 | \$600,000 | 3 |
| 13. | Welders Supply Company | 45 | 52 | \$4M | 2 |
| 14. | Mexican Restaurant | 25 | 37 | \$1.1 | 3 |

Among the 35 respondents, there were 24 family-member owner/managers, 9 family-member managers, and 2 non-family managers (see Table 3). There were 22 women and 13 men respondents for a total of 35 respondents, which exceeds the number (30) suggested by Reay (2014) for a well-crafted research study to fully cover the topic to the point of saturation or redundancy of respondent information. In grouping the 33 family member respondents, 20 were first-generation family members, 9 were in the second generation, and 4 were in the third generation (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
DEMOGRAPHICS OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONDENTS

| Family Firm | Respondent(s) | Company Position | Family Bus. Generation | Respondent Age Range | Family Position |
|-------------|---------------|------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | A | Owner, Mgr. | 1st | 50s | Wife, Mother |
| | B | Owner/Mgr. | 1st | 50s | Husband, Father |
| 2 | A | Owner/ Mgr | 1st | 50s | Aunt |
| | B | Owner/Mgr. | 2nd | 20s | Niece |
| 3 | A | Owner/Mgr. | 2nd | 70s | Wife, Mother |
| | B | Family Mgr. | 3rd | 50s | Son |
| 4 | A | Owner/Mgr. | 1st | 50s | Wife, Mother |
| | B | Family Mgr | 2nd | 20s | Son |
| 5 | A | Owner/Mgr. | 1st | 50s | Wife, Mother |
| | B | Owner/Mgr | 1st | 50s | Husband, Father |
| | C | Manager | None | 20s | Manager (Male) |
| 6 | A | Owner/Mgr. | 1st | 60s | Wife, Mother, Gmother |
| | B | Owner/Mgr | 1st | 70s | Husband, Father, Gfather |
| | C | Owner/Mgr. | 2nd | 40s | Daughter, Mother |
| | D | Family Mgr | 3rd | 20s | Brother |
| | E | Family Mgr | 3rd | 20s | Sister |
| 7 | A | Owner/Mgr. | 1st | 50s | Wife, Mother |
| | B | Family Mgr. | 1st | 60s | Husband, Father |
| 8 | A | Owner/Mgr. | 1st | 60s | Mother, Wife, Mother in law |
| | B | Owner/Mgr. | 2nd | 40s | Daughter-in-law, Wife |
| | C | Manager | None | 50s | Manager (Female) |
| 9 | A | Owner/Mgr. | 1st | 50s | Wife, Mother |
| | B | Owner/Mgr | 1st | 50s | Husband, Father |
| 10 | A | Owner/Mgr. | 1st | 50s | Wife, Mother |
| | B | Family Mgr. | 2nd | 20s | Son |
| 11 | A | Owner/Mgr. | 1st | 70s | Grandmother, Wife, Mother |
| | B | Family Mgr. | 3rd | 20s | Granddaughter |
| 12 | A | Owner/Mgr | 1st | 50s | Wife, Mother |
| | B | Owner/Mgr | 1st | 50s | Husband, Father |
| | C | Family Mgr | 2nd | 20s | Daughter |
| 13 | A | Owner/Mgr | 1st | 70s | Wife, Mother, Gmother |
| | B | Owner/Mgr | 1st | 80s | Husband, Father, Gfather |
| 14 | A | Owner/ Mgr | 1st | 50s | Mother |
| | B | Family Mgr | 2nd | 20s | Daughter |
| | C | Family Mgr | 2nd | 20s | Daughter |

Data Collection

After ascertaining that the family firms met the requirements for our study, we obtained permission from the family leader(s) to conduct the interviews. We interviewed available owners and managers in the organizations with at least two respondents per family firm, which provided multiple views for triangulation purposes. The interviews were semi-structured and involved open-ended questions concerning women in family firm leadership. For example, some questions were: “Why did you choose to

enter the family business?" and "Describe your leadership style in the family business," and "What values are shared in your family business? Please describe." Qualitative interviews comprised the data collected.

In-depth Interviews

The authors conducted the in-depth interviews themselves. These tape-recorded interviews were conducted individually with respondents at each family firm, totaling 35 participants. We transcribed approximately 35 hours of interviews, which varied in length from 45 minutes to 75 minutes, averaging 60 minutes each. The transcribed interviews totaled 217 pages with an average of 6.2 pages per respondent.

Preparation

The researchers preceded each interview with a careful reading of each respondent company's website and relevant information online. Although observations and documents about each company were collected, these were supplemental in nature. The in-depth interview transcriptions formed the basis of the data analysis.

Data Analysis

The analytic techniques used in this study followed the procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as grounded theory analysis. First, in an extensive and time-consuming step, we analyzed each case separately and summarized case histories of each company (available upon request). Then, we performed content analysis of the data looking for insights and patterns across the cases (cross-case analysis). The transcribed interviews supplied the basis for our study as we coded and analyzed the data, using the Atlas Ti qualitative software program. Merriam (2009:205) described this procedure as "simultaneous coding of raw data and the construction of categories that capture relevant characteristics of the document's content." We identified and separated important thoughts and phrases and labeled them as "codes" in the Atlas ti system. We equate this to unitizing methods depicted by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). During the analysis, we developed an initial model to organize our thoughts in the project. Simultaneously, as we progressed through the steps of coding, we refined and expanded our model of "Senior Women in Family Firms: An Application of Servant Leadership Characteristics" through several iterations until we arrived at our final model.

The lead author coded the data and the second author checked the coding of the data for accuracy. We used in-vivo codes employing the actual words of research respondents (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Strauss's (1987) coding divides the process into three phases and labels them open, axial, and selective (Walker & Myrick, 2006). In the first step of the analysis, called "open coding", we began with the 217 pages of transcripts and through a comparative process identified 601 codes or incidences of significant, recurring expressions or thoughts, which we placed in 509 code groups or sub-categories. Strauss (1987: 101) defined open coding as the "analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data."

In the second step, "axial coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), we placed the 509 sub-categories into 309 categories, labeling the categories by company and respondent (1A through 19B), (see Table 4). Axial coding is crosscutting or relating concepts to each other (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This is the category level of analysis and the beginning of analysis of the data through interpretive lenses (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005). The purpose of axial coding, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 97), is to put the fractured data back together in new ways "by making connections between a category and its subcategory" (see Table 3).

The third step of the process, identified as "selective coding", involves the development of themes across the cases. Selective coding, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.143), is the "process of integrating and refining the theory." In this step, we coded the data into 14 central categories (see Table 4). We built clusters of thoughts and phrases and looked for unifying phrases and connective language to construct a framework for analysis (Cresswell, 1998). Among the differences in the 19 family firms in the study, some recurring themes emerged. We traced these themes across the cases and built a theoretic base

to understand senior generation women in family firm leadership. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), this is Level 4 analysis – testing the themes. From this theoretical base, we developed three propositions and a model to explain the relationships of these propositions. Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to these steps as Level 5 – interrelating the explanations and Level 6 – delineating the theory. In the remainder of the paper, we examine our findings in comparison to our conceptual grounding in a separate discussion section and conclude the paper by recognizing limitations of our study and suggesting future research.

**TABLE 3
AXIAL CODING**

| Axial Coding General Categories | Company (Respondent) |
|--|--|
| Company history | 1A,1B,2A,2B,3A,3B,4A,5A,5B,6A,6B,6C,7A,7B,8A,8B,8C,9B,10A,11A,11B,12A,12B,12C,13A,13B,14A,14B,14C |
| Background/role in ff | 1A,1B,2A,2B,3A,3B,4A,4B,5A,5B,6A,6B,6C,6D,7A,7B,8A,8B,8C,9A,9B,10A,10B,11A,11B,12A,12B,12C,13A,13B,14A,14B,14C |
| Matriarch | 1A,2A,5A,6A,8A,9A,10A,11A,13A |
| Dominant CEO | 3A,4A,6C,7A,12A,14A |
| TMT Executive | 2B,8B,11B,14B |
| Next Gen Mgr | 6E,12B,14C |
| Woman Founder | 2A,4A,7A,8A,11A,12A,14A |
| Male Founder | 1B,3B,5B,6B,9B,10B,13B |
| Work as child in ff | 2B,3B,4B,6C,6D,6E,8B,9A,9B,10B,11B,12B,12C,14B,14C |
| Education | 2B,3B,6D,8B,9A,9B,10A,10B,12A,12B,12C,13A,14C |
| Enter husband's bus | 1A,3A,5A,6A,9A,10A,13A |
| Learn husband's bus. | 1A,3A,5A,6A,9A,10A,13A |
| Hands on manager | 1B,8B,9B |
| Servant leader | 1A,2A,5A,6A,8A,9A,10A,11A,13A,14A |
| Lead by example | 1A,2A,5B,8C,9B,10A,14A,14C |
| Mentor | 2A,2B,11A,11B,14A |
| Loving | 7A,7B,8B,8C,14A |
| Value-Christian faith | 2A,9A,5B,7A,7B,9A,9B,10A,12C,14A,14B,14C |
| Value-take care of customer | 1A,1B,2B,4B,6A,6B,6C,6D,6E,8A,9A,9B,10A,12C,14A,14C |
| Value-take care of employee | 1A,1B,10A,14C |
| Value-take care of family | 1A,1B,2A,4A,14A,14B,14C |
| Desire to lead ff | 1B,2A,2B,9B,11B,14A,14B |
| Support leader in ff | 1A,5A,6A,6B,9A,10A,11A,13A,13B,14B,14C |
| Put family first | 1A,4A,4B,13B,14A,14B,14C |
| Women advance industry | 1B,5A,5B,6A,6B |
| Listening | 1A,2A,2B,4A,5A,6A,8A,9A,10A,11A,13A |
| Empathy | 1A,2A,2B,5A,5C,6A,7A,8A,8C,9A,10A,11A,13A |
| Healing | 1A,11A,13A,14A,14C |
| Awareness | 1A,2A,2B,4B,5A,6A,6B,6C,8A,8C,9A,10A,11A,13A |
| Persuasion (not position) | 1A,2A,5A,6A,6C,8A,9A,10A,11A,12A,12C,14A |
| Conceptualization | 1A,2A,6A,6B,6C,8A,9A,10A,12A,12B,14A |
| Foresight | 1A,2A,10A,10B,12A |
| Stewardship | 1A,2A,6A,7A,7B,8A,9A,9B,10A,11A,13A,14A |
| Commitment to growth | 1A,2A,2B,6A,6C,7A,8A,8C,9A,10A,12A,12C,13A,14A |
| Building community | 1A,4A,5A,5B,7A,10A,11A,13A,14A |

TABLE 4
SELECTIVE CODING - CENTRAL CATEGORIES

| Central Categories | Corresponding Finding/Proposition |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Matriarch | Finding |
| Dominant CEO | Finding |
| TMT Executive | Finding |
| Next Gen Manager | Finding |
| Listening | Proposition 1, 2, 3 |
| Empathy | Proposition 1, 2, 3 |
| Healing | Proposition 1, 2, 3 |
| Awareness | Proposition 1, 2, 3 |
| Persuasion (not position) | Proposition 1, 2, 3 |
| Conceptualization | Proposition 1, 2, 3 |
| Foresight | Proposition 1, 2, 3 |
| Stewardship | Proposition 1, 2, 3 |
| Commitment to growth | Proposition 1, 2, 3 |
| Building community | Proposition 1, 2, 3 |

FINDINGS

In this section, we report on the results of our study regarding the research questions: What are the leadership roles of senior generation women in family firms? and How does servant leadership apply to senior women in family firms?

Leadership Roles of Senior Generation Women in Family Firms

As we studied the interview data, we found differences among the women family member respondents, which we began to separate into four distinct roles or steps. We noted differences in management levels, experience in the family business, respect and consideration from family members and employees, and ownership levels. We found different levels of authority and different levels of ownership in the business (see Figure 11). From lowest to highest, the roles or steps were Next Generation Manager, Top Management Team (TMT) Executive, Matriarch, and Dominant CEO. The Next Generation Manager was a daughter or wife who entered the family firm and progressed through stages in the company and had risen to the rank of manager but had no ownership in the company. A TMT Executive was a daughter or sister who had advanced as a family firm manager to a formal leadership position in the family firm but was not the CEO. She may lead a division of the company and/or hold a top management position. She owned a share of the company, but not a controlling interest. A Matriarch was a wife and/or mother who owned a controlling interest in the family business with her spouse. The term “Matriarch” refers to an older woman who is powerful within a family or organization (Smith, 2014). The Matriarch has decided to take a lesser role in the formal management of the company but is well versed in the company and takes part in major decisions. She is a powerful figure in the family firm. A Dominant CEO is the recognized leader and controlling owner of the family business. She was the founder, the chosen successor, or has taken over the company after the death of her husband. She is a strong and independent leader who is committed to the success of her family business. She fits with national trends of increasing numbers of women CEOs in family firms (Mass Mutual American Family Business Survey, 2007).

FIGURE 1
STEPS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN FAMILY
MEMBERS IN FAMILY FIRMS

| Steps of Leadership Development of Women Family Members in Family Firms | | |
|---|---------|---|
| Level of Ownership and Authority | Highest | DOMINANT CEO (Mother, Sister, Widow) Highest level of ownership and authority, controlling individually. Top Manager, Chairman of Board of Directors |
| | High | MATRIARCH (Wife of owner, Mother) High level of ownership and authority, controlling with spouse. Board of Directors Member, Business Advisor |
| | Middle | TMT EXECUTIVE (Sister, Daughter, Daughter-in-law) Significant level of ownership and authority, part owner Top Management Team Member, Board Member |
| | Low | NEXT GENERATION MANAGER (Sister, Daughter, Daughter-in-law) Low level of ownership and authority or none Mid- to Low-Level Manager |

By design, this study focused on senior generation women in family firms. Therefore, in each of the 14 respondent family firms selected, there was at least one senior generation woman. In Company 6, there were two senior generation women: A Dominant CEO and a semi-retired Matriarch. Among the 22 women family member respondents, we identified 9 Matriarchs, 6 Dominant CEOs, 4 TMT Executives, and 3 Next Generation Managers (see Table 5). Our findings suggest that leadership among women in family firms may be categorized into senior and junior generational levels. Among senior women, we found two different types of leaders: Matriarchs and Dominant CEOs. The 9 Matriarchs and 6 Dominant CEOs made up the senior generation leaders in their family firms. In the junior generation, we found TMT Executives and Next Generation Leaders.

TABLE 5
WOMEN FAMILY MEMBER RESPONDENTS: LEADERSHIP ROLES IN FAMILY FIRMS

| Company/ Respondent | Current Leadership Role | Business Experience |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1A | Matriarch | 30 |
| 2A | Matriarch | 25 |
| 2B | TMT Executive | 6 |
| 3A | Dominant CEO | 23 |
| 4A | Dominant CEO | 24 |
| 5A | Matriarch | 22 |
| 6A | Matriarch | 38 |
| 6C | Dominant CEO | 32 |
| 6E | Next Gen Manager | 2 |
| 7A | Dominant CEO | 33 |
| 8A | Matriarch | 37 |
| 8B | TMT Executive | 20 |
| 9A | Matriarch | 22 |
| 10A | Matriarch | 22 |
| 11A | Matriarch | 30 |
| 11B | TMT Executive | 10 |
| 12A | Dominant CEO | 14 |
| 12B | Next Gen Manager | 3 |
| 13A | Matriarch | 45 |
| 14A | Dominant CEO | 25 |
| 14B | TMT Executive | 13 |
| 14C | Next Gen Manager | 4 |

Matriarchs

There were nine Matriarchs in this study, all in the founding (first) generation of ownership in their family firms. Three Matriarchs (2A, 8A, and 11A) were the individual founders of their family firms, while six Matriarchs were the wives of the individual founders (1A, 5A, 6A, 9A, 10A, and 13A). The Matriarchs averaged 30.1 years of business experience and were all over 50 years old with one respondent (6A) in her 60s and two respondents (3A,13A) in their 70s. See Table 2 and 3. The Matriarch is not currently the CEO of the company although two respondent women (2A and 11A) did occupy that position in their family firm but have now retired and serve in an advisory role to the CEO. The Matriarchs in this study developed their skills over many years, were well respected, unselfish, and frequently put other family members before themselves, such as their husband or children. For example, Respondent 9A managed the office, freeing her husband to do creative graphic design work. She remarked: “To be creative it helps if you do not have to worry about all the office work. It does hinder your creative side. Also, I lend a hand if someone is struggling and jump in and be a teammate and get the work done.” Respondent 8A, another Matriarch, concurred, “We encourage everybody who works with us. Nobody is any better than any of the others. It is like a cog in a wheel going around. If one of the cogs breaks off, the wheel doesn’t go around. We are a team.” Of the four types of women leaders in family firms, we believe that Matriarchs most consistently displayed the selflessness that resonates with servant leadership.

Dominant CEOs

Of the six female respondents who were identified as Dominant CEOs, four were first-generation family leaders (4A, 7A, 12A, and 14A) and two were second-generation leaders (3A and 6C). The four first generation women respondent CEOs were also the founders of their family firms. Respondent 7A remarked: “I began the business before I met my husband. He has only been involved with the business the last 15 years.” The Dominant CEOs averaged 25.2 years of business experience, mostly in their family firms, and their ages ranged from the 40s (one) to the 50s (four) to the 70s (one). Respondent 12A explained her situation as a Dominant CEO: “When we first started the garden business in 2002, it was both under my husband’s name and my own. However, his lawn care business began to thrive so that he could not be at both places at the same time... So, the garden business was put under my full ownership in 2012. This way he would be able to focus on his yards and I, the plants.”

The two second-generation women CEOs (3A and 6C) became family firm leaders upon the retirement or death of prior generation leaders. At Company 6, the founder (husband and father) decided to retire. According to Respondent 6A, “I have a supportive role. My daughter (Respondent 6C) is the CEO now ... I might throw in an opinion. It was like that with my husband. I always gave him my opinions and whether he took it or not, is another thing.”

TMT Executives and Next Generation Managers

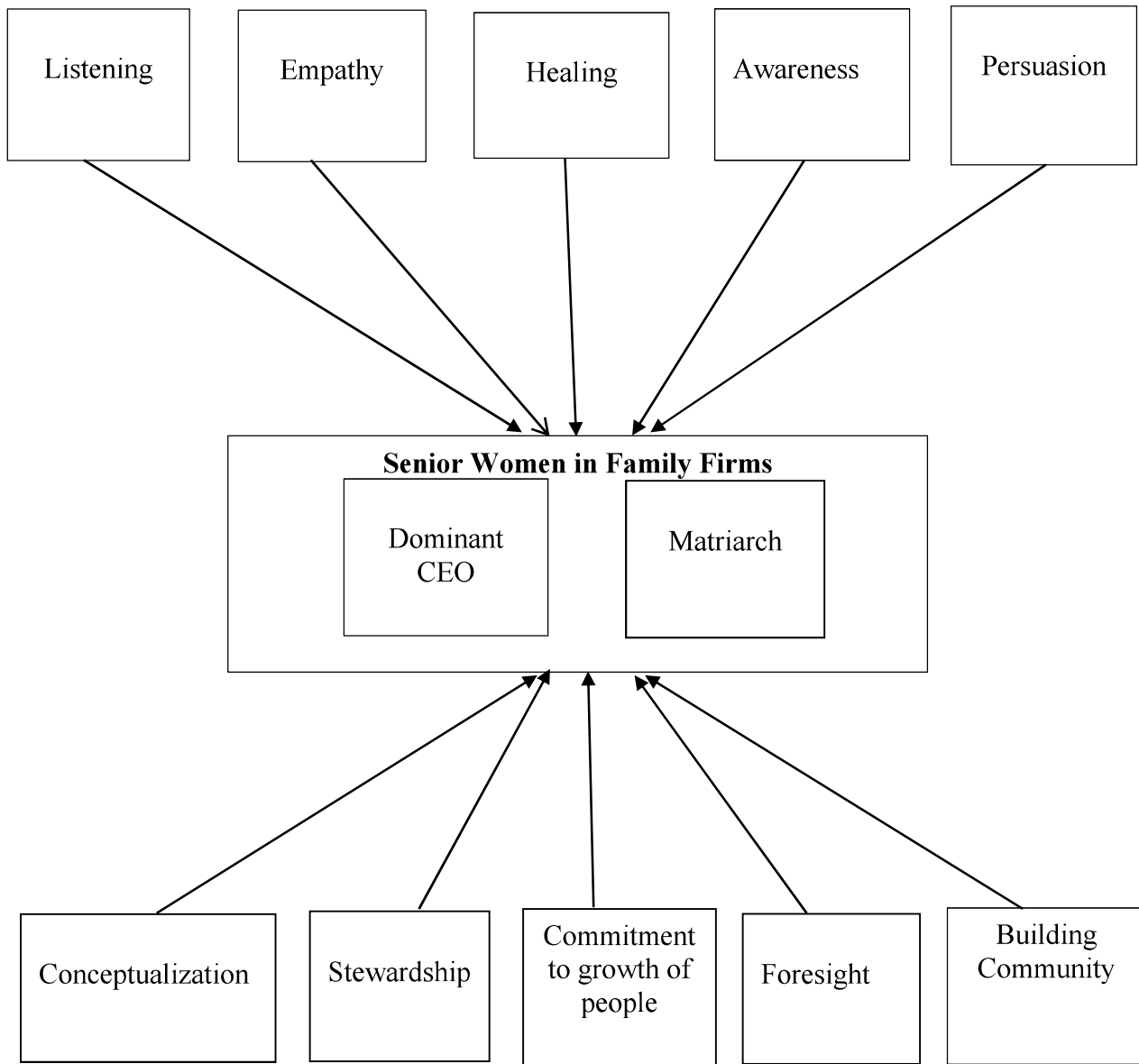
Among our respondents, the four TMT Executives and three Next Generation Managers made up the junior generation of women in family firms. The TMT Executives averaged 12.2 years of business experience, while the Next Generation Managers averaged three years of experience. The TMT Executives were all second-generation family members, while the Next Generation Managers were also second-generation except for Respondent 6E who was in the third generation of her family firm. Respondent 14B described her position as a TMT Executive in her family’s restaurant business as follows: “I am the general manager for Company 14. I worked as a waitress in high school. I left the business to work as a teller at a local bank for four years. I came back around 2014 and began helping my mother run the business. It can be hard to balance your personal and work life when managing two restaurants, but I do enjoy my work.”

Next, we address our second research question: How does servant leadership apply to senior women in family firms?

Application of Servant Leadership Characteristics

The following comments illustrate how we may apply servant leadership specifically to senior women in family firms. To this end, we refer to Spears (1995) list of ten critical characteristics of the servant leader, which he gleaned from Greenleaf’s writings. The list includes: (1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing (both for oneself and others), (4) awareness (in general and of oneself), (5) persuasion (rather than positional authority), (6) conceptualization (broad-based conceptual thinking or long-term dreams), (7) foresight (the ability to foresee the outcome of events), (8) stewardship (holding something in trust for another), (9) commitment to the growth of people, and (10) building community. In this study, the senior women leaders did meet Spears (1995) list of characteristics for servant leaders. See Figure 2.

FIGURE 2
SENIOR WOMEN IN FAMILY FIRMS APPLICATION OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS



Adapted from Spears (1995)

Senior Women Family Member Respondents

The focus of this study was on the senior women in each family business. We carefully examined the transcribed interview data applying Spears’ (1995) characteristics of the servant leader. In an iterative fashion, we compared each of the senior women to the servant leader standards using their interview responses, the responses of others in their family firm who knew them well, and our own impressions as interviewers. We rated each respondent on each of the 10 characteristics, using a five-point scale with 5 as the highest level of servant leadership and 1 as the lowest level. We examined to what extent the respondent exercised each servant leadership characteristic (see Table 6).

We then averaged the ten scores for each senior woman respondent. We considered an average score of 4.50 and above as Very High on servant leadership; a score of 4.0 to 4.49 was considered High on servant leadership; a score of 3.00 to 3.99 – Moderate on servant leadership; 2.00 to 2.99 – Low on servant leadership, and 1.00 to 1.99 – Very Low on servant leadership.

Our results indicated that 10 of the 15 respondents scored Very High on servant leadership. All nine of the Matriarch respondents scored Very High on servant leadership with an average score of 4.77. Regarding the six Dominant CEOs, one (Respondent 14A) scored very High on servant leadership, four scored High on servant leadership, and one (Respondent 3A) scored Moderate on servant leadership. The average score for the Dominant CEOs was 4.17.

TABLE 6
SENIOR WOMEN FAMILY MEMBER RESPONDENTS – SERVANT LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

To what extent did the respondent exercise each servant leadership characteristic?

(1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing (both for oneself and others), (4) awareness (in general and of oneself), (5) persuasion (rather than positional authority), (6) conceptualization (broad-based conceptual thinking or long-term dreams), (7) foresight (the ability to foresee the outcome of events), (8) stewardship (holding something in trust for another), (9) commitment to the growth of people, and (10) building community.

Servant Leadership Scale: 5 – Very High, 4- High, 3- Moderate, 2 Low, 1 – Very Low.

| Servant Leadership Characteristic | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | AVE. |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|------|
| Company/ Respondent | Current Leadership Role | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1A | Matriarch | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5.0 |
| 2A | Matriarch | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4.8 |
| 3A | Dominant CEO | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3.0 |
| 4A | Dominant CEO | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4.4 |
| 5A | Matriarch | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4.6 |
| 6A | Matriarch | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4.7 |
| 6C | Dominant CEO | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4.2 |
| 7A | Dominant CEO | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4.4 |
| 8A | Matriarch | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4.7 |
| 9A | Matriarch | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4.8 |
| 10A | Matriarch | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4.9 |
| 11A | Matriarch | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4.7 |
| 12A | Dominant CEO | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4.4 |
| 13A | Matriarch | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4.7 |
| 14A | Dominant CEO | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4.6 |

The following are examples of Very High servant leadership in each of the ten servant leadership characteristics.

Listening

The senior women listened to their family members and employees. For example, a senior woman leader listened to family members and employees who needed her advice and counsel. Respondent 2A, who was a Matriarch, recalled:

They (the salon workers) consider me like a mom because they are all younger than me. For me, I tell them to come to work dressed in a respectable fashion. Respect the fact that we have older clientele. We have had conversations about the language to use. When we have the radio on, let's listen to things that are not below grade. In their personal life, they ask for advice. I give advice that I would use myself.

Another Matriarch, Respondent 11A, also listened to her family members in the restaurant business. She remarked, "I am just here to help. I will answer questions if they need me, but they are usually smart enough to work it out. My granddaughter is a leader and she changed the menu, but I let her do what she wants."

Empathy

The senior women respondents had empathy for their employees and family members and took action to respond to their needs. For example, Respondent 1A, who was a Matriarch, stated:

We always provided benefits for our people. There were some hard times, especially around 9/11. Instead of letting people go, I did not take a salary. We did not lose any employees at that time even though a lot of my friends in our city had to let people go. It was a scary time. We worked hard so that our employees kept their jobs and their benefits.

The senior woman leaders set the standards for their family firms by providing empathetic leadership. At Company 14, Respondent A recalled, "Our main value is to treat everyone like family. We want our customers to feel comfortable and at home. Our value is to make other people feel comfortable. Respondent 7A, a Dominant CEO, also felt empathy for her customers and stated:

My style of leadership is never loud. I am very calm even in stressful situations. I like to lead in a way that is respectful. I expect a level of excellence, but in a gentle manner. I think that people can learn without being yelled at. The atmosphere at our studio is very family oriented.

Healing (Both for Oneself and Others)

The concept of healing is often considered out of the ordinary in the pragmatic society of the western world of the U.S. and Europe. In this study, we did have one example of a Matriarch, Respondent 13A, who did care for another family member in a physical healing context. She recalled, "My mother got sick and had cancer. I am the only child and she moved in with us. I retired and took care of my mother.

Perhaps, a more common example of the healing characteristic of servant leadership was the following statement by Respondent 14 C about her mother, Respondent 14A, a Dominant CEO.

We are a family and we do try to help each other because we all succeed together. My mother has helped all of the family members who work in the restaurants, such as helping them with loans or coming up with a down payment for a car. If you help her, especially by working in the restaurant, she will help you.

Awareness (in General and of Oneself)

Many of the respondents expressed awareness of their position in the family firm and the importance of being aware of the benefits of the family business. For example, Respondent 10A, a Matriarch, responded as follows:

You have to be thankful for everything that you have. We have come from nothing you could say. I think back to when I was single with my mom and times were rough, and we

did not have very much. I was still thankful for what I did have. It is on a different level now, but we still have to be thankful.

Besides being thankful for what you have, another aspect of awareness is to respect others. Respondent 2A, again a Matriarch, expressed the following:

The number one thing is respect, first for yourself in the services that you are providing and then, number two, for the client that you respect their time. You want to have a salon where customers can visit weekly or monthly and feel relaxed and comfortable. Respect is the number one thing and then integrity.

Another aspect of awareness that was often cited by the respondents was the importance of good customer service. Respondent 4A, the Dominant CEO of her family firm, stated the following:

Good service is important and we like to bring something else to the table. We always bring more than is on the contract for our customers. At the end of the day, it is more like a friendship than a business. In the long run, it is worth it because our customers will come back.

Persuasion (Rather Than Positional Authority)

Spears (1995) asserted that servant leaders employed personal power, such as persuasion, as opposed to positional power owing to their standing in the company. Many of our respondents expressed this idea using the term “lead by example.” Respondent 10A, a Matriarch at an oil field service company, stated, “I like to lead by example. My husband does this as well. He is out there in the mud, just like they are.” Similarly, Respondent 14A, the Dominant CEO of the family restaurant business, said, “I think my leadership style is to lead by example.” At Company 11, a health food store, Respondent A remarked, “We are a team and work together to solve problems.”

In another example, the family gathered together to keep their garden business going. Respondent 12A, a Dominant CEO, recalled the help she received not because of her positional authority but because of the love of her family:

I was diagnosed with breast cancer that year, and I could not do what I was used to doing. I had to focus on my health and go through chemotherapy and radiation treatment. I am very thankful that it is now over, but at the time, it was difficult adjusting to that in the business. I could not be there as often. My husband and oldest son took on most of my responsibilities and they all worked together to sustain it in my absence. My family’s unity is what kept it all together.

Conceptualization (Broad-based Conceptual Thinking or Long-term Dreams)

In family businesses, succession is an extremely important process in the life of the company, involving conceptual thinking and the realization of long-term dreams (Sharma, Chrisman, & Gersick, 2012). For family firms, the rising of the next generation is vital to the survival of the business, as studies have shown only a 30% success rate for successions (Lansberg, 1988; Stavrou & Swiercz, 1999). During our data gathering process, the leadership of Company 6 passed from the founder (Respondent 6B) to his daughter (Respondent 6C). The wife of the founder (Respondent 6A) described her role as follows: “My role is a supportive role. The business was turned over to my daughter (Respondent 6C) ... She makes 99% of the decisions now for our business. It was like that with my husband (Respondent 6B) – you only have one boss.” This successful succession exemplified conceptual thinking and the realization of long-term dreams for Respondent 6C.

Additionally, Respondent 12A commented on the future of her company, “I would say anything is possible and that working together and united is the key.” Her husband, Respondent 12B agreed, “Just,

keep working. Keep going and do your dreams. Do not give up and keep doing right by your customers. Take care of them.” According to the respondents in this study, taking care of customers leads to company success and, therefore, the achievement of long-term dreams.

Foresight (the Ability to Foresee the Outcome of Events)

According to Spears (1995), foresight was another characteristic of servant leaders. In this study, foresight was manifested in wise management and customer service. According to Respondent 1B, foresight involves long-term thinking, “Number one is to do the right thing for your clients no matter the short-term effect because that always helps you in the long term. Then, not just trying to sell things, but to really service your client.”

Respondent 12B concurred with this idea, stating as follows:

It really falls on how customers are treated. If you treat them right, they'll trust you and come to you because they know you do the best you can. Whether that is explaining the care about the plant, that makes a difference. Showing that you care and know enough about the plants, they will come back because they see that what you have told them is true. Communication is key. You must spend time with you customers. If you help them out the most you can, they will help you.

Stewardship (Holding Something in Trust for Another)

Stewardship was closely tied to personal faith according to the family business respondents and was reflected in at least three different ways. First, stewardship meant safely holding something of value for customers. Respondent 6B explained, “As long as we have been in business, we have never lost a piece of customers’ jewelry – thousands over the years. We have systems in place. It is other people’s merchandise.” Secondly, stewardship meant to properly use a valuable God-given skill as described by Respondent 9B, “Because Christ has given us this ability, we also want to please our customers as well. We are in the service business. I love hearing people say that this is different from other print shops.” Thirdly, stewardship meant operating the entire business as a gift from God according to Respondent 7A, a Dominant CEO: “I am the director. I say that the Lord owns the building and that I work for Him. I am responsible for everything at the dance studio.” Respondent 7B echoed this sentiment, “In our family, we look at the studio, the store, and the gym and realize that we run the business, but it is not ours. God has blessed the business.”

Commitment to the Growth of People

Servant leaders are expected to put the interests of others first. This was especially true concerning the commitment to the growth of next generation family members. For example, Respondent 1A, a Matriarch, remarked on the desire to build the skills of her son in the insurance business:

It is a little different when you have your son there. It was harder for my husband to realize that our son was a college graduate and needed to do the business too and not just be a go-fer. It was hard for him to let go because my husband and I are both strong. We like to explain things and do the talking.

Similarly, respondents expressed the desire for their children to do better in the area of education. Respondent 12C explained, “My parents value our education. I have learned a lot having a family business. There is a lot of labor, repetitive stuff. My parents wanted to make sure that we know that there are other opportunities. An education opens the door to a lot of possibilities.” Respondent 8A stated: “I have watched the children grow up to be who they are, not trying to make them someone else like some parents do. Respondent 8B does not live vicariously through her children. She pushes them to find themselves. Respondent 8B communicates very well and her children are amazing.”

Building Community

The respondents described the servant leader characteristic of building community as residing both inside their companies and then extending outside into their local communities. For instance, Respondent 5A, a Matriarch, cited the advantages of being a family business in building community:

We are a small family business which I think our customers appreciate. I am in the office and my husband is out in the field dealing with customers. We have had the same roofers for the past 15 years. People appreciate that we are a husband and wife trying to support our family. We put on a good quality roof and give personal service. People tend to want to help a family rather than a big corporation.

Company 4 planned and decorated local venues for events, often using elaborate floral arrangements, colorful place settings, mirrors, and streamers. In a very understated manner, Respondent 4A explained, “We like to work with the community because they like what we do.” Additionally, at Company 14, there was a desire to help the local community. Respondent 14C stated, “The people at our first restaurant location there know us better, and we are more involved in the community in events like parades and such.”

In summary, the senior women family firm leaders evidenced the ten servant leader characteristics delineated by Spears (1995). We believe that the practice of these characteristics led to perceived good leadership overall for the senior women respondents. Many, though not all, of the senior women leaders in the respondent family firms may be characterized as servant leaders. Matriarchs were clearly associated with the ten servant leadership characteristics as they rated Very High on average Dominant CEOs also rated High on servant leadership. Therefore, we propose the following.

Proposition 1: Senior women in family firms are likely to practice high levels of servant leadership as measured by Spears’ (1995) characteristics.

Proposition 2: Among senior women in family firms, Matriarchs are most likely to practice very high levels of servant leadership as measured by Spears’ (1995) characteristics.

Proposition 3: The practice of high levels of Spears’ (1995) servant leadership characteristics will strengthen senior women’s leadership in family firms.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

In this section, we will discuss implications for theory, implications for practice, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

Implications for Theory

This study has important theoretical implications in three areas: (1) servant leadership in family firms, (2) matriarchy theory and leadership roles of women in family firms, and (3) overall contributions to family business studies.

Servant Leadership in Family Firms

Our results suggest that senior generation women in family firms often exhibit the characteristics of servant leaders as originally described by Spears (1995) from the writings of Greenleaf. We cited multiple examples for each of the ten servant leader characteristics from our respondents. Our in-depth interview data suggests that servant leadership is congruent with the behavior of most of our respondents. We view the leadership of the senior women in our study as varying along a continuum from non-servant leader to servant leader somewhat analogous to the variance of transactional leaders to transformational leaders

(Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). Servant leadership is a concept for everyone, not just the top managers in a company. Leaders share information openly with employees and seek to empower them. Because servant leadership does not require charisma to the same degree as transformational leadership, it is accessible to many more people. Average and ordinary people can become servant leaders – they are not “some sort of superhuman” (Smolenyak & Majumdar, 1992:31). Therefore, organizations are much more likely to be full of potential servant leaders. We suggest that many of these servant leaders are senior generation women in family firms.

Matriarchy Theory and Leadership Roles of Women in Family Firms

In our findings, we recognized four roles or steps in the leadership development of women in family firms which we labeled: Next Generation Managers, TMT Executives, Matriarchs, and Dominant CEOs. We grouped the senior generation women in this study as either Matriarchs or Dominant CEOs. While there are many studies concerning women CEOs (Chadwick & Dawson, 2018), Matriarchs have not been well researched or understood in family business studies. Matriarchs are not invisible women in family firms without honor and respect (Dumas 1989, 1992; Hollander & Bukowitz, 1990). Rather, Matriarchs selflessly choose to play a role that benefits their husbands and family within the family business (Smith, 2014). In contrast to some sociologists, Smith (2014) did not view the relationship between men and women as a power struggle. Patriarchy, the rule of fathers in which a male family member leads the family business, has been depicted as the opposite of Matriarchy. Instead, Göettner-Abendroth (2005) described Matriarchy as an everyday practice and theory of future possibilities, not the opposite of Patriarchy. We extend Smith’s (2014) analysis with our case study approach, triangulating self-descriptions of Matriarchs and the perspectives of other family members in the business. We depict the Matriarch as a woman of character and strength in the family firm (Respondents 1A, 2A, 5A, 6A, 8A, 9A, 10A, 11A, and 13A), and we found the Matriarchs to be honored and respected, not marginalized without decision making power (Cesaroni & Sentuti, 2014). Among the senior women respondents, Matriarchs most consistently displayed the characteristics of servant leadership.

Contributions to Family Business Studies

This study addresses senior women family leaders, not just spouses (Poza & Messer, 2001) or daughters (Curimbaba, 2002). Also, our study focuses on women in business roles, not just family roles (Jimenez, 2009). We view the leadership of women in family firms as multi-faceted, with four steps in their development (Next Generation Managers, TMT Executives, Dominant CEOs, and Matriarchs) not just one or two types, such as “women managers” and “women entrepreneurs” (Faraudello et al., 2018). We apply the characteristics of servant leadership to senior women in family firms for the first time in the literature to our knowledge. Our results suggest that senior women in family firms often possess many of the characteristics of servant leaders and that servant leadership does provide an accessible guideline for the behavior of senior women in this setting.

Implications for Practice

Our research has significant implications for family firm practitioners starting with the realization that changes are taking place regarding the roles of women in family firms. Family firm leaders should understand that women family members often possess qualities, such as servant leadership characteristics, that are valuable resources that will enhance the leadership of their business. For practitioners, rival family firms are employing women because of the vast amount of talent and abilities that they possess, and this trend will likely continue until women hold equal status with men in the leadership of family firms.

If inter-generational succession is the goal, practitioners should equally encourage their daughters and sons to enter the family firm. Practitioners should provide for higher education for both sons and daughters and meaningful part-time work in the family firm while they are still in school. Family firm leaders should serve as mentors themselves or provide for mentors for their children. Because family firm leaders know their sons and daughters better than outsiders, they are in a unique position to develop the

talents and abilities of their sons and daughters (Cater, Kidwell, & Camp, 2016). Our study shows that women are making progress as leaders in family firms.

Limitations and Future Research

Using a qualitative case study approach and grounded theory analysis of 14 U. S. family firms, we examined the questions: What are the leadership roles of senior women in family firms? and How does servant leadership apply to senior women in family firms? As a qualitative study, we recognize the limitations of sample size and generalizability. We believe that this is offset by rich detail and depth of information. We recognize that there may be cultural limitations since this study was based in the U.S. We suggest that future research in other cultural contexts internationally could provide additional insight into senior generation women's leadership roles in family firms. Within the U.S., sub-cultural variations may also prove interesting to study, focusing on senior women in differing ethnic groups, such as Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, or African Americans. Many opportunities for future research in the area of senior women's leadership in family firms exist. We invite studies to further investigate the four steps of leadership roles of women family members in family firms, including comparative studies of women CEOs and matriarchs. Other areas of interest for future research include an examination of senior men's roles as leaders in family firms to discover if their roles are different or similar to women's roles. Similarly, a comparison of brothers and sisters' roles in family firm may be interesting.

We have described the leadership of senior women in family firms, focusing on their roles as Dominant CEOs and Matriarchs. We employed the theoretical lens of servant leadership and found the commonalities of unselfishness and concern for others among many senior women leaders. Our study fills an important gap in the understanding of the leadership roles of senior women in family firms.

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