IDENTIFICATION AND WORKER RESPONSES TO WORKPLACE CHANGE: EVIDENCE FROM FOUR CASES IN INDIA

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This article uses ethnographic and interview data about four cases in two work settings in India to examine identification as a factor in workers' reactions to workplace change. Novel technology and management practices are frequently introduced into work settings as the world of work changes. Workers tend to cooperate more with some workplace changes than with others. The previous employment relations literature has invoked interests, cultural values, and worker power to explain workers' responses to change. This article introduces an additional factor: whether a change fosters or impairs workers' identification with their work. The author examines identification at three levels—occupational, organizational, and that of the work itself—and finds that workers are more likely to cooperate with workplace change that protects and fortifies their pre-existing sources of identification.

The world of work is dynamic; workers are continually expected to adjust to change introduced by employers or governments. This workplace change can take the form of new technologies, new management practices, or new policies or regulations governing work. Workers respond to such change with varying levels of enthusiasm, and more positively at some times than at others. It is crucial to understand *when* workers respond positively, since implementing change typically entails significant investments of time, money, and effort.

Existing theories in employment relations cite interests, cultural values, and worker power as the primary determinants of whether workers cooperate with or resist change. I study four cases of workplace change in two work

settings. Within each setting, one instance of change met with some cooperation; the other met with resistance. Even though the existing explanations could have some merit, they do not fully explain the variation in workers' responses that I document across my cases. Thus, these work settings offer an opportunity to examine what else might account for workers' differing reactions to change.

I argue that, alongside the factors discussed in the employment relations literature, we need to pay attention to the role of *identification*. Identification can be defined as the state of personally valuing one's work as an end in itself, and defining oneself in terms of one's work. Organizational behavior scholars have highlighted that workers can identify with three distinct aspects of their work: the occupation, the organization, or the work itself. I argue that workplace changes that foster identification, at any of the three levels, are more likely to be accepted, whereas those that impair identification are more likely to be rejected.

This article relies on qualitative data drawn from ethnographic observation and interviews with workers who experienced workplace change. My data come from two work settings in India: handicraft and garment production. The cases I study are multidimensional but advance the goal of building theory on workers' responses to change. The article makes two contributions to employment relations research on how workers respond to change. First, it unpacks the influence of identification on workers' reactions to change, demonstrating that factors other than interests, cultural values, and worker power can help explain whether workers are likely to cooperate with change. Second, it distinguishes three sources of identification and shows that their prevalence can vary both within and across settings. The article concludes by highlighting that organizations ought to pay close attention to the prevailing array of identification when implementing workplace change.

Workplace Change

Workplace change can entail new technology, such as performance-tracking tools or high-tech machinery (Barley 1986; Milkman and Pullman 1991; Aronowitz and DiFazio 1994; Vallas 2003); new management practices, such as flexible work arrangements or lean production practices (Appelbaum and Batt 1994; Osterman 1994; Smith 1997; Distelhorst, Hainmueller, and Locke 2016); or new policies, resulting from new state programs or modifications to labor regulations (Campbell and Brosnan 1999; Ranganathan 2013). These changes can be initiated by governments, industry associations, or employers for a variety of reasons that include reducing costs, improving efficiency, and adhering to global norms or best practices. Irrespective of the motive, the changes affect workers' day-to-day work lives in their respective workplaces. Sometimes these changes are readily adopted by workers; at other times, they are more likely to be met with resistance (Hampson, Ewer, and Smith 1994; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, and Davis 2003).

Existing Explanations for Workers' Reactions to Workplace Change

Employment relations, labor sociology, and management scholars offer three key explanations to account for variation in workers' responses to change. In particular, these streams suggest that workers' responses can be motivated by their interests, cultural values, and power. In this section, I elaborate on each of these explanations.

Material Interests

Workers' own interests play a central role in how they think about and respond to workplace change (Osterman 1995; Liu, Guthrie, Flood, and MacCurtain 2009). Change that entails material or reputational benefits tends to be met with cooperation, whereas change that is accompanied by deprivation of benefits or even job loss tends to be met with resistance. The introduction of occupational licensing, for example, has generally won support because licensed workers earn more than their unlicensed counterparts (see, e.g., Kleiner and Krueger 2010, 2013; Gittleman, Klee, and Kleiner 2018). By contrast, industrial restructuring accompanied by layoffs and an erosion of working conditions has often met with resistance among factory workers (see, e.g., Lee 2007; Parsons 2013; Jung 2017).

Sometimes organizations link adoption of change to wages, through practices such as wage premiums and bonuses (Holman, Batt, and Holtgrewe 2007), to secure workers' cooperation. Osterman (1994) documented that some organizations have introduced creative pay systems and other economic inducements to incentivize workers to adapt to innovative work practices such as job rotation, quality circles, and total quality management. A large employment relations literature on high-performance work systems similarly describes complementarity between cooperation with change and incentives, particularly job security, high relative pay, and performance-linked bonuses (see, e.g., Appelbaum and Berg 2001; Shin, Taylor, and Seo 2012).

Organizations can also shape workers' responses to workplace change with levers that affect workers' interests and well-being indirectly. Some evidence reveals bullying in conjunction with workplace change; in such cases, workers might cooperate with change out of fear of retaliation or threats to their reputation (D'Cruz, Noronha, and Beale 2014). Similarly, declining job security in an industry has been associated with greater cooperation with workplace change because workers fear unemployment if they refuse to cooperate (Cappelli et al. 1997).

Cultural Values

Cultural values can also shape how workers think about and respond to workplace change: A change acceptable in one culture may not be readily tolerated in another country or culture. The management and employment relations literatures examine the roles of both national and organizational cultural values (Westney 1987; Reay, Golden-Biddle, and Germann 2006).

With respect to national culture, for example, in a comparative study of automobile factories, Jürgens and Krzywdzinski (2016) found that the introduction of individual performance-based pay encountered resistance in Russia but acceptance in China. In Russia, where during the Soviet period supervisors had often treated employees arbitrarily, employees doubted that supervisors would award performance-based pay fairly. In China, by contrast, prevailing cultural values—possibly including the influence of the Communist Party—fostered a positive attitude toward managers, and thus trust that employees would be fairly compensated for their performance.[1]

The culture of an organization (or even an industry) can also shape employees' response to workplace change. In Italy, surgeons were more receptive to adopting robotic surgery when they viewed doing so as in keeping with the distinctive cultural traits of their organization (Compagni, Mele, and Ravasi 2015). By contrast, 3M employees who viewed the exacting planning associated with adoption of Six Sigma practices as endangering 3M's "core values" expressed their frustration (Canato, Ravasi, and Phillips 2013). Discussing culture at the industry level, McBride (2008) and Vallas (2003) asserted that the successful introduction of high-performance work systems depends on the feasibility of integrating the systems into stable cultures within an industrial sector that embeds employment relationships.

Worker Power

The amount of power that workers exercise in an organization can further determine how readily they accept a change. Workers who lack power are unlikely to be in a position to resist adoption of a change. For example, workers employed in sweatshop work environments have little opportunity to resist workplace change, either actively or passively (Kuruvilla 2018). Granting workers some power—either through external entities such as unions or through internal organizational structures—can facilitate two-way communication and worker input in the design of the change.

Despite a persistent belief that workers who wield power through unions always resist new technologies to protect work processes that benefit their members (Murray 2010; Litwin 2013, 2017), a number of employment relations studies have found that worker power exercised through formal institutions such as unions or works councils can accelerate adoption of new technologies. Collective representation can help buffer new practices' negative effects on employee well-being by taking employees' interests into account (Lévesque and Murray 2005). For example, the introduction of organizational change in the United Kingdom was associated with lower job-related anxiety as well as positive effects on productivity among employees working in unionized workplaces (Bryson, Forth, and Kirby 2005; Bryson, Barth, and Dale-Olsen 2013).

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[1]Business-school cases offer additional examples of the role of national culture in workplace. See in particular Pucik and Xin (2010) on Haier, and Bartlett and O'Connell (1988) on Lincoln Electric.

Workers could also wield power through internal employee-involvement structures and processes that ensure two-way feedback between those who design an organization's strategy and those who implement it (Avgar, Litwin, and Pronovost 2012). Some evidence suggests that organizations whose employees are primed with knowledge and resources prior to the implementation of workplace change enjoy more success. For example, the positive effects on performance of introducing health-information technologies were more pronounced at clinics that achieved higher levels of employee involvement (Litwin 2011). Similarly, patient-centered care (PCC) in the United Kingdom was more successfully implemented at hospitals that had previously adopted high-involvement work practices (Avgar, Givan, and Liu 2011).

This article focuses on four cases of workplace change, two each in two different work settings. In each setting, one change met with some acceptance and the other was rejected. As I will show in the Findings section, the existing explanations of interests, cultural values, and worker power do not appear to fully account for the worker responses I observed. In both settings, however, it was salient that workers identified with various aspects of their work lives. Could this identification have affected their responses? There is some evidence that change efforts can be accompanied by framing that equates the desired change with the prevailing type of identification, suggesting that identification might matter in influencing workers' responses to change (Bartunek 1993; Chreim 2002). Next, I review the organizational behavior literature on identification to explore this construct that has the potential to advance employment relations scholarship on workers' responses to change.

Identification as an Additional Explanation

Scholars have defined identification with an entity or a domain as "the sense of its being a part of one's self-definition" (Steele 1997: 613). Defining oneself in terms of a collective or a role can entail willingness to enact its identity and to act in its best interests even at one's own expense (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008). Identification thus "engages more than our cognitive self-categorization and our brains, it engages our hearts" (Harquail 1998: 225). Studying identification matters because it is a process by which people define themselves, communicate that definition to others, and use it to navigate their work lives and personal lives.[2]

In organizational behavior scholarship, three conceptualizations of identification have proven particularly influential over the past 20 or so years: identification with one's work, one's occupation, and one's organization (Vough 2012).

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[2]Identification entails a visceral connection absent from other attachment constructs (such as meaning and calling on the one hand and job crafting and job satisfaction on the other). Uniquely, a highly identified person views the collective or role as tantamount to the self (Ashforth et al. 2008).

Identification with the Work

Identification with work can be defined as an attachment to one's tasks that is so intense that one defines oneself in terms of their work (Tweedie and Holley 2016). Such identification develops in the course of performing one's work tasks (Cartwright and Homes 2006; Pratt, Pradies, and Lepisto 2013; Umney 2019).[3] The concept of identification originated with Hegel ([1807] 1977) and Marx ([1844] 1964), both of whom conceived of working as, in part, an act of self-creation, in which work activity both expresses and realizes individuals' capabilities. The paradigmatic worker identified with their work is the master artisan, whose skills and creative powers are realized in the product of his or her labor. However, identification with work is not restricted to specific activities (such as skilled manual labor); it can encompass any work that is experienced as a labor of love, that workers perform well for its own sake, and that produces one's self even as it produces an object (Honneth 1995; Sennett 2008; Redding 2012; Ekman 2013). Scholars have documented that individuals who identify with their work display characteristic work-related attitudes and behaviors; for example, they work harder and have lower levels of absenteeism (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz 1997; Ranganathan 2018a).

Occupational Identification

Identification with one's occupation has been defined as "close familial bonds . . . linking a worker to the larger community" of individuals who perform the same kind of work (Pratt et al. 2013: 179; Ibarra 1999; Kreiner, Ashforth, and Sluss 2006). Such bonds need not be literally familial, or based on legally binding relationships; they could draw on affiliations with practitioners of the same occupation that are familial in nature (Vough 2012; Caza and Creary 2016). Traditionally, most (though not all) occupations represent specific occupational identities (Nelson and Irwin 2014) and are simultaneously inclusive (in the sense that they promote solidarity) and exclusive (in that they rely on occupational boundaries and restrictions on entry) (Huws 2006). Individuals who are highly identified with their occupations experience "oneness" with their occupational group (Elsbach 1999; Pratt and Foreman 2000; Hekman, Bigley, Steensma, and Hereford 2009) and frequently sacrifice personal gain to maintain membership in their community (Thatcher, Doucet, and Tuncel 2003; Stern 2004; Anteby, Chan, and DiBenigno 2016).

Organizational Identification

Identification with an organization has been defined as a "perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization" (Mael and Ashforth

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[3]Burawoy (1979) described workers who develop identification with their work by playing games in the workplace.

1992: 109) that causes members to perceive themselves as sharing qualities and faults, successes and failures, and even destinies with their organizations (Mael and Tetrick 1992; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Pratt 1998; Elsbach 1999; Haslam, Van Knippenberg, Platow, and Ellemers 2003). It is this perception of the oneness (Ashforth and Mael 1989) of the self-concept (Pratt 1998) and the organization that characterizes identification: A person who identifies with an organization defines himself or herself at least partly in terms of what it is thought to represent and would feel a deep existential loss if a separation were to occur (Besharov 2014; Petriglieri 2015; Bednar, Galvin, Ashforth, and Hafermalz 2020). Organizational identification has been shown to have important implications on outcomes such as turnover intentions at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Sharma and Dayal 1975; Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995; Mael and Ashforth 1995; Pratt 1998; Kreiner and Ashforth 2004; Van Knippenberg, Martin, and Tyler 2006; Clark, Gioia, Ketchen, and Thomas 2010).

Given the far-reaching implications of identification on diverse outcomes ranging from absenteeism to turnover highlighted by organizational behavior researchers, it is likely that identification at each of these levels will shape workers' responses to change. Yet, employment relations scholarship has paid little attention to the role of identification in theorizing about workers' differing reactions to change. I fill this important gap by clarifying how different forms of identification might affect whether workers cooperate with or resist change.

Research Design, Settings, and Methods

This article relies on comparative qualitative field data about four workplace changes across two settings. Calls for more frequent use of such data in the study of employment relations have noted that it can identify mechanisms to better explain labor and employment trends (Anteby and Bechky 2016), and that "comparative methods are more likely to generate novel theories . . . [and] show how the presence or absence of conditions contribute to a relationship or outcomes or how processes unfold" (Bechky and O'Mahony 2016: 169).

I focus on two work settings in India: handicraft and garment production. These settings are dissimilar: handicraft is a largely male craft setting characterized by autonomy over work; garment production is a largely female mass-manufacturing setting with significant supervisory control. Furthermore, identification with work is a hallmark of craft work but not of low-wage production work (Thompson 1983). As Locke and Thelen (1995) observed, however, it can be extremely valuable to compare apples and oranges, in terms of field settings, and to engage in contextualized comparisons. In fact, a benefit of studying these settings is the opportunity to identify comparable processes in settings in which one would not expect

similarities, thus increasing the generalizability of the study (Seawright and Gerring 2008).

In each setting, I investigate how workers responded to two changes. The rapid pace of change in management practices and in government policies governing work in India provides convenient opportunities to study multiple changes in the same setting. In both cases, the two changes differed in a range of ways but the workers remained the same.

Settings: Handicraft and Garment Production

My first work setting was Channapatna, a handicraft cluster in the state of Karnataka in southern India. Its 5,000 artisans, most of whom are male, produce handmade wooden and lacquerware objects such as jewelry and toys. The artisans earn $60 per month on average and most have only a primary-school education.

I conducted eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in Channapatna in 2011 and 2012. I spent three days a week in the field and the rest of my time in Bangalore typing field notes, writing memos, and interpreting the emerging data. Fieldwork included intensive observation of the artisans' day-to-day work. I also conducted 40 in-depth, face-to-face interviews with artisans, traders, and government officials in Channapatna and Bangalore. These interviews were conducted in English, Kannada, or Hindi and averaged one hour in length.

The second work setting was a garment factory—specifically, the largest factory owned by one of India's leading manufacturers of branded formal wear. The company reports average annual revenue of $400 million; the factory produces on average 100,000 pairs of trousers and 50,000 jackets per month. Its 2,000 workers are predominantly female; they have usually attended only primary school and earn approximately $100 per month.

Two research assistants and I conducted 18 months of ethnographic observation at the factory between April 2014 and September 2015. The ethnography was open-ended; we sought to understand inductively how production was managed at the factory, various organizational practices, and how workers viewed their work. To capture a range of experiences, my research team conducted 120 in-depth interviews with employees at all levels of the factory's hierarchy—workers, supervisors, and upper management. These interviews were conducted in Tamil, Kannada, and English and lasted, on average, 30 minutes.

Comparative Analysis

I began by analyzing the data collected in each setting to ensure that the detailed, rich data on both contexts contributed to theory building (Vaughan 2004). Analysis of field notes and interview transcripts was performed using Atlas.ti and Excel; passages of text were coded to designate the various ways in which workers interpreted the structural transformations

they were experiencing.[4] I also wrote multiple memos in an effort to analyze puzzling observations. In this way, theorizing and analysis of the qualitative data proceeded iteratively, as is characteristic of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

I then drafted memos on themes that emerged. During analysis, I noted similarities and differences between cases, often using tables to compare constructs across settings and to foster comparison. These grounded theoretical methods (Glaser and Strauss 1967) encourage the mining of differences to build theoretical explanations.

Findings

Four Cases of Workplace Change and Workers' Responses

While performing ethnographic observation, I studied workers in two very different work settings experiencing unanticipated, top-down workplace changes. Here, I describe the changes I observed and workers' responses to them.

Handicraft: ID Cards and Industrial Crafts Park

While conducting fieldwork in Channapatna, I observed the introduction of photo-identification cards in the craft work setting. The ID cards were issued to artisans at no cost by the central government (the Office of the Development Commissioner of Handicrafts within the Ministry of Textiles). The card was intended predominantly to serve as a form of identification and to verify artisans' status as skilled craftsmen. It was also supposed to be used to access a range of benefits, including some reserved specifically for artisans, such as health insurance, an artisan-specific credit card, and opportunities to take part in fairs and exhibitions across the country.

I also observed the construction of the Channapatna Crafts Park, facilitated by the state, to house a variety of new woodworking machines.[5] The Crafts Park was a mechanized facility for the production of high-quality goods that meet international specifications for design, quantity, and size. The machinery was imported from Germany, Austria, China, and other countries. An administrator described one machine: "To give you an example, in one minute the auto-lathe machine makes thirty to forty beads. The cost is reduced from Rs.4 to barely Rs.0.22 for a bead." He explained further that "artisans have to bring their own seasoned wood, give the orders and collect the finished products; everything will be done by the machine itself." Park administrators predicted that the machines would help artisans cut their costs, focus on higher-value-added activities, and export high-quality goods in large volumes, thus lifting themselves out of poverty.

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[4]Note that quotations in the Findings section phrased in the third person (rather than the first person) are from my field notes rather than interview transcripts.

[5]For more about this initiative, see Ranganathan and Doering (2018).

How did artisans respond to these workplace changes? The ID card met with widespread support among artisans. In my interviews, many of them proudly displayed their ID cards in mid-conversation, of their own accord. Workers told me that they and other artisans voluntarily visited a government office to obtain cards. According to interviews, ID cards were issued to approximately 5,000 artisans in the woodwares craft category. Given that slightly more than 5,000 artisans are in Channapatna, it appears that this initiative was accepted by nearly 100% of them. Artisans reported having put up with the inconvenience of waiting in long lines for cards.

By contrast, workers in the same context seemed to reject the Crafts Park. A trader who had closely observed the construction and opening of the facility said, "The machines are imported and are of very good quality. However, the artisans are not . . . using them at all." Government officials estimated that, because of the artisans' low engagement, the park operated at only 10% capacity. When the park had been open for several months, one government official lamented that "business is yet to pick up among artisans." An artisan reported that his counterparts "even tried to strike against the Craft Parks . . . to publicly display [their] rejection of this government initiative." The media has continued to describe the Crafts Park as a failure, given limited artisanal engagement (Chacko and Varier 2015; Tripathi 2016).

Thus the two changes met with very different reactions. A year later, while doing fieldwork at a garment factory, I again observed two workplace changes and a spectrum of worker responses.

Garment Production: RFID Technology and Kaizens

The first change I observed while doing fieldwork at a garment factory was the introduction of radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology that tracked workers' individual work performance in real time.[6] The factory management felt the need for an IT-based production recording system. An industrial engineer explained that the technology "helps management to track pieces and bottlenecks." Work-in-process garments were tagged with RFID tags; workers were instructed to scan a garment's tag on the RFID scanner newly installed at their workstations prior to working on it. The system made individual productivity readily evident to management and to workers.

I also observed the introduction of a Japanese practice—*kaizen*, or continuous improvement—intended to improve production processes continuously. The head of the factory had recently visited a Toyota plant he described as "a dream manufacturing unit." This inspirational visit prompted him to invite a group from Japan to visit his factory and introduce the practice of kaizen. At daily 10-minute meetings with team leaders,

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[6]For more about this change, see Ranganathan and Benson (2020).

workers were encouraged to suggest improvements (known as kaizens) based on the previous day's work. The proposals were evaluated and the best were monetarily rewarded.

How did the workers react to these changes? A substantial proportion accepted the RFID garment-tracking technology and scanned tags without complaint. A manager marveled at how smoothly the technology had been adopted. A worker who agreed remarked, "I've adapted to the system and like it!" Another said, "I have integrated scanning the RFID tags into my work flow. . . . It's seamless now." My data reveal, however, that while the technology received support from one contingent of workers, another contingent was less supportive. These workers used the technology grudgingly. "I miss the days before this machine was installed," said one such worker. Another worker said, "I really don't like it. I use it because I have to, but I would rather not." In this way, this change was met with divergent responses.

The introduction of kaizens was far less widely supported by the garment-factory workers. Data indicate that the bulk of kaizens came from a small number of people; few other workers submitted ideas for improvements. A senior executive agreed: "In a group of one hundred operators, it has never been a challenge to receive 100 kaizens a month—but only some fifteen to twenty of the one hundred operators seem to suggest all the 100 kaizens." A worker confided that most of her colleagues disliked giving kaizens. "I really don't enjoy the process of thinking of kaizens and sharing them. Neither do my line-mates," she told me. "But they keep asking for kaizens."

Three Sources of Identification that Influence Workers' Responses to Change

The data show that workers at both settings cooperated to varying degrees with the workplace changes they experienced. My analysis suggests that their responses were influenced by the perceived interaction between the changes and their identification with their work. In particular, I found that workers cooperated with a workplace change when it fostered identification and resisted it when it disrupted such identification.

In keeping with the literature, I uncovered three distinct sources of identification in my data: identification with one's occupation, with one's organization, and with one's work itself. Table 1 illustrates each with quotes from my data. The remainder of this section uses data from both settings to describe each source of identification in detail, specifically highlighting how it interacts with the workplace changes discussed above.

Occupational Identification: ID cards

I found artisans in Channapatna to be tied to their occupation by region, religion, and gender. Channapatna is a small town in the south of India. Its mostly male, predominantly Muslim artisans inherited the woodcraft trade from their fathers. Other family members also participated in the

Table 1. Three Sources of Identification

Sources of identification	Setting	Sample quotes
Occupational identification	Handicraft	"These people [other artisans] are my brothers. We may not be connected by blood but we connect with each other and grew up together knowing we would be artisans. . . . That binds us."–Artisan
Work identification	Handicraft	"The art and skill involved in my work is beautiful. . . . The lacquering work brings me joy . . . true and pure joy."–Artisan
	Garment production	"There's many, many operations on the shop floor here, but I've been doing the same operation for many years and it's now a part of me! My operation of attaching a sleeve to the jacket body is difficult, and I love seeing the sleeve/headroll attach on each piece I make with no wrinkles."–Garment worker
Organizational identification	Garment production	"This company has given me so much, . . . everything I have. Earlier I had nothing. Now I wake up each morning excited to be going to work at this company."–Garment worker

production of wood handicrafts. Growing up together in a craft production system, and sharing ascriptive characteristics, the artisans of Channapatna develop strong bonds with each other and a strong sense of identification with their community.

One artisan told me, "I have experience of thirty-two years in this line. Before that, my father and my uncle were in this line. This is our family business. This is everyone's family business in Channapatna. We are all in it together." Another artisan added, "Yes, this occupation is hereditary, but you don't have to learn from your father only. People see others, and learn, and start doing the craft. Everybody is introduced like this." Yet another artisan, after listing all his teachers as a gesture of respect, said, "I had nine *gurus* [teachers] in all, including my father. Under this *guru parampara* [system of apprenticeship to a teacher], teaching is always free. But while learning from a particular *guru*, he becomes like your father for those years. This system has helped to sustain deep bonds that artisans have with other artisans in the community."

I posit that Channapatna artisans supported and embraced the ID card because it fostered their sense of identification with and attachment to their craft community. The ID card had the effect, I found, of strengthening artisans' psychological bond to fellow artisans locally, and to woodworking artisans elsewhere in India whom they might never meet. One artisan described the card as a testament to his "love for his occupation." Another artisan, who received his ID card after a three-month wait, was ecstatic: "I view it as a New Year's gift for me and my entire community from the government of India." A third said that "every time he sees the card, he is

reminded of his place in the artisanal community . . . which makes him feel part of something bigger than himself." Another artisan remarked that the "card will give national identity to the artisans across India, and we will all be covered under a national database . . . and will be endowed with recognition and status as artisans."

The card seemed to have particular meaning for the artisans given their dwindling numbers in Channapatna. "Earlier, there were eight thousand people in Channapatna and now there are four thousand," one artisan lamented. "Even though we are small workers, we want to save this 150-year-old industry. This card reminds me of how proud I am to be an artisan in Channapatna and to be working with all these skilled people." Another artisan elaborated: "Now I am already fifty-seven years old. I will work for eight more years and will then retire and go to Medina on a pilgrimage. For the next generation of Channapatna artisans, it [the ID card] is very important. It will remind them of their place and will remind them that, together, their goal is to make sure that Channapatna has identification on the world map."

Identification with Work: Industrial Crafts Park and RFID Technology

Handicraft. The data suggest that artisans also identified strongly with the work itself. Artisanal creation in Channapatna adheres to a craft production system: Artisans exercise control over each process in the value chain, from acquiring the raw wood to crafting it on a lathe to polishing and painting it. This deep involvement in the production process promotes identification with work. Artisans frequently described "loving the work" and referred to their products as "babies"; more than one referred to their craft as "work for the soul."

For example, one artisan said, "I love this work, even though it doesn't pay that well. And all I want is to do good work . . . and to have the opportunity to keep making more and more." Another artisan asserted that "artisans do their work very honestly and treat their work as God." He continued, "People carry that kind of devoted attitude toward their work. That's why you see people cleaning their machines in the morning and evening . . . because they treat their machinery also as God." When I asked whether they ever got bored, an artisan said, "You don't get bored by working on these kind of things, because every time you are making new and different things." He showed me some jewelry he had just made. "This is a whole set that I love making, earrings and necklace," he told me. "I also sometimes make bangles and hairpins as part of this set." Another artisan spoke more generally: "The end is not making money. It's the deep satisfaction this gives you."

My data suggest that workers resisted the imported woodworking machines at the Channapatna Crafts Park because the machines depersonalized the work and restricted their creative control. One artisan pointed out that,

performing his work by hand, he had "control over every piece and its shape and its color. I love doing this work." Another declared, "I would never work with the machines. . . . I earn little, but making the products with my own hands is the little joy I get. . . . I wouldn't give this up for anything else." Traditionally, the artisans did not make detailed sketches of their products prior to crafting them; their creativity depended on the ability to make real-time modifications. But executing jobs at the Crafts Park required them to provide detailed plans of their products in advance, undermining their creative control and thus their identification with their work.

Artisans in Channapatna organized a strike to protest the Crafts Park. In response to the strike, newspaper articles reported that the Crafts Park disrupted artisans' long-standing production process. *The Bangalore Mirror* charged that the Crafts Park "lacks an integral vision. . . . What we see now is a mass-produced, export-oriented production that is popular, but lacks creativity and the subtle finish of this craft" (Jayaram 2016). In interviews, artisans asserted that they did not oppose technology in general; they objected only to technology that impeded their relationship with their work. Several artisans independently illustrated this point by recounting that the electric lathe—in common use in Channapatna—had been introduced by Japanese visitors a few decades ago. Prior to their visit, artisans had used hand lathes. However, upon seeing the potential of the electric lathe to promote efficiency and advance their craft, they enthusiastically adopted the new technology. One artisan summed up the point: "I don't want to use tools that compromise my craft or don't allow me to work with my hands. If I want to make something five millimeters thick, I want to have the pleasure of making it five millimeters thick. If a new technology allows me to earn more without interfering with my work, I'd be the first one to adopt it."

Garment Production. Few people would expect garment workers to identify with their work as artisans do. Garment work is widely understood to be routine and tedious. Indeed, a large proportion of the workers I encountered did not identify with their work and called it "boring" and "repetitive." But I also observed workers who appeared to identify with their work and who referred to their jobs as "fulfilling" and "challenging."

Upon probing further, I found that the complexity of the operations that workers performed dictated their relationships with their work: When the operation was simple, they did not identify with it; when the operation was complex, workers took pride in it. For example, a worker who sewed intricate internal pockets declared, "I have a strong interest in my operation. It's my craft to sew it each time without wrinkles." By contrast, a worker hemming pants legs said, "This work is so boring, I could do it in my sleep."

I further found that relationships with the work governed how workers responded to the introduction of RFID technology to track their productivity. Specifically, those who performed simple work welcomed the RFID technology. I posit that they may have done so because the new technology

fostered a sense of identification with work by "gamifying" it: Workers could track how many pieces they had completed and try to surpass their previous day's performance. One worker said, "I like pressing the various buttons [on the machine], and this makes the work fun." Another praised the RFID scanner for "keeping her interested in the work." Yet another told us "that the last hour was her time to push the maximum number of pieces" and that she "relished seeing her RFID machine at this time."

By contrast, those who performed complex work seemed less welcoming to the new technology. Observation suggested that such workers saw the RFID technology as a hindrance rather than a game. They viewed RFID as unnecessarily controlling and as disruptive to their rhythm and their pre-existing identification with their work. A worker who performed a complex lapel-seam operation said, "My work is critical and difficult to do . . . having industrial engineers observing while work is being done would make even a normally fast operator slow down." Another such worker said, "Before the machine was introduced, I was able to allocate my time on my own . . . but now the countdown has added additional work pressure."

Thus, in a setting in which workers were all subject to the same change, and to the same economic and cultural considerations, varying degrees of identification with work affected the responses of different workers. Those for whom the new technology fostered greater identification with the work supported it; those for whom the technology impeded identification were less supportive. This pattern provides evidence for identification with work as a decisive factor in workers' responses to workplace change.

Organizational Identification: Kaizens

My data reveal that many workers at the factory also identified strongly with the company and with the work it afforded them. The female garment workers whom I observed were first-time workers; prior to employment at the factory, they had not been members of the workforce. Garment factories in India often hire women without prior work experience as entry-level sewing-machine operators (Ranganathan 2018b). The women at this factory were grateful to the company for offering them employment and financial security. "I love my job, my co-workers, and my work environment," one worker said. "I would do anything for this company." Another said, "I like working at this company. . . . They provide a holistic work environment. . . . There are no aspects that I dislike about this company."

The factory also organized events that promoted identification with the company: an annual health camp at which workers received free health checkups, celebrations of major religious festivals (important to the workers) on the factory premises, and an annual celebration of the company's history (complete with games and food) that many workers eagerly anticipated. Workers participated in all these functions enthusiastically, "happily obliging for photographs." These events prompted workers to view their employer as

"caring," "benevolent," and "the best." As one worker declared, "In my eyes, my company can do no wrong."[7] The organization was also considered a fair and even-handed employer, further fueling workers' identification with it. "They pay my wages on time; they correctly calculate my overtime," one worker explained. "Many other companies don't do this."

Observation suggests that workers resisted the introduction of kaizens because it disrupted identification with the organization. "I dislike looking for faults,"[8] one worker said. "It makes me not like my work. Instead, if I don't look for faults, I don't see any faults and like my organization." As she explained, "Kaizens are essentially faults, or things that are not working that can be improved." Another worker said, "I'm happy with the status quo—I like my operation and the company. I don't understand this need to continuously be on alert mode and think about 'what mistakes could I fix?' . . . This makes me critical of my work, and I'm not comfortable with that." A senior executive commented: "I don't think they like to pick out things that are not working in the organization. . . . They want to hold onto the image that this organization is perfect." Thus, I posit that this change in workplace practices encountered resistance from garment workers because it subverted identification with their organization.

Putting It All Together and Addressing Alternatives

Table 2 summarizes the findings discussed above, which show that the mechanism of identification influences workers' responses to workplace change. When a change fosters identification with work, or with the occupation or the organization, it is accepted; when it interferes with such identification, it is resisted.

Thus, I am drawing on organizational behavior theory to offer a new, micro-level explanation for why workplace changes are sometimes accepted and sometimes resisted: namely, how a particular change affects workers' identification. This finding advances employment relations research on how workers respond to change. In particular, I suggest that the outcomes I observed cannot be explained by invoking the conventional employment relations explanations of interests, cultural values, and worker power.

For example, those explanations cannot fully account for the Channapatna artisans' embrace of ID cards and resistance to the Crafts Park. If the artisans were driven only by their interests, they should have cooperated with both changes: They were quite poor, and both changes promised economic reward.

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[7]Though workers were highly identified with the organization, their relationships with their supervisors varied. One worker went on to clarify that, though the company was "good," her supervisor was "bad."

[8]This interpretation of kaizens as "faults" or "mistakes" could be unique to this organization and to the way that the practice was introduced to its workers. Over time, kaizens became associated with mistakes that ought to be rectified rather than opportunities for improvement.

Table 2. Workers' Responses to Workplace Change

Setting	Workplace change	Workers' response	Mechanism	Sample quotes
Handicraft	ID card	Cooperation	Fosters identification with occupation	"I like the ID card. . . . It gives me *pehchan* [an identity], which brings me closer to my fellow brothers [artisans]."–Artisan
	Industrial Crafts Park	Resistance	Impedes identification with work	"The government is wrong if they think that we will make the products only with machines, not using labor at all. . . . We even tried to strike against the Crafts Park."–Artisan
Garment production	RFID tracking technology	Cooperation	Fosters identification with work	"My work was boring before. I am very positive about RFID. . . . I can regularly check my production numbers, and that is fun."–Garment worker on pant line
		Resistance	Impedes identification with work	"I don't like this watchman RFID machine. . . . I liked getting lost in my operation before; now I feel like I'm being watched."–Garment worker on jacket line
	Kaizens	Resistance	Impedes identification with organization	"The bulk of kaizens come from a small number of people. Other people don't give kaizens. . . . They are satisfied with their job; they don't want to constantly look for flaws."–Garment worker

Notes: RFID, radio-frequency identification.

The ID cards promised access to benefits such as insurance,[9] and the Crafts Park machines were meant to increase exports of their products. As for cultural values, the artisans valued their anonymity and privacy and disliked interference of any kind. Past government-sponsored changes had, in the words of one artisan, ruined "their heritage and their craft." Thus a cultural-values perspective would predict rejection of both changes. With respect to worker power, a subset of the artisans who had organized a woodcraft association mobilized their collective resources to strike in opposition to the Crafts Park. Thus, the artisans had the power to resist both changes, but rejected one and accepted the other.

Nor can interests, cultural values, and worker power alone explain garment workers' responses. Jointly, these three perspectives would predict garment workers' support of both changes. With respect to interests, workers should have cooperated with both changes to protect their jobs, stave off any threat of being fired, and avoid the risk of creating conflict in a

[9]Ironically, though the vast majority of artisans in Channapatna had obtained ID cards, few of those I interviewed had accessed any of the benefits available through the card. Artisans complained that "the government made it difficult to access the benefits."

desirable workplace. The factory even offered a small monetary reward for suggesting particularly valuable kaizens. That workers nevertheless resisted suggesting kaizens is an outcome that a purely interests-based perspective would not anticipate. As for cultural values, the organizational culture at the factory was dynamic: The company constantly tried out new programs and initiatives, and the workforce tended to rise to such challenges and to pride itself on its flexibility. The concepts of kaizen and RFID tracking should thus have been compatible with workers' values. Finally, workers at the garment factory enjoyed little power: They were not unionized and had few other nearby opportunities for formal employment. This scenario should predict acceptance of both changes.

The three explanations that the literature has offered—interests, cultural values, and worker power—cannot explain, singly or jointly, workers' responses. Hence, I posit that the actions of the artisans and garment workers cannot be understood without considering how each workplace change interacted with the identification they experienced.

Conclusion and Discussion

This article looks at how workers respond to workplace change. Drawing on ethnographic and interview data on four cases of change in two settings in India, I ask why workers sometimes embraced change and at other times resisted it. I argue that whether a change is accepted or resisted depends on how it interacts with workers' identification with their occupation, their organization, or the work itself.

Contributions to Employment Relations Scholarship on Workplace Change

This article offers two contributions to the employment relations literature on workplace change, building on important themes from labor sociology and management. First, employment relations research on implementation and adoption of workplace change has specified three conditions under which workers will support change: when change offers material or reputational benefits that advance workers' interests (Osterman 1994; Shin et al. 2012), when it is culturally resonant (Irawati 2011), and when workers have sufficient power to shape the trajectory of the change (Murray 2010; Litwin 2013, 2017). I propose an additional factor: That workers are more likely to cooperate with changes that foster identification with their work and less likely to cooperate with those that impede such identification. This research directly links macro-level changes with workers' micro-perceptions of value and identification in their work. Existing employment relations studies of workplace change do not address employee self-perceptions (e.g., professional and organizational identification) that may influence employees' reactions to change. My study highlights the potential usefulness of incorporating employee-identification variables in models that predict employee responses to new technology and other workplace changes.

Second, the article highlights three types of identification—identification with one's occupation, an organization, or the work itself—that can affect workers' reactions to change. I find that patterns of identification can vary within a given setting as well as across settings. For example, garment workers at the same factory varied in their level of identification with their work, depending on the operation they performed. Further, artisans in Channapatna identified strongly with their occupation, a pattern absent among garment workers. Thus, organizations should pay attention to the specifics of identification when implementing a workplace change. Irrespective of the form of identification, though, I find consistent patterns of cooperation with and resistance to workplace change. When a change fostered identification, it was likely to be met with support, but when it hindered identification, it was likely to receive some opposition.

Contributions to the Organizational Behavior Scholarship on Identification

This article also contributes to the organizational behavior literature on identification. Scholars have documented that individuals who identify with their work, occupation, or organization display particular work-related behaviors: They work long hours, for example, and rarely express turnover intentions (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997). I find that identification with work affects not merely individual worker decisions (such as their turnover or attendance decisions, for example) but can have aggregate effects resulting in the acceptance or rejection of broad occupational or organizational change. Existing research on identification has largely ignored its role in understanding the transformation of work practices, a phenomenon that is increasingly prevalent and whose success hinges on worker buy-in. Thus, this article builds on the rich history of scholarship on identification to bring workers back in to the study of workplace change.

Generalizability and Boundary Conditions

Though my data derive from a close study of two settings in India, I expect that the resulting theory will generalize to other contexts. Given rampant globalization, technological innovation, industrialization, and diffusion of management and consulting practices, workplace change is affecting many countries and work settings. This article offers a theory to help make sense of such change and to predict how workers will respond. Apart from the handicraft and garment settings in India described herein, other research offers some evidence of identification-related resistance to and cooperation with workplace change in other settings as well.

For example, in past research, I studied the introduction of new plumbing codes in India (Ranganathan 2013). Like handicraft, plumbing adheres to a craft production model: Young plumbers learn their skills by apprenticing to senior plumbers within the same close-knit community. Plumbers thus identify strongly with their occupation. I documented that plumbers rejected the

newly introduced Uniform Plumbing Code, which was seen as undermining the community-based learning system plumbers cherished, and thus impeded identification. Plumbers identified with learning the ropes from community "brothers," rather than a thousand-page document. Resistance to the plumbing code thus stemmed, at least in part, from the code's disruption of plumbers' identification with their occupation.

In co-authored research, I described the introduction at Indian call centers of "fun-culture" practices, such as organized sports leagues, TGIF events, and movie nights to make work "fun" (Ranganathan and Kuruvilla 2008). That study documented that workers seemed to cooperate and participated wholeheartedly in the events. Because they would have had difficulty finding jobs if not for the call centers, call-center workers identified strongly with their organizations, which offered them opportunities to earn well and to interact with the West. The workplace "fun" culture reinforced such organizational identification: Workers described loving the company even more than before. It seems that call-center workers embraced their organizations' fun practices in part because they fostered identification with the organization.

In non-Indian contexts, too, workers' responses to workplace changes reflect their relationship with their work. For example, when a US Fortune 500 retail chain rebranded its stores, workers who viewed the transformation as positively affecting their relationship with their work were more likely to cooperate with it (Sonenshein 2010). Musicians in Britain and France used the help of unions to resist objectives imposed on them by management that interfered with their own motivations (Umney and Coderre-LaPalme 2017). Cleaners in Australia resisted changes that undermined work quality (Tweedie and Holley 2016). Although the cleaners in this case study performed dirty and often demeaning work, they demonstrated a strong commitment to providing quality work and thus systematically subverted management controls in order to improve cleaning quality.

These hints from other studies suggest that identification is a widespread, real-world phenomenon, identifiable in workers' understandings of their work in diverse contexts and in both blue- and white-collar jobs among workers ranging from craft workers to professionals.[10] These diverse studies demonstrate the importance of identification with work, organizations, and occupations in explaining workers' responses to change in developing countries as well as in more advanced economies.

Future Research and Policy Implications

Ideally, this article will inspire more empirical research on adoption of workplace change, including studies that probe the role of identification in workers' responses to change while carefully considering alternative

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[10]I imagine we would also observe identification among some supervisory staff, small business owners, and entrepreneurs.

interpretations. Further, future work might build on the simple theoretical framework presented here. This article represents a preliminary and provisional exposition of the role of identification in workers' responses to change; future research should more fully and systematically investigate the different forms of identification and their implications. For example, apart from the sources of identification I have discussed, the identification literature suggests a plethora of possible nested and cross-cutting identities that a worker views as self-defining (Pratt 1998). It would be useful for future work to consider these additional loci of identification, as well as possible interactions between multiple identifications. Additionally, the identification literature describes identification as a process, the occurrence of which depends on a wide variety of contextual factors such as socialization processes (Dutton et al. 1994). Beyond the *state* of identification considered in this article, it would be useful to consider how this *process* of identification interacts with workplace change.

Additionally, this article does not consider changes undertaken by workers themselves; future research might examine how worker-initiated change unfolds. It might also look beyond the two extreme responses to change—support and resistance—that form the backbone of the theory presented here. It would be productive, for example, to distinguish between overt and covert resistance to change. It would also be useful to explore other channels of response, such as exit, voice, and loyalty, and variation in responses to change over time.

Future research could also explore intersections between factors that influence workers' responses to change. Umney and Coderre-LaPalme (2017) briefly considered the intersection between identification and worker power while exploring trade unions' ability to adjudicate meaning-of-work conflicts in response to change. Also, some workplace changes could be viewed as strengthening or weakening power, thus intensifying workers' response: For example, the ID cards issued to artisans in Channapatna might have been interpreted as a way of strengthening workers' power through prestige or occupational closure. Further exploration of the intersection between identification and power (and other explanatory factors) would advance scholarship, which to date has tended to consider single explanatory factors in isolation.

Finally, the theory outlined here has important policy ramifications. It suggests that to minimize failed initiatives, implementation of workplace change should be grounded in awareness of whether affected workers identify with their work, organizations, and occupations—and, if so, the likely effect of change on such identification.

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