

Changes in the Organizational Field of Howrah Foundries: Studies in Field Identity, Institutional Logic, and Governance Norms

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Abstract

The present thesis deals with the changes in the organizational field of Howrah foundries. It focuses on three important facets of changes in an organizational field, that is, changes in field identity, institutional logic and governance norms. The changes in each of these facets have been explored in three separate studies.

The *first study* contributes to the emerging area of research on field identity formation and change. Our findings suggest that identity custodians such as the professional and industry associations are crucial to the process of field identity formation. They not only organize the field members but also establish linkages with related organizations to forge an optimally distinct identity. In addition to identity formation, the current study also explores the dynamics of field identity fragmentation. Our findings suggest that entry of new members leads to strains in either the symbolic or instrumental aspects of field identity that eventually culminates in identity fragmentation. By symbolic aspect of identity, we mean those aspects of identity which arise in response to the question “Who we are?” Instrumental aspects, on the other hand, deal with those facets of identity that arise in response to the question “What we do?” The study further explicates the intermediary processes of identity drift and expansion. The identity drift in Howrah foundries took place as new members with symbolic characteristics differing from existing members entered the field. This resulted in formation of cliques around the symbolic dimension and eventual fragmentation of field identity. The subsequent two identity fragmentations were brought about by identity expansion. In one case, the new field members felt the need of distinct identity as the expanded identity had become unmanageable. In

another case, the old members felt the need for a separate identity as the expansion led to their under representation.

The *second study* examines the incorporation of “green” or ecological logic in the field of Howrah foundries. It suggests that industry associations perform important institutional work of incorporating the new ecological logic in the field. Although they may start as defenders of the status quo, they also show flexibility in coming to terms with new situations. Industry associations are important, specifically in the context of small scale industries, where individual organizations don’t have enough resources to incorporate ecological concerns. Our findings show that though the associations initially engaged in defensive institutional work, they latter performed collaborative work with outside members to solve the emergent problems and facilitated the transition to new order of things. This resulted in incorporation of the “green” logic in the field. The framing and translation of logic at the field level assigned specific meanings to it and instantiated it in form of technological artifacts. We refer to this elaboration of logic in terms of its specific discursive meanings and artifacts as artifactual framing. These changes reshaped the interaction between organizations and the ecology (natural environment) and altered the status quo in Howrah foundries ecological field. Ecological field here refers to organizational collectives, natural environment in which they are embedded and the pattern of interaction between them.

The *third study* explores the role of social movement within an organizational field and suggests that the social movement organizations play a crucial role in governing the field by bringing about periodic and incremental changes in field norms. The empirical context of the study is provided by trade union movement in the Howrah foundries. The findings suggest that trade unions play a dual role. They act as

social movement organization as well as a field governance actor. This duality of trade unions enabled us to explore the role of social movements in field governance. The findings show that social movements facilitate field governance by periodically mobilizing the members to challenge and change the existing norms. The interstitial nature of field governance actors, which have one foot inside the field and one foot outside, enables the process of field governance. The field governance actors leverage their external linkages to shape the dynamic field norms. In the current case, the field governance actor that is trade union was situated at the interstices of political and industrial field. It facilitated interaction of industrial field with political field through mechanisms of member exchange and resource sharing and leveraged them to change wage norms in the industrial field.

Overall the thesis points to several new mechanisms of field change such as identity fragmentation and artifactual framing. It further contributes to institutional work and field governance research. With respect to institutional work, it uncovers three different types of institutional work aimed at logic changes. With regards to field governance, it brings to fore the role of an important field governance actor namely trade unions.