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“Bring in Your Parents Day”: Building inclusion and engagement through a cross-generational family-friendly workplace initiative

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“Bring in Your Parents Day”: Building inclusion and engagement through a cross-generational family-friendly workplace initiative

Structured abstract

Purpose

Employer-sponsored family-friendly events are designed to boost engagement and encourage retention by building family members’ identification with the organization. These events are usually targeted at employees with dependent children, but LinkedIn’s more inclusive “Bring in Your Parents” (BIYP) initiative aims to introduce employees’ parents to the daily work of their adult children. This study evaluates the impact of BIYP on the attitudes and behavioral intentions of participating employees and their parents.

Methodology

Repeated-measures surveys were conducted among participating employees and parents in six organizations in six countries (UK, Ireland, France, Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia). These were followed by in-person interviews with participating employees (UK), and phone interviews with HR managers (Brazil, Canada, France, Spain, UK, USA).

Findings

Participation in BIYP increases employee engagement and parents’ instrumental and affective support for their children and for their children’s employers. Hosting BIYP is perceived to enhance corporate reputation among both internal and external stakeholders.

Practical implications

BIYP serves the dual function of building employee engagement and creating new parental brand ambassadors for participating organizations. BIYP can be an effective tool for employers to engage

members of staff not traditionally included in organizational family-friendly events and may be particularly useful for firms with a high proportion of younger workers in tech-savvy jobs.

Originality/value

This evaluation of a new workplace initiative demonstrates measurable effects on important employee attitudes and behavioral intentions.

Keywords:

Engagement

Identification

Family-friendly

Diversity

Millennial

Generation Y

Generation Z

Inclusion

Article classification: Research paper

Bring In Your Parents Day

'Family-friendly' organizational initiatives designed to boost engagement among employees and organizational identification among their family members have traditionally been focused on parents of young children, and typically included events such as children's parties and "Bring Your Children to Work" days. Initiatives such as these can provide an opportunity for employees' children to gain a glimpse into the working world of their parents, which can be valuable for children's understanding of the role of work in modern lives and possibly contribute to their future career considerations. However, these initiatives inadvertently exclude employees without caregiving responsibilities for children. In contrast, the "Bring in Your Parents" Day (BIYP) initiative, promoted globally by LinkedIn, targets a segment of the workforce not usually included by family-friendly initiatives: employees from the "Generation Y", or "Millennial", and "Generation Z" generations, born after 1981. After internal conversations at LinkedIn revealed that employees struggled to explain the nature of their work to parents who were not familiar with social media, LinkedIn originated the BIYP initiative in 2013 as a means of improving older generations' understanding of their Millennial children's jobs. The rapid advancement of information technology in the past few decades has created jobs that did not exist when Millennials' parents entered the labour force, such as user experience designer, app developer, or social media manager. Moreover, today's jobs often include tasks and technology unfamiliar to those who have not had exposure to digital technologies from the outset of their careers and who are therefore not "digital natives" themselves.

What impact does BIYP have?

There are compelling reasons to expect changes in job-related attitudes and behavioral intentions resulting from an organization's participation in Bring in Your Parents Day (BIYP), both for the individual employee and for their participating parents. According to the Job Demands-Resources model, job resources promote engagement through a motivational process that can involve both positive emotions and experienced meaningfulness (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Bringing one's parent to work enables employees to share a key element of their lives with family members

who would not usually be involved in their work domain, and also provides them with the opportunity to showcase their job-related skills and achievements to individuals who are outside of their work context and network. BIYP thus represents both a form of organizational support and a source of recognition, both of which have consistent positive relationships with employee engagement (Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010).

Research Focus

The study presented here evaluated BIYP's ability to improve organization-supportive attitudes and behavioral intentions among participating employees and the parents who visited their children's workplaces. An online, repeated-measures survey of participating employees and parents collected data at two time points in order to test changes in attitudes and intentions: first, one week before the BIYP event, and second, one month following the organization's BIYP event. The sample comprised 111 employees from six organizations located in the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia, and 37 BIYP-participating parents. Six face-to-face interviews were conducted with employees in the UK, and ten phone interviews were conducted with Human Resources (HR) managers in Brazil, Canada, France, Spain, the UK, and the USA.

Showing parents what they do on the job enhances employees' engagement and confidence in their ability to solve new problems

Following participation in BIYP, there were statistically significant increases in employee engagement and perceived problem-solving ability. By bringing parents to the workplace and having them learn about the nature of one's job responsibilities, employees' enthusiasm and sense of vitality on the job appears to be renewed. Increased employee confidence in their ability to solve new problems may be an effect of being able to demonstrate work-related skills and accomplishments to parents during BIYP. For example, several organizations used BIYP as an opportunity to present participating employees with certificates of recognition for specific achievements while their parents were in attendance. Increased confidence may be attributable to

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3 this recognition, or employees may simply have been reminded of their own work-related efficacy
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5 during the process of showing their parents what they do on the job. (Figures 1, 2)
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8 Increased engagement was also cited by HR managers as a primary benefit of BIYP for both
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10 individual employees and for the organization as a whole. The prevailing view was that by having
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12 their parents visit the workplace and learn about their job, employees feel that their employer
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14 appreciates them and their contributions to the organization's goals. HR managers spoke of making
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16 employees feel welcome, respected, and connected to both their parents and to their employer. The
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18 phrase "giving back" was invoked in the context of firms demonstrating that they care for employees,
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20 and most HR managers said that BIYP was a key piece in their overall engagement strategy.
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24 *"Employees were really proud to show parents the success and development of [the firm],*
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26 *which reinforced the feeling of belonging to the company."* (HR manager, transportation firm,
27
28 *France)*
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30 ***By improving parental understanding of the child's job, BIYP enables parents to become a job-***
31 ***related resource for their offspring***
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35 Following employees' participation in BIYP, there was a statistically significant increase in
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37 perceived parental knowledge about their current job (Figure 3).
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39
40 *"Conversations about work were nonexistent before. My family are all scientists... In my day*
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42 *to day life they had no idea what I did. They understand my work achievements now."*
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44 *(Joanna, public relations specialist, UK)*
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47 This increased parental understanding of their job role opened the door to increased
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49 emotional support and the opportunity for parents to provide relevant job-related advice.
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51 Employees reported that having their parents better understand their work responsibilities and pace
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53 of work enabled parents to offer more frequent and more appropriate support. This was especially
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55 important for young employees who, due to the high cost of housing in some metropolitan areas,
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57 still live with their parents and see them every day after work.
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"It's a very stressful environment to work in. I can now ask for advice because they understand my role; they understand why I come home exhausted sometimes. It opens the avenue for conversation. No one 'gets' our job unless they're also in PR. Understanding and supporting makes a big difference." (Amira, public relations officer, UK)

A digital trainer explained that when she returns to her home at the end of the work day, she often seeks a period of quiet time before engaging in family conversation, and may seek a complete break from using digital devices during the evening. After seeing first-hand the amount of interpersonal interaction involved in her work and her constant use of computers while on the job, her mother now recognizes the necessity for her to 'switch off'.

"It's made our relationship better; she understands why I am tired and frustrated at the end of the day sometimes... She is able to help me." (Mia, digital trainer, UK)

Employees described how before BIYP, it was more difficult to have conversations about work with parents, who often misunderstood the nature of their jobs. While the new, nontraditional jobs performed by their children seemed intangible to many parents prior to participating in BIYP, they now make more sense. Employees reported that their parents feel more comfortable asking targeted questions about their children's work, and more confident about making job-relevant suggestions to their children. By improving parents' understanding of their children's jobs, BIYP increased parents' confidence and enabled them to provide higher quality work-related advice and emotional support to their children.

By improving parental understanding of the child's job, BIYP empowers parents to become a resource for the organization

Following parents' participation in BIYP, there were significant increases in identification with their children's organizations, and of willingness to promote their children's organization to outsiders. (Figure 4)

After participating in BIYP, parents also developed more positive attitudes toward their children's employers, enabling parents to become organizational brand advocates among their own

peer groups. Employees spoke of their parents feeling proud of their firms' achievements, and of independently keeping up with their firms' news by regularly visiting their websites. Analyses of the HR manager interview data showed that one of the primary benefits of firms' participation in BIYP was perceived to be enhanced organizational reputation among parents, which extended also to customers, potential job applicants, and the public. A number of HR managers interviewed made the point that customers take events such as BIYP into consideration when deciding where to allocate their purchasing power, as these events can serve as outward signals by the organization as to how the firm treats its employees.

"Parents become ambassadors in a way of the vision and values of the company, because they are more attuned to what we are doing and more a part of it." (HR manager, logistics firm, USA)

Interestingly, parents can also serve as organizational ambassadors in conversations with their own children, encouraging them to stay with the firm.

"Participating parents were telling employees: 'You work at a good place, it's beautiful here', they were emotionally engaged. Sends a good message to employees. Parents encourage them to develop themselves within [the firm] because they treat you well, so don't be thinking about leaving." (HR manager, software firm, Brazil)

Implications for HR

By providing opportunities for employers to demonstrate an interest in their employees as whole persons, to showcase organizational activities to individuals who would otherwise not have access to the internal environment of an organization, and to educate parents about their adult children's careers, BIYP serves the dual function of both building employee engagement and creating new parental brand ambassadors for participating organizations. As such, this initiative can be an effective tool for employers to use in their efforts to engage members of staff broadly, and also specifically for those not traditionally included in organizational family-friendly events, such as transgender or LGB staff (Beauregard, Arevshatian, Booth, & Whittle, 2018). It may be particularly

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3 useful for firms with a high proportion of early-career, younger workers in a range of recently
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5 emerging new tech-savvy jobs, whose parents are likely to be unfamiliar with their job role and
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7 content. As younger employees may also be less likely to have dependent children, this widening of
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9 the company's suite of family-friendly initiatives to include multiple generations and cross-
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11 generational workplace engagement programs may also address the unintended exclusionary
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13 consequences of some of today's child-focused workplace initiatives.
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17 Finally, it is important to note that a number of firms participating in BIYP expanded their
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19 organization's commitment to an inclusive culture by encouraging employees to invite other
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21 relatives or mentors if their parents were unable or unwilling to attend. For example, in one
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23 participating organization where the main office building is shared with a medical facility, a senior
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25 citizen attending a doctor's appointment decided BIYP looked interesting, went in to have a look,
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27 and was readily "adopted" by employees who didn't have a parent attending. By incorporating
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29 events such as BIYP into existing family-friendly events such as "Bring Your Children to Work" days,
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31 celebrations of Mother's Day, Father's Day, Family Day, family open house days, and corporate
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33 outings such as family fun days at local attractions, organizations can express their support for the
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35 work-family balance of all employees rather than just those with caregiving responsibilities for
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37 children. Future research investigating the employee response to workplace inclusion and
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39 engagement initiatives may therefore wish to extend to assessing responses to the participation of
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41 employees' children, spouses, parents or other family members, as this knowledge could be valuable
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43 to further developing our understanding of this more inclusive type of engagement strategy.
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48 **Conclusion**

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50 This evaluation of a workplace engagement initiative targeted at Generation Y and Z
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52 employees, the LinkedIn sponsored "Bring in Your Parent" event, has demonstrated that such a
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54 strategy can generate measurable value for participating organizations and their key stakeholders,
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56 as evidenced by the multiple perspectives of participants in this study. Participation was shown to
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58 benefit all involved: employees, their parents or other family guests, and the organizations for whom
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they work. The development of further initiatives that support employers in demonstrating inclusion, deepening employee engagement, and widening organizational engagement with a range of stakeholders beyond the employee would be a welcome next step.

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Figure 1: Statistically significant increases in scores on Engagement items (employee survey data)

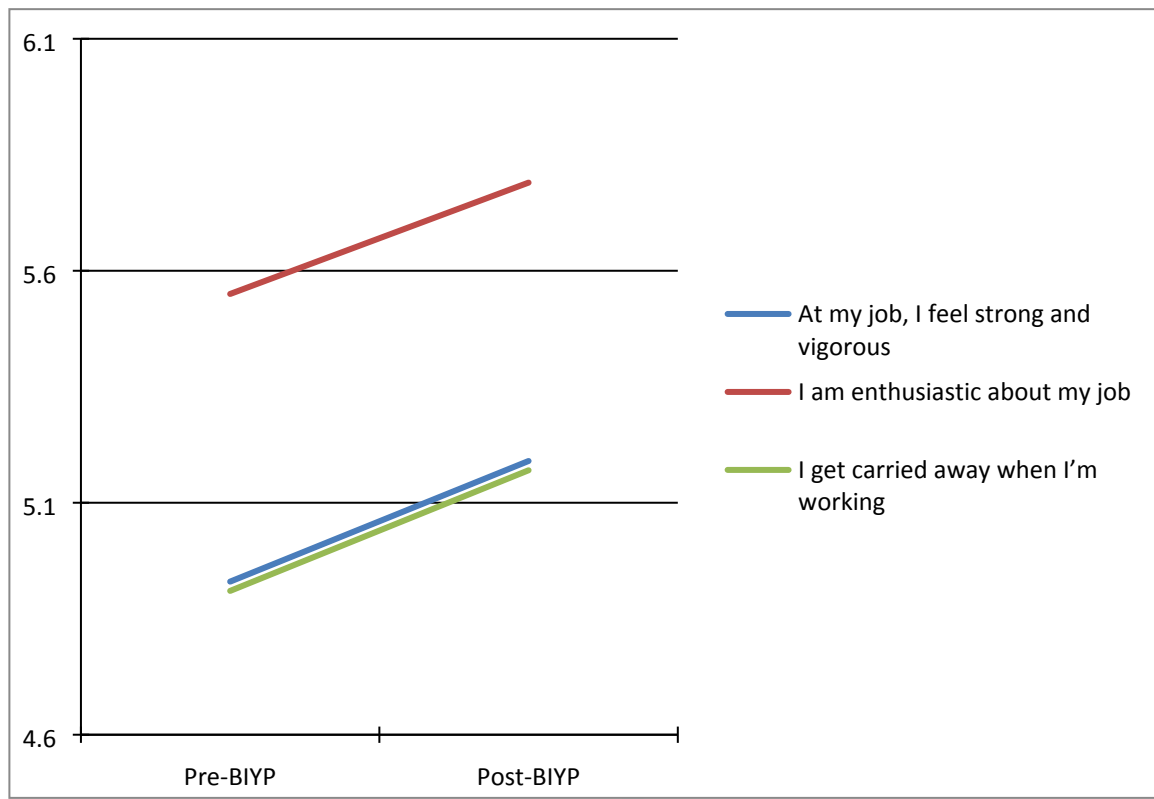


Figure 2: Statistically significant increases in scores on Problem Solving items (employee survey data)

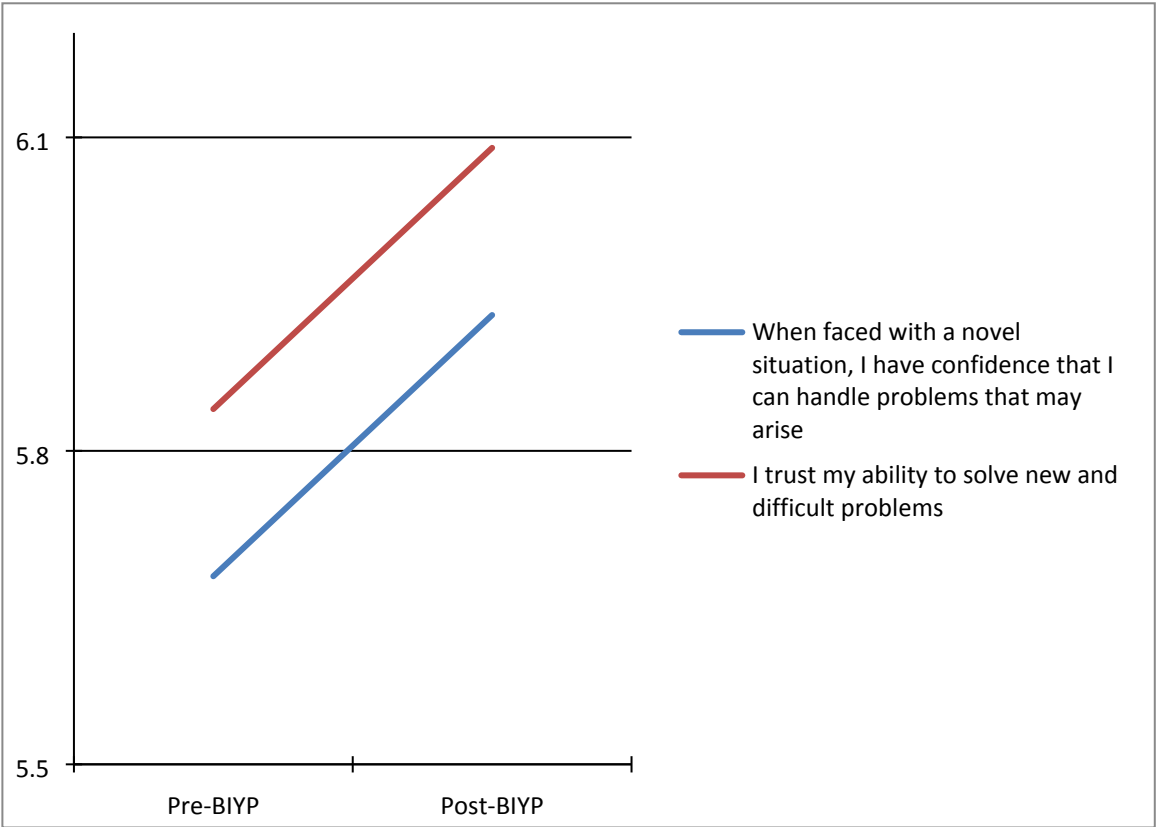


Figure 3: Statistically significant increases in scores on Parental Involvement in Career items (employee survey data)

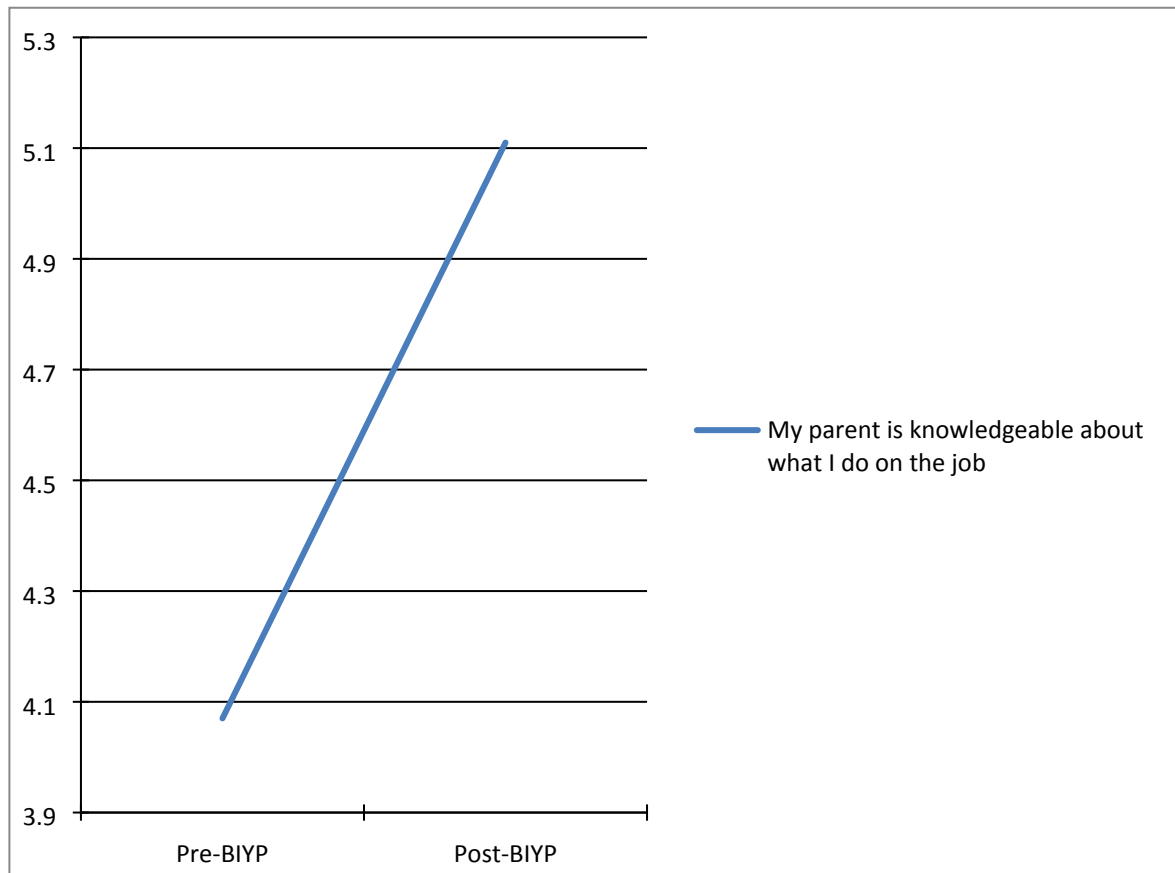


Figure 4: Statistically significant increases in scores on Organizational Identification and Willingness to Promote Firm to Outsiders items (parent survey)

