

Role conflict.

Role ambiguity.

Everyone talks about the first one. For performance, the data points to the second.

It isn't one thing. It's two.

Conflict

Occupying two roles at once with incompatible demands. Father and chairman. Daughter and CFO.

Ambiguity

Not knowing what's expected of you in the role you hold. What you can decide, and without asking whom.

They get cited as if they were the same thing. They aren't, and they aren't fixed the same way.

And here's the surprise.

Correlation coefficient (r) with performance

$$r = .21$$

Role ambiguity

.07

.21

$$r = .07$$

Role conflict

0 · no relationship

1 · perfect relationship

The figure measures the strength of the relationship. In both cases it works against performance: more ambiguity or more conflict means worse performance. But ambiguity's correlation is three times larger. In tension and dissatisfaction, by contrast, they're evenly matched.

These are correlations, not causation, and they are modest. The underlying studies cover organizations in general; the application to family business is my own.

Role conflict isn't eliminated.

A role isn't a label: it's a script about what you can say, to whom, and in what tone.

When two scripts fire at once, you don't choose: the more deeply rooted one wins. And the father script has thirty years behind it; the chairman script, eight.

Your father is still going to be your father in the boardroom.

No protocol changes that.

**What you can prevent
is the two roles colliding.**

Role ambiguity is invisible.

Almost no one writes down who decides what, up to what amount, or who has to sign off first. In a family business, everyone assumes it's already understood.

And everyone understands it differently.



Roles are also liability.

They aren't only psychological: they're legal positions with distinct duties.

The founder who steps down but keeps deciding may be acting as a **de facto director**, and answer as one. The child who is the formal director, and lets others decide, doesn't escape that duty either.

The one who decides doesn't answer for it.

The one who answers for it doesn't decide.



Each role, in its own room.

Shareholders' meeting That's where you speak as a shareholder.

Board of directors That's where you speak as a director, with a director's duties.

Family council That's where you speak as family — which is what frees up the other two.

If the same person sits on all three, the conflict doesn't disappear. But it stops bleeding into the same conversation.

And, where possible, split the chairs: whoever chairs the family council shouldn't also chair the board.

Name the role. Even just to yourself.

One way to handle role conflict is to say which hat you're speaking from.
Out loud:

«**I'm answering this as a shareholder.**»

«**I'm telling you this as your father.**»

Or, at least, ask yourself before answering: **am I answering this as a father or as chairman?**

It doesn't eliminate the conflict: it makes it visible. And what's visible can be managed.



The fix for ambiguity: write down who decides what.

Each body's remit	What goes to the shareholders' meeting, what to the board, and what stays within the family.
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Board regulations	How it's convened, how it decides, and what it delegates.
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Each role's job description	What each family member working in the business actually does, and to whom they answer.
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Powers, with limits	Who signs, and up to what amount.
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Family protocol	Who joins the business, and under what conditions.
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It sounds like bureaucracy. It's the one thing ambiguity can't survive.

Conflict is contained. Ambiguity is eliminated.

The first step is knowing which of the two you're facing.

Pablo Gómez-Acebo Calonje

Lawyer (Madrid and New York), mediator, and graduate in Psychology

Estudio Jurídico Alta Mediación