

Bourdieu, Strategy, and Identity Work: A Case from a Manufacturing Organisation in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This empirical study aims to discuss how organisational actors' identity work is reflected through their strategy work, from a Bourdieusian perspective. The study is a case study which followed the qualitative research approach. The participants of the study were managers representing a cross-section of a manufacturing organisation in Sri Lanka. Twenty-six semi-structured interviews were used for the generation of the data for thematic analysis. NVivo12 data management software was used for the data management and in initial coding. It was found that managers are engaged in different identity work for self during their strategy work, in the implementation of a new organisational strategy. Further, the behaviour and practices normalised in the selected organisation through managers' strategy work reflected their identity work for other/s in way of defining other/s. The discussion was based on the theory of practice by Pierre Bourdieu (1990). Accordingly, this research shows how the identity work of position takers (newly joined and promoted organisational actors) supports shaping the practices linked with a new strategy (strategy work). Further, their identity work reflected through strategy work is also connected with their individual dispositions (habitus). The discussion further shows how individuals' capital—mainly their cultural capital—contribute to constructing a new strategy in the selected organisational field. As implications of this study, it highlighted the contribution of the position-takers in shaping the organisation's strategy (strategy work) while engaging in identity

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work for self and others. Consequently, this study illustrates how organisational actors perform different social-symbolic work (identity work and strategy work) in parallel.

Keywords: *Capital; Habitus, Identity work; Social-symbolic work; Strategy work*

Introduction

An organisation's strategy is understood in terms of a fixed or a flux nature (e.g.: as an intended strategy or an emergent strategy) (Andersen & Nielsen, 2009). Thus, strategy is understood as a fixed *thing*—an organisation's property—or as flux *activities* that organisational actors 'do'. In line with the notion of flux activities that organisational actors 'do', 'strategy-as-practice' is a perspective that emphasises practice, praxis, and practitioners in their strategy work (Whittington, 2006). According to the above perspective, practices (of the organisation) are likely to be adapted in praxis (actual activity) by practitioners (organisational actors)(Whittington, 2006). Yet, strategy researchers have traditionally (and not analytically) separated the creative processes [including the praxis] of practitioners through which ideas are generated from the organisational reality (Vaara et al., 2004). Thus, there is a lack of consideration of the processes through which particular strategies as concepts, ideas, or narratives gain popularity and become legitimated and institutionalised (Vaara et al., 2004). Hence, an uncertain understanding of the origins of influential practices suggests the importance of a close engagement with the detailed activities of practitioners and deep respect even for the minutiae of their praxis (Whittington, 2006).

Within this lacuna, this study intends to identify how strategy work has linked and resulted through the identity work of organisational actors. Managers of an organisation hold the primary responsibility as its strategist. Consequently, the study's research question is, 'how identity work of organisational managers' is reflected through their strategy work.' Hence, within this study, the identity work of managers, linked to normalised individual practices of an operational strategy, is focused as their identity work.

Accordingly, this paper is organised into four main sections. First, it reviews the literature on strategy work and identity work. It provides a brief review of the theory of practice by Pierre Bourdieu, which will be used in explaining the construction of collective practices through individual practices within an organisational field. Then, the following section presents the methods used for the study, along with an overview of the case study organisation. Afterward, findings, in line with the purpose of the study, are presented with a discussion with concepts in the theory of practice. Finally, the implications of the study are presented with a summary of the study.

Literature Review

Strategy work and identity work are two types of social symbolic work that intentionally shape the key objects of organisational life (Caza et al., 2021). Accordingly, strategy work can be defined as intentional shaping of organisational strategy. In contrast, identity work can be defined as intentional shaping of identity/identities of either individuals or collectives.

Within this literature review, initially we will mention about the concepts of strategy work and identity work separately as they are appeared in the existing literature base in management and organisational studies. Then, in building the argument behind this study, we will show how strategy work can be linked with individual identity work, or how the parallel production of identity work and strategy work can be possible and evidenced in organisational context.

Strategy work

The strategy-as-practice perspective shares many of the insights of earlier process perspective of strategic management (Pettigrew, 1987) which emphasis macro processes in strategizing. Yet, the practice perspective calls for greater emphasis on understanding the minutiae of both the micro-processes and practices of strategizing. Accordingly, strategizing comprises actions, interactions, and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices they draw upon in accomplishing that activity (Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007) by shaping the organisational strategy intentionally. In this research line, different practices that can be considered as strategy work. For instance, practice of masking negative emotions within a strategic change (Vuori et al., 2018),

efficacy driven communication practices (Vuori et al., 2018), the practice of constructing narratives of transformative change (Dalpiaz & Stefano, 2018), the practice of knowledge sharing (Neeley & Leonardi, 2018), the practice of adopting a broader definition of work (Pettit & Crossan, 2020), use of different communication practices with rhetorical tactics, vocabularies, talk, and text to dynamically shape organisational attention (Ocasio et al., 2018), and using visual and discursive practice in the construction of PowerPoint slides to influence the Strategy meaning-making process (Knight et al., 2018) are some examples for practices focused within this research stream.

Identity work

Identity is a ‘root’ organisational construct, and it can be linked to everything in organisations (Caza et al., 2018). Identity work (intentionally shaping identity), according to Brown (2017), refers to the range of interlinked activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept’ (p. 298). Thus, identities are people’s ‘subjectively-construed understandings’ of who they were, are, and desire to become (Brown, 2015; Toyoki & Brown, 2014) through their identity work.

Within the management and organisational studies, identity work signifies all the generic processes identity holders perform concerning their identities. Generic processes of identity work—though there is little consensus on these—include claiming, affirming, accepting, complying, resisting, separating, joining, defining, limiting, bounding, stabilizing, sense-making, forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, revising reconciling, and restructuring, and the differentiation between work that is *active and passive* and that which is *conscious and subconscious* (Caza et al., 2018; Kreiner et al., 2006; Levy et al., 2003; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012).

Identity work in strategy work

Caza et al. (2021) highlight the possibility of combining and connecting theoretical traditions in the study of social-symbolic work in the organisational context by highlighting the gaps and the growing interest in the area. Identity work and strategy work are two such social-symbolic work in organisational context. Yet, the focus on micro-practices which individual organisational actors are engaged in, within a strategic change and the identity work of

organisational actors, which are linked to the normalised ‘practices’ of an organisational field, are limitedly evidenced.

However, due to the mutually constitutive nature of identity work, individuals construct their own identities while influencing higher-level identities (like organisation and its strategy) while they are participating in the organisational activities. Therefore, identity work can be part of a larger group process, involving indexes of the self that evoke meaning to others (Oliver, 2016). For instance, Johnson et al. (2010 as cited in Oliver, 2016) have found how the identity work of CEOs has influenced their praxis and has a significant impact on strategic organisational changes by exemplifying the mutually constitutive nature of identity work.

Further, illustrative studies highlight multiple ways in which identity work is used in strategy work. Those studies exemplify the organisational change and the identity work of the actors. Yet, these studies demonstrate the construction of counter-institutional identities (Chreim et al., 2019), leader’s identity work (Xing & Liu, 2015), construction of professional identity (Reay et al., 2017), identity work in failed change effort (Nag et al., 2007) with particular focus on organisational strategic change and identity work.

In this study, in addressing the above gaps, our focus is on discussing how identity work is reflected in the strategy work of organisational managers, from a Bourdieusian perspective, by exemplifying the way of performing different forms of social-symbolic work (strategy work and identity work) in parallel, in micro-practices within a strategic change.

The theory of practice by Pierre Bourdieu

In the organisational context, practices result through the multiple strategy work (actors are engaged) while shaping the organisational strategy. Bourdieu signifies ‘concrete human activities’ by practices (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 13). Yet, Golsorkhi et al. (2010) point out that Bourdieu (1990) mainly uses the economy of practice or the practical sense instead of the word practice. Theory of Practice by Pierre Bourdieu (1990) explains why and how individuals behave in specific ways or follow certain practices, but not in other ways in accomplishing the satisfactory life they aspire to. Bourdieu’s (1990) theory has three main interrelated concepts, namely, capital, habitus, and field which explain interactively, a practice of an individual at a particular spacio-temporal context.

An organisation can be identified as a field. A field, then, can be identified as a field of forces (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and the functioning of the field is recognised as a struggle between these forces. These forces are comprised of the ideas, viewpoints, arguments, justifications, and etc. of a certain matter. The forces are represented by different field participants (organisational actors) identified as agents. A field has its own rules, structure, and positions. Different agents occupy positions in the structure (job positions) within a field based on the rules at a particular spacio-temporal context (Gomez, 2015). Yet, the rules, structure, and positions are in a ‘continuous change’ resulting from the ongoing struggle of the forces. The struggles of forces are taken over resources, stakes, and access (Bourdieu, 1990): for instance, intra-organisational actors struggling within the organisation to control its policies, identities, and strategies of action or the space of position-taking (Bourdieu, 1990).

Doxic society or doxic field (here, a doxic organisational field) is a society/field where the established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary (as one possible order among others) but as a self-evident and natural order (Bourdieu, 1977). Accordingly, doxa is the taken-for-granted assumption on the way things work in the field (Gomez, 2015). The question of legitimacy does not arise, and symbolic struggles between forces are not fought in a doxic society (Everett, 2002), and doxa is a belief in the legitimacy of a society/field at a particular moment (Gomez, 2015). When organisational actors agree upon and activate a set of practices and identify those practices as their strategy, that organisation can be recognized as, in a state of doxa at that moment.

The habitus makes possible, the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions, and actions/practices inherent in a particular condition of its production – and only those (Bourdieu, 1990). Consequently, habitus produces individual and collective practices (Bourdieu, 1990). The habitus is constituted in the practice of agents, and it is always oriented towards practical function and provides a feel for or sense of the social game (Bourdieu, 1990). Thus, habitus is the source of most practices (Bourdieu et al., 1963; Foster, 1986).

The positions of an agent within a field will be determined and influenced by the volume and structure of the capital they possess (Gomez, 2015). Bourdieu (1986) defines capital as accumulated labour (materialized or incorporated,

embodied form). In objectified or embodied forms, capital takes time to accumulate. Capital may be of any number of different forms or species (Bourdieu, 1986). Accordingly, economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital can be identified as the three main types of capital. Economic capital is the monetary and material wealth, commodities, and physical resources. Knowledge, skills, taste, lifestyle, and qualifications are considered cultural capital and are less tangible. Social capital is the power and resources that stem from a network of relationships. Social capital includes the connections and added value that membership in a group brings (e.g.: manners, bearing, and pronunciation). Value granted to the various forms of capital varies according to the field and time (Gomez, 2015).

Agents occupy positions in a field during the struggles via behaviours of usurping, excluding, and establishing a monopoly over the mechanisms of the field's reproduction and the types of power effects in it (Everett, 2002). Agents like organisational managers distinguish themselves from others within their field through symbolically meaningful position-taking, e.g.: works, services, acts, arguments, products – which relationally derive their semiotic significance from their difference vis-à-vis other such position-taking within a space of position-taking (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008). Occupants of these distinct positions are engaged in the ongoing struggle, representing different forces, within the field as bearers of different amounts and combinations of resources, some of which yield more significant advantages within that particular field than others. Thus, within the struggles in the field, two sets of agents, who represent two forces, will be there as the dominants and dominated (positions) (Everett, 2002) as a result of struggles. This position-taking conserves or transforms the structure of the relationships of the forces that constitute the field (Bourdieu & Wacquan, 1992) with the changes in the agreed-upon practices and linked strategies.

Hence, the theory of practice can be used in explaining the how and why organisational managers are participating in certain (collective) practices (while representing force they prefer) with the help of their capital, to contribute to shape a strategy (strategy work with practices) within an organisational context. Further, this theory can also be used to explain, how and why individual

organisational actors are participating certain (individual) practices with the influence of their habitus/individual dispositions.

Methods

This study intends to examine the how identity work reflected through individual practices in the strategy work of managers in an organisational context in Sri Lanka. The case study approach was the best option for the study, given the nature of the research question, (i.e. which required the researcher to catch the complexity of the context with descriptions), over surveys, archival analysis, or history (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). Further, the case study research design is used by studies comparing identity construction in different contexts due to changes in organisational strategies (e.g., Chreim et al., 2019). Following the constructivist paradigm, the study relied on the qualitative data gathered through 26 semi-structured interviews (representing a cross-section of the organisational managers). Accordingly, an interview guide was prepared to collect data on the practices of the organisational managers in line with the tools of the Lean Management System (LMS) introduced in 2014 as a productivity improvement strategy of the case organisation. To ensure the study's trustworthiness, the criteria of trustworthiness proposed by Guba (1981) was considered. As strategies to overcome possible ethical issues, ethics approval of the Ethical Review Committee of the University of Colombo was obtained while ensuring voluntary and informed consent in the data generation. Further, confidentiality and anonymity were also assured by using pseudonyms. For the data collection, audio & video records and transcriptions of 26 organisational managers and field notes were generated, and NVivo12 data management software was used for the data management and initial coding.

The fieldwork of this study was carried out in the case organisation, CmixL, between December 2020 and March 2021. The fieldwork was carried out in four production centres of the case organisation and its administrative centre (Head Office). CmixL, a manufacturing organisation in Sri Lanka's coconut industry, is headed by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). In the year 2014, a newly appointed General Manager has taken initiatives to introduce several tools of the Lean Management System to the organisation. This study mainly focuses on the

period from 2014 to 2020, where the tools of LMS were implemented and normalised within the four factories of CmixL.

Thematic analysis was used in data analysis. Within the data analysis of this study, first we identified different practices or the strategy work, organisational managers were engaging to implement new strategy. Then, the justifications and or the reasons behind these practices from individual manager's perspective were analysed to identify the possible identity work behind those practices. Five categories of actors were identified with their identity work. Consequently, the identity work of each manager was identified by categorizing their identity work under two main themes, i.e., identity work for self and other(s).

Presentation of Results and Discussion

The strategy-work at present CmixL in line with the implemented tools of LMS reflected how managers engage in identity work for self and other/s—other managers and other workers— while doing their identity work. Accordingly, conducting knowledge sharing sessions, sharing the short term plans, employee categorization, training sessions, creating change agents, conducting ROR meetings, organizing annual/monthly functions, worker visits to other factories to participate in annual/monthly functions, the introduction of team-based production, and introducing production and efficiency targets were evidenced as the organisational practices which are shaped by the strategy work of managers. During the discussions on this strategy-work of managers, meanings attached by them to these practices were reflected, and the identity work for self and for other(s) was evidenced.

In this section, the results of the analysis is presented under two sub-sections as identity work for self and identity work for other/s. Then in the next sub-section, identity work in strategy work from the theory of practice is discussed.

Identity work for self

In this section, the identity work of managers in line with the individual practices/behaviour/activities is presented under five categories: General Manager Operations (GMO), managers who joined after 2014, managers who have been at CmixL before 2014 and who have taken steps to support LMS,

lower-level managers, and other managers who are not included in the above categories.

1. Identity work of General Manager Operations (GMO)

Defined his role: The very first identity work can be identified through his initial proposal of LMS to the CEO. GMO was recruited with the objective of ‘bringing productivity’ to the organisations. The CEO had wanted an improvement office manager or a time study manager as those were the best practices in the garment industry, which was a developed industry at that time. However, with the proposal of LMS and the acceptance of it by the CEO, Nadha *defined* his role at CmixL. With the LMS at CmixL, new production targets have been introduced by the GMO. The introduction of new targets is an area where Nadha’s identity work of *defining* himself as a rule maker and others as rule-followers was reflected as *they (all other organisational actors) need to work according to the rules which I have introduced*.

Claims the second-highest position in the field of CmixL: With the consent of the CEO, Nadha designed his designation of GMO with the overall strategic scope. He stresses that he is looking over the overall operations of CmixL, which includes both manufacturing and service, by directly reporting to the CEO. Even though there is another GM, Nadha implicitly *claims* that he is occupying the second-highest position in the field of CmixL.

Making sense and maintaining a knowledge gap: At CmixL, Nadha’s initial objective was to *make sense* of how things were happening at CmixL. According to Nadha, he had studied CmixL for a few months before he started the knowledge sharing sessions in every factory to make the factory managers and staff aware of the organisation's position, at that time. Though Nadha called those discussions knowledge-sharing sessions, not revealing the ‘master plan’ implies how Nadha separated himself by *maintaining* a knowledge gap. He had been careful not to reveal his plan with vision, mission, and objectives with the LMS at CmixL. Nadha has used ‘not revealing’ as an identity work *separating* and *sense-making* managers and staff. According to Nadha, revealing the whole plan at once would have confused them and created the perception ‘change is impossible’. However, he had shared ‘the next immediate plan’ with the others by creating the perception ‘this much is possible’. He was

justifying the other managers' inability to bear it or their fear, with the reflected meaning of, *I can work with the master plan with vision, mission, objective, and all, but they (other managers and staff) fear and can't bear them.*

Separating from others with the contextual adjustments of the strategy:

Further, within Nadha's narration of LMS at CmixL, he expressed how he introduced tools of LMS by considering the nature of the organisational context at that time. According to his knowledge of LMS, it was necessary to begin by implementing changes at the top level. But as a newcomer to the field of CmixL, instead of starting the process from the top, he had started by solving problems at the bottom level. Moreover, though it is accepted to introduce the 5S tool first within LMS, he has initiated team-based production. Accordingly, he has *separated* himself from others who follow LMS as prescribed in textbooks written on Japanese/Toyota management practices.

These identity works are directly related to the identity work of self. Further, the below mentioned identity work are not directly related to the identity work of self, rather they are done with and through others, but for the self-identity. For instance, through accommodating others and implementing the strategy means, the strategy introduced by the GMO, will be implemented successfully, with credits to GMO for the ultimate success.

Classifying, straightening, and accommodating others for getting the things done:

During these initial interactions with the managers and staff at CmixL, Nadha has *classified* managers and staff. According to Nadha's classification, there were three types of employees in the face of a change: critical mass, opinion leaders, and employees who resist or oppose change. As per Nadha's explanation, bringing about change with these three types of employees needs to differ from one category to another. Making the opinion leaders more powerful is an identity work of Nadha by *strengthening* the organisational actors who are capable of spreading 'his story' in the organisation. Moreover, the position of Assistant Factory Manager was created to *strengthen* the factory managers in introducing LMS to factories. Further, the managers and staff were occasionally given a chance to participate in external workshops and training programs of LMS, 5S, Quality Circles (QCs), etc., by *accommodating* those participants to enhance their knowledge of these LMS tools.

Forming new positions to getting the things done: *Forming* several new positions can also be identified as steps taken to ‘make the new opinion leaders.’ Accordingly, new positions of Lean Manager, Assistant Factory Manager, Improvement Officer, Assistant Improvement Officer, Team Leader, and Assistant Team Leader are the new positions created with the introduction of LMS at CmixL. The introduction of gifts, meetings, and functions can be identified as means used for *stabilizing* and *maintaining* the Strategy with LMS at CmixL as per the initiation of Nadha.

2. Identity work of assistant managers recruited after 2014

Ten assistant managers have been recruited to CmixL after 2014, i.e., after LMS introduction to factories. According to Nadha, this is a position created to support factory managers in implementing LMS. Among these ten, six assistant managers joined CmixL after 2014 with prior experience or knowledge on LMS, while the other four managers had no previous experience in LMS. When analyzing the identity work linked with the strategy work of these managers, apparent differences can be identified among them.

Defining self: Vajira, the current quality manager, joined CmixL during the early stage of the LMS implementation. He entered via personal contacts with Nadha as they had previously worked together at Hcom. According to Vajira, he faced a tough time in CmixL, among other managers and staff. Some had just ignored him and ‘passed hints.’ Yet, he was patient. Recalling his memories, he says, ‘...to do this, as an individual, we need to tolerate during difficulties, and face challenges...’. He *defined* himself as a person who can tolerate things while facing challenges. He discussed how he met that challenges with implementing tools of LMS, by *defining* himself as a person of the people.

Maintaining self and separating the self: Further, he elaborated on his Lean journey at CmixL by reflecting on how he *maintained* his identity as a person of the people. He reflected on the ways he used for *separating* his identity from other managers and staff, by participating activities other didn’t.

Separating self and defining others: By explaining the reasons for the tough time he had had at CmixL, he *defined* the other managers and staff he met.

Further, while *maintaining* his identity as a person of the people, he *defined* the identity of some factory managers who did not support LMS significantly.

Defining self by separating self: Wicky is another manager who joined CmixL with the introduction of LMS. He has completed his higher education with an engineering degree, and he had worked with Nadha at Hcom where he gained exposure to LMS. The narration of Wicky reflected how he tried to *define* his identity as a knowledgeable person in LMS. While *defining* his identity around reading and knowledge on LMS, Wicky expressed his views on others at CmixL, reading on LMS and giving him books.

Defining self by accommodating, strengthening, and changing others: Ruwan, another colleague from Nadha's previous workplace, joined CmixL as an assistant factory manager. At present, he is a factory manager. Comparing the before and after situations, he highlighted how he contributed to developing the factory's infrastructure by increasing the number of workers, increasing the number of young people joining the factory, and bringing in new machines during his tenure. In doing so, the way he *defined* his identity as a facilitator by *accommodating* change was reflected. Further, he highlighted the necessity of on-time maintenance and services to machinery and facilitating workers to achieve their targets without any machine downtime by *strengthening* the workers. Ruwan further elaborated how the staff and workers joined the change by *changing* their attitudes and perceptions.

Complying, maintaining, and strengthening others: Shan, a recently joined assistant factory manager, who has had LMS experience at his previous workplace, shared his view on his contribution to CmixL, i.e., *complying* with the existing practices. Neth is a factory manager who joined CmixL in 2017 as an assistant factory manager with exposure to foreign company culture. During his initial period at CmixL, he had had to look for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), QCs, and conduct meetings, etc., and *maintain* and *comply with* what was going on in the factory at that time. At present, as a factory manager, he is mainly looking into other projects like automation projects by *strengthening* the operations of the factory.

Sena joined as an assistant manager in 2018, with prior experience in LMS. His narration on the day-to-day practices reflected how he *complies*

with and maintains the prevailing practices at CmixL. Rush, Disa, Rana, and Gaya, who did not have previous experience in LMS, joined CmixL in 2018, 2016, 2017, and 2017 respectively. Their narrations are centred on *complying* and *maintaining* the prevailing practices.

Separating self by highlighting issues: Three managers expressed their ideas on covering targets and why they are motivated with the gifts given. Further, they raised their concern about the issues of CmixL at present, like the dust, the necessity of considering the workers' emotional aspect, and automation and machine maintenance. These concerns reflected the meaning of 'not only Lean' and 'not only this way, i.e., indicating that they see other alternatives or courses of improvement for the existing LMS. They also tried to define the managers who embrace LMS with the implied identity work of defining others as *they are with myopia with a short sight on benefits of LMS, ignoring other areas.*

For instance, while comparing the interior arrangement of his previous workplace with separated sections, Sena *raised his concern about restructuring* the factory floor with sections to decrease the level of dust accumulation. Rush also *raised his concern about restructuring* the factory floor with sections to decrease dust accumulation and allocating workers who are capable of working in a dusty environment to sections with more dust.

3. Identity work of managers who have been at CmixL before 2014 and have extended support for LMS

Resisting and joining: Jana, Kisa, Ayal, Indi, Amal, Lal, and Amitha were managers at CmixL before introducing LMS in 2014. They have joined CmixL in 2006, 2012, 2004, 2012, 2003, 2004, and 2009 respectively. These managers are directly connected with the manufacturing processes at factories. *Resisting* was evidenced among these managers during the initial stages of LMS at CmixL. Jana revealed the way he resisted by inquiring about the expenses and cost aspects of LMS. Kisa also told their curiosity and fear and how they *joined* and supported the LMS. Ayal explained the initial *resistance* of workers he experienced as a supervisor at that time and how they *joined* the LMS later. Later on, Jana was sent to participate in training programs with an understanding of the lean concepts. He has been promoted to his present position as the Lean manager, a group-level managerial position, reflecting how he *joined* the journey of LMS. Kisa had also been promoted in 2015.

Defining self by accepting, joining, and maintaining: Further, the narration of Jana reflects his initiative to introduce and *maintain* the tools of LMS, including kaizen, QCs, and bin card systems, under his tenure as a factory manager. Lal is the present maintenance manager with a background and career in machine maintenance. He was keen to highlight the benefits he got from LMS for his role at CmixL. Accordingly, he described the way employees identify and forward the issues in machines at QCs and ROR (real-time operations review) meetings and forward their suggestions via kaizen, etc. However, throughout his narration, it was reflected that his area of specialization, i.e., machine maintenance came to the fore. For example, talking about the initial period and the expansion of CmixL, Lal spoke about the number of machines, their types, and how that number increased. However, the description of the benefits of LMS showed that the workers forward more ideas in comparison to the past. Consequently, Lal's narration implied the way he *defined* himself and *joined* and *accepted* the journey of LMS.

4. Identity work of lower-level managers

Compiling and strengthening self: This category of actors contains team leaders and improvement officers who can be considered lower-level managers at CmixL. According to Nadha, the decision to create the position of the team leader is a crucial decision. The reason behind this, as Nadha explains, is that a team leader is a person who is within a team yet responsible for identifying and forwarding the issues of the teams to the higher management to obtain solutions. Among these issues, there could be issues that occur among team members. When a team leader forwards this type of issue to higher-ups, the displeasure of some of the members might be directed at the team leader.

On the other hand, with the introduction of LMS, the supervisor position has been replaced with the new position of improvement officer. These improvement officers are not assigned to one particular team. Instead, they are assigned to the whole factory.

The identity work reflected through the narrations of these lower-level managers mainly was on how they *complied* with the work arrangements of the factory. Further, the empowerment and encouragement they received from managers and staff are considered as *strengthening* themselves by these managers and improvement officers. For instance, one improvement officer discussed how she had developed computer skills with the help and encouragement of the factory

manager. Moreover, some of these lower-level managers were keen on discussing how they use tools such as 5S, fish born diagrams at their houses, reflecting how they comply with those practices even in their personal lives.

5. Identity work of other managers who are not included in the above categories

Resisting, accepting, and supporting: Under this category, the views of three managers, which reflected their identity work concerning LMS, are discussed. Madhu, Princi, and Anoma are not directly related to the production side of CmixL. Yet, they participate in functions and meetings. The narration of Madhu reflects their implied *resistance* during the initial stage of LMS. But her comments on the present status of the CmixL reflect how she has *accepted* the benefits of LMS, among other things which have contributed to the organisation's overall productivity. Princi also explained her experience with the workers after LMS introduction and how they *support* and *accept* it.

According to the identity work for self of the above five category of managers, generic processes (Caza et al., 2018; Kreiner et al., 2006; Levy et al., 2003; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012) of defining, claiming, sense-making, separating, maintaining, strengthening, accommodating, classifying, separating, bounding, stabilizing, complying, joining, resisting, accepting, and supporting could be identified with the above findings. Further some of the managers were engaging in practices to create, and sustain personal identities (e.g., person for people) by 'subjectively-construed understandings' of who they were, are, and desire to become (Brown, 2015; Toyoki & Brown, 2014) through their identity work. Moreover, managers intentionally shaped their identities (Brown, 2017) through their own practices (e.g.: defining, claiming, making sense, resisting, etc) and they have done different things for others (e.g.: accommodating, strengthening, changing others, etc.) for their own identities. Moreover, the study also highlighted how the study participant have separated themselves identity work for others (e.g., defining others).

Identity work in strategy work from the theory of practice

In the above sections of the presentation of results, we showed how different practices/ strategy work are linked to identity work of managers. In this section, the 'identity work in strategy work' is discussed from 'Theory of Practice,' from

the Bourdieusian perspective. Accordingly, first we show how the organisational actors are taking positions in the organisational field and participating in the struggle within the field, to push their preferred strategy as the dominant strategy in the field, by representing the forces for implementing new strategy with LMS. Later, we are showing how organisational actors with different individual dispositions are engaging in collective practices. Yet, the individuals have varied justifications for their engagements in those collective practices with habitus and personal dispositions, which then lead to different identity work.

Capital for position taking: Gomez (2015), elaborating the positions of agents (organisational actors) within a field, discussed how positions would be determined and influenced by the volume and structure of capital organisational actors possess. Accordingly, it is evidenced that within the present CmixL field, the bearers of capital, which can contribute for the strategy with LMS, have been able to secure main positions.

After introducing LMS in 2014, new positions have been introduced, and the post of quality supervisor has been removed. Accordingly, General Manager Operations, Lean Manager, Assistant Factory Manager, Team Leader, Assistant Team Leader, Improvement Officer, and Senior Improvement Officer are the positions newly introduced to CmixL. Yet, according to the GMO these positions are created to fulfill the requirements that arose with the new strategy. And if some other new conditions arise, they will change these positions, and some new positions will be created.

Within CmixL, all the three types of capital, including economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital can be identified as the capital possessed by its actors. At CmixL, there are different cultural capital including expert knowledge and experience in LMS, working experience, bachelor's degrees, and master's degree, knowledge of the production process at CmixL, skills in the different tasks of the production process, knowledge about the workers and their needs and skills, knowledge about different factories and factory managers, and lean tools implemented at CmixL. Connections with institutions and consultants in LMS and contacts with GMO before joining CmixL are the social capital that can be identified in the CmixL field at present. The existence of economic capital with some actors at CmixL was reflected through creating new

positions, recruiting new employees, and getting approval for functions and gifts.

Participating in the struggle within the field for implementing the strategy:

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) have explained that the position taking is either conserving or transforming the structure of the relationships of the forces (ideas, preferences, arguments, justifications, procedures, practices, etc) that constitute the field with previous strategy. As explained earlier, at CmixL, the GMO wanted to make individuals like him to execute and *spread the message of change* (forces for the new strategy) within the organisation. Accordingly, he created new positions, recruited, and assigned the needed individuals to those positions. Thus, by position making, Nadha has been able to get the support of these new position takers to transform the organisational structure of the CmixL field to a field with tools of LMS.

Further, according to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), individuals often work to *discredit the form of capital upon which the force of their opponents rests*, and often try to *valorise the species of capital they preferentially possess or support* during the struggles. At CmixL, accordingly, discrediting the form of capital dominated within the previous strategy field of CmixL, was evidenced by highlighting the drawbacks and limitations of the previous field by different actors supporting the field of LMS. For instance, the low productivity, higher machine downtime, the absence of a proper system for solving workers' problems were issues that prevailed in the previous field of CmixL, were highlighted by most of the managers during their explanations. Showing the plus points of the present LMS, those managers highlighted the benefits achieved in these areas in attempting to attach value to the capital (e.g., their knowledge in LMS) they preferentially possess or support.

Habitus, Individual practices, and strategy work: The positions do not determine the practices. Instead, agents in similar social positions (managers in same level) may have different personal perspectives on practices. And their practices depend on personal dispositions or habitus. Thus, the habitus makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions, and actions/practices inherent in a particular condition of its production (Bourdieu, 1990).

The habitus is constituted in the practice of agents. According to Bourdieu (1990), it (habitus) is always oriented towards the practical function and provides a feel for or sense of the social game. Regularities and irregularities or regular practices or irregular practices can be interpreted with the concept of 'habitus' since habitus is a tendency to generate regulated behaviour apart from any reference to rules (Bourdieu et al., 1963).

By adopting its (habitus') strategies, the habitus tends to create all the reasonable common-sense behaviour of organisational actors. Thus, habitus ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought, and action, and tend to guarantee the correctness of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms (Bourdieu, 1990).

Within the present CmixL field, the link between the organisational collective practices (regulated behaviour accepted by organisational actors/ collective practices) and the individual dispositions (habitus) could be identified by analysing the managers' narrations by considering their past experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and actions.

Collective practice for strategy but different dispositions: As per Bourdieu (1990), the individual dispositions/habitus have produced individual practices and then collective practices. The same is evidenced, at present CmixL field, that individual practices have motivated/demotivated by the individual dispositions. However, different individual practices, though linked with different individual dispositions, have contributed to collective practices necessary for the new strategy.

Collective practices are necessary for implementing a new strategy within an organisational context. At the present CmixL field, different collective practices for operating with tools of LMS are evidenced. Accordingly, practices like setting and achieving targets, conducting meetings and having functions, team-based production, distribution of gifts, and etc have become organisational collective practices through the strategy work of organisational managers. However, the perception of individuals on these organisational practices differs. For instance, the organisational practice of setting and achieving targets, is perceived differently by three managers in three ways. One manager highlighted the need for *on-time machine maintenance required for achieving targets* while

discussing his involvement in purchasing new machines to achieve targets. Another manager discussed the *need to encourage workers to achieve targets, while another one discussed his involvement in purchasing machines and developing the factory's infrastructure as a prerequisite for targets.*

These practices reflect the personal dispositions which have led to the individual practices. As such, the manager who mentioned encouraging the workers to achieve targets was keen on becoming a 'person for workers.' On the other hand, the manager who stressed machine maintenance has a background in mechanics, while the manager who emphasized the need for purchasing machines and developing the infrastructure had previous working experience at a Sri Lankan-based multinational company with high-standard infrastructure.

The organisational practice of conducting meetings and having functions was perceived by three managers as; *meetings as Quality Circles, meeting for encouraging worker interactions, and meetings as time-consuming tasks.* When analyzing the individual disposition of these three managers, it could be identified that the above perceptions are linked with the expert knowledge and experience on LMS, willingness to be a person of workers, and need of meeting deadlines, respectively.

The managers who have experienced difficulties with a previous rooster system used in duty allocation, perceive the team-based production and the internal arrangement for team-based production lines as an *easy way of allocating tasks.* Yet, another manager with previous working experience on LMS in a different context perceived the need for *separate dusty areas* irrespective of the present internal arrangement of team-based lines. A manager who has faced difficulties with the setup that prevailed before 2014, perceives the role of team leaders constructively as *they are capable of managing their teams.* Further, a manager handling automation projects in his factory considered the role of team leaders by highlighting the benefit they get by saying they are helping us concentrate *on other projects.* A manager who has expert knowledge and experience in LMS considered the distribution of gifts as a *way of giving and taking.* Another manager who has experience with the economic difficulties of workers stressed the poverty side of the workers as *workers are working for gifts because they are poor.*

Capital, dominants, and identity work: In line with individual practices and their justifications behind those practices we could identify different forms of identity work, including defining, claiming, sense-making, separating, maintaining, strengthening, accommodating, classifying, stabilizing, complying, joining, resisting, accepting, and supporting while shaping their identity by taking and occupying positions in the field during the struggle of implementing the new strategy. Further, the normalised practices in the field of CmixL at present reflected how managers are performing identity work of defining others in parallel to their strategy work. Everett (2002), discussing the struggles in a field with the theory of practice, explains how agents take and occupy positions in a field with the help of their capital during the struggles, with different behaviour of usurping, excluding and establishing a monopoly, over the mechanisms on which the field reconstruct and the types of power effects in it. In the CmixL field, different behaviours, and practices, could found out with reflected identity work through managers' interpretations.

Further, these behaviours and practices are possible within the limited regularities and are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are objectively adjusted to the logical characteristics of a particular field, whose objective future they anticipate (Bourdieu, 1990). According to this logical character of the field, the value granted to the various forms of capital varies from field to field and time (Gomez, 2015).

As such, at present, they mainly possess the cultural capital through knowledge and experience in LMS and knowledge about the production process and workers. Thus, as Everett (2002) has discussed, within the struggles in the field, two sets of agents are present: dominants and dominated. Accordingly, in the current field at CmixL, the bearers of the above-discussed cultural capital have become dominants by dominating the others.

Within the present field at CmixL, it is reflected that, the value granted to the cultural capital is prominent over the other two types. Accordingly, the knowledge and expertise in LMS and the knowledge of the contexts, including workers and production process, are highlighted as the cultural capital at CmixL. For instance, as one manager revealed, he has tolerated a lot of *hints passed* by others and how they *did not care* about him during the initial stage of LMS introduction (exemplifying the subordinated position of his at that time).

However, at present, due to his knowledge and experience on LMS, he was promoted to the level of group manager, exemplifying the results of the struggle that prevailed over time and the increased value of the capital (the experience in LMS) he possessed. This is evidenced to show how possession of particular type of capital has contributed for dominant positions which has also contribute for strategy implementation (strategy work) within the field and how the same capital has contributed for shaping of the identity (identity work).

Further to this type of promotions and salary benefits to managers, gifts/ monetary rewards for targets achievers for other non-managers were evidenced within the CmixL field at present.

Conclusion

The identity work is an inevitable dynamic of strategy work of managers in shaping the organizational strategy. In line with the purpose of the study, the identity work of the managers reflected through their strategy work at CmixL, during an implementation of a productivity improvement strategy, was empirically presented.

Further, the concepts in the theory of practice by Pierre Bourdieu, was used to support the argument of the study in showing the parallel production of strategy work and identity work in organisational context. Accordingly, the struggle of the organisational actors reflected through their identity work was concerned. The discussion also highlighted how different actors supporting the field of LMS discredited the form of capital in the previous setup by highlighting the drawbacks and limitations of the previous organisational field and valorise the species of capital they preferentially possess or support. Further, the link between the individual disposition (*habitus*) and organisational practices was also discussed by considering managers' past experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and actions to show the identity work linked with strategy work.

A study that focuses on the reconstruction of behaviour in the organizational context and organizational strategy requires longitudinal data. Yet the primary data for this study was collected over four months, i.e., from December 2020 to March 2021. Further, our retrospective focus was on the period before 2020. Accordingly, the data collection period can be considered short, which leads to

some limitations in accessing other study participants' perspectives on their organizational life. Further, the data-gathering period was amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to the conducting most of the interviews via the Zoom platform, adhering to the social distancing norm in the new normal. This may have impacted the limited interaction with the participants leading to limitations in understanding the perspectives of the study participants.

The findings of this study have significant managerial implications by showing how individual dispositions are linked to their individual practices, which, in turn, are linked to organisational practices needed for organisational strategy implementations (strategy work). However, in some instances the identity work for self and other(s) may be harmful to the organization as a whole as well as to the other organisational actors with possible negative consequences. Thus, practicing managers need to consider the possible dynamics of identity work. Further, by contributing to the literature on social-symbolic work, this study illustrates how two different social-symbolic work (identity work and strategy work) performed in parallel.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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