

Sensemaking, Reflexivity & Sensibility? Navigating Work at Power Ltd - An Interpretive Study

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This interpretive investigation, utilizing extensive interaction and participant observation, explores the situational, temporal, and long-term sensemaking processes of married working women in the Finance and Accounts (F&A) department of Power Ltd [a pseudonym], a notable manufacturing company in Vadodara in Western India. Avoiding behavioral reductionism, we begin with Weick's sensemaking principles, recognize their limitations, and investigate workplace subjectivity through Archer's theory of reflexivity. This methodology holistically and temporally integrates affect, cognition, and action within the evolving Indian socio-cultural context, drawing from everyday individual experiences and narratives. This novel, creative, bottom-up situational, and long-term personalized comprehension of work experiences examine the iterative interaction between individual cognition and the asynchronous multidimensional generative mechanisms. It prioritises a process-based analysis of gendered performativity.

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Introduction

A few studies in the sociology of work have examined Indian working women's workplace sensemaking processes to the tensions intersubjective internal conflict against subtle external harassment at the workplace. Most of such studies tend to deploy Weick as the go-to means of integrating meaning-making with context. At least in India, there is little literature or qualitative studies that try to understand how the interplay of varying episodic emotion, thought, and action shape individual agency at different points in time to inform how a working woman makes her way through her workplace and her awareness of doing gender. Additionally, the literature on gender highlights the importance of discursive words and deeds forming the semiotic basis of gender

(Alvesson & Billing, 2009:117-43; Cormack, 1999). Other gender studies see it as the consequence of emotional labor (Petinger, 2019:83; Hochschild, 2012). Gender inequalities of elision and power emerge from conceptual categories ranging from Acker (1990,1994) to Connell (1987), and the Foucauldian CMS understanding (Knights, 2021) labels gender as an ongoing subjective experience of self-discipline and regulation. These gender regimes (Connell,2006: 839 or stereotyping have well-known consequences, such as the Queen Bee syndrome (Mavin & Grandy, 2012: 224), hegemonic masculinity (Sheerin & Linehan, 2018), and, finally, accepting and rationalising victimhood (Nash & Moore, 2019).

Any activity of sensemaking must be analyzed within the prevailing discourse, cognitive mechanisms, actions, and behaviors that arise within a structural socio-cultural normative framework defined by power dynamics and gender regimes. Distinct individual histories and biographies, in conjunction with the contextual circumstances, transcend the seven principles of sensemaking, yet are inherently woven into a continuous reflexive dialogue and deliberation that influences the present.

The rich, spontaneous, and dynamic nature of each woman respondent's ongoing interplay of emotion, reflection, and reflexivity with the normative organizational and socio-cultural in the Finance & Accounts (F&A) department of Power Ltd (a pseudonym) and how it frames her sensemaking is investigated.

Our unit of analysis is in Vadodara, a medium-sized city in Gujarat, India, for many years before the pandemic in 2020 and through the second wave in 2021.

Intended Contributions

We have endeavored here an anti-performative (Durepos et al., 2021: 457-58) sociologically informed perspective of both understanding and experiencing how women experience, manage and navigate multiple workplace expectations and indifferent colleagues and powerful superiors. Starting with Weick as a launching pad we use Archer's critical realist framework. Indian working women's sensemaking in multiple situational contexts by not only studying it at various moments but as a continual fluid ongoing bricolage of flowing and evolving embedded individual experiences whereby situations, events, and time contextually interact in varying proportions (Berlant, 2019: 37). Thus, this interpretive study joins the broader conversation within the organizational studies of gender and workplace meaning making by providing a concurrent micro-dynamic contextual temporal, conjunctural (Littler, 2016: 6), and longitudinal emergent perspective rather than just reassessing and rederiving gender concepts and deploys Archer in a novel manner and corrects Weick's psychologized power agnostic approach.

This study is guided by five core research questions:

1. How do the female employees in the Finance and Accounting department

of Power Ltd perceive themselves and their working environment?

2. In what manner do their emotions impact the definition and organization of situational meanings, their interactions with others, and their work dynamics?
3. What are the work-related insecurities and challenges they face, and what conscious and unconscious coping mechanisms do they employ to manage pressure and stress from their superiors?
4. What motivates them to work for Power Ltd, and how do their short- and long-term decisions get influenced by their constraints amid internal conflicts?
5. How does each respondent's internal conversation and sensemaking individually contribute to developing collective, causal organizational normative generative mechanisms that either hinder or support the agency of female employees and the structuring of the gender regime?

Analyzing these research questions within their specific contexts will also elucidate how contemporary Indian working women in the finance and accounting department of Power Ltd, as well as their counterparts in other similar Indian manufacturing firms, navigate their workplaces both consciously and spontaneously and cope with workplace harassment and internal workplace conflicts.

In essence, we have three contributions that are illuminated through the

empirical sections of three sensemaking scenarios in the empirical section after the methodology.

1. Our primary contribution is in clarifying how her conceptualization of choices, constraints, and possibilities informs individual unconscious and strategic actions, thereby shaping her immediate and long-term workplace decisions within the context of implicit, enduring power inequalities, considering this as an ongoing process rather than a discrete outcome. This analysis employs the theoretical frameworks of two eminent scholars from the interconnected disciplines of psychology and sociology. Weick talks about the what of the process of comprehending and navigating an environment by drawing upon Archer who talks about the why and the how aspects and provides a dynamic structural, contextual rationale. We then discuss how this new sensemaking reading contributes to the unintentional shaping and maintenance of generative structural mechanisms that shape personal choices at various times and reinforce gender-stereotypical biases and normalize various forms of workplace bullying, particularly in non-western large manufacturing firms located in mid-sized cities such as Vadodara in India.
2. The second contribution addresses an epistemological gap within the sensemaking literature by sociologically accentuating the dynamic interplay among temporal environment in-

terpretation, the cognitive processing of emotions, and, most critically, a relatively neglected concept—individual reflexivity in decision-making.

3. Our third cohesive contribution is to empirically demonstrate how women inadvertently contribute to the normalization of gender regimes and the perpetuation of stereotypical male attitudes and assumptions. This, in turn, leads to both a qualitative and quantitative deficiency in diversity within large Indian manufacturing firms, which are otherwise reputed for epitomizing and promoting progressive human resource policies and contemporary HR paradigms. This amalgamation of workplace events and the actions and interpretations of multiple individuals culminates in sense-giving or sense-breaking that reinforces inequalities in leading Indian manufacturing firms.

Weick Sense-making, Sense-breaking & Sense-giving

Weick's (Weick et al., 2009, Weick, 2005, 1995) sensemaking principles have been very influential in the OB-HR literature. He has fundamentally contributed to our learning of how we understand and interact with our world. Weick and his understanding of sensemaking have been deployed in diverse situational and geographical contexts ranging from analyzing terrorist attacks (Ramesh, 2014) to comprehending organizational automation (Chopra et al, 2022).

Weick (1993) showed that this routine sensemaking and feedback loop ac-

complished patterns break down in demanding situations due to incomplete or partial knowledge of the situation, overwhelming emotional challenges, or contradictory evidence. Difficult superiors demanding workplace situations also trigger emotional dissonance, which contributes over time to a progressive schism in sensemaking known as sense-breaking (Giuliani, 2016: 220). Following these intermittent instances of sensemaking breakdown, dilemmas, topic changes, and reinterpretations during those transition moments Knight et al, 2024), the literature fails to thoroughly examine the intricate but muddled sociological subjectivity underlying human ambivalence. Additionally, it does not humanely explore the cognitive patterns, especially from the perspective of the individual's first voice. Furthermore, much of such literature inadequately sheds light on the voices of certain employees, married working women in non-western contexts.

While much invaluable insight is derivable from his work, some faults are overlooked and rarely addressed in the vast sensemaking literature.

From our sociological viewpoint, would like to focus on limitations in Weick's sensemaking before we proceed further:

1. Weick's sensemaking paradigm does not holistically capture heterogeneous time (Blagoev et al 2024); space and randomness; how local and more extensive social contexts mould a continuity of beliefs and values understood as culture; and the muddled linkages

between asynchronous emotion, thought, action and context which Archer does so consistently. Moreover, the Weickian worldview, while advocating incompleteness, ends up presenting individual and collective sensemaking as recurring institutionalized cognitive representations even if the events were unpredictable.

2. We agree with Schwandt (Poesi, 2005:174) that:

“Sensemaking research involves a fundamental paradox: it defines reality and meanings as socially constructed, yet it seeks to disengage from that experience and objectify it.”

Although Weick speaks about sense-breaking, he does not discuss or contextualize how, comprehension, impact, and effect of the varying degrees of underlying power and inequalities bear upon an individual’s sensemaking, perception framing of a situation and relative self-definitions.

Moreover, power, rather than a static abstract concept, exists and plays out dynamically within an organization’s discursive practices or formal and informal hierarchy. Although having different ends and motives, literature on power points out the asymmetrical distribution of recognition, encouragement, and positional and economic rewards among employees, all of which are not engaged robustly by Weick (Rowlinson, 2004, 616-19). The ability to distribute and control recognition, motivation, symbolic, positional and financial resources rests in the hands of a few senior managers, which impact and shape

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the interpretation and sensemaking of those less powerful. Emotionally, each employee must constantly self-rationalize, self-regulate, stock-take, and compare (Jackall, 2010: 210] their worth to their peers, which influences their sense-breaking or sense-giving at any given time. Building upon the inherent challenges in Weick’s seven sensemaking principles, we will relate each respondent’s *initial* sensemaking to her work context to Archer’s four kinds of reflexivity and their embedded dynamic normative environment within and beyond the workplace.

Making Sense of Sense-making Through Reflexivity

All of us as individuals have a mishmash of varying concerns. As a result, the basis for taking cues and then interpreting the environment should be an individual’s reflexivity, which is exercised through internal conversations¹ and is the underlying process that mediates the im-

¹ Archer (2007: 128) defines internal conversations as everyday self-talk where everybody engages their personal powers through a reflexive inner dialogue and that internal conversation is responsible for the delineation of our concerns, the definition of our projects and, ultimately, the determination of our practices in society. It is agential reflexivity, which actively mediates between our structurally shaped circumstances (for example a task to complete) and what we deliberately make of them. The activities involved range over a broad terrain,

pact of our surrounding social forms and shapes our response to them.

This ongoing dialogical sense-making between enactment and plausibility can emerge only when an individual is engaged in a continuous internal conversation (Archer, 2007) that is grounded and characterized by either or a combination of each of the four types of reflexivity, which Archer describes as *communicative, autonomous, meta, and fractured*, and which forms the basis of her navigating through her workplace world. Additionally, an objective structural or cultural property can exercise its causal powers and come alive only when agents belong to a particular organizational social context.

In the context of our research, generative structural mechanisms refer to socio-cultural, organizational and societal norms that persist and shape and manage behavioral patterns, individuals' conventional understandings and colleagues' work

priorities and commitments. This multi-dimensional operative social furniture generates varying structural causal properties. Some normative implications on behavior are more direct and situational, while others are gradual, cumulative incremental in shaping workplace attitudes and mindsets. Consequently, we believe that every Indian working woman's workplace sensemaking is either aided or hampered by the more normative generative structural mechanisms that pattern, structure and underpin their workplaces, such as formal written and unwritten rules and policies and dominant discursive understandings about access to positional, material, informational and emotional, organizational resources. These generative mechanisms' mutual dynamic iterative interplay with the individual and collective sensemaking efforts varyingly combine; to constitute the invisible evolving foundational basis of the gendered organizational regime varyingly affecting her.

Archer argues that all individuals possess the personal power to reflect subjectively upon their circumstances and decide what to do in them or about them. These concerns frame their emotions and their assimilation and interpretation of information. Within this personal agency, reflexivity enables subjects to design and decide their responses to the structured circumstances in which they find themselves, considering what they care about most. We argue that this intrinsic reflexivity is precisely that which propels our respondents' ongoing sensemaking process to deliberate upon specific courses of actions and is less a direct consequence of social processes (Caetano, 2015: 66).

which, in plain language, can extend from daydreaming, fantasizing and internal vituperation; through rehearsing for some forthcoming encounter, reliving past events, planning for future eventualities, clarifying where one stands or what one understands, producing a (silent) running commentary on what is occurring, talking oneself through (or into) a practical activity; to more pointed actions such as issuing internal warnings and making promises to oneself, reaching concrete decisions or coming to a conclusion about a particular problem. She gives an example of Jonathan's (a 31-year-old information technology team manager) immediate reaction: 'Oh God, all the time. I find it hard to switch my mind off so I am analyzing everything all of the time, analyzing everything I am doing and saying – thinking "Should I have said that or done that?"'

At the outset, we say that our study's respondents are not passive recipients of gender stereotypes when faced with these structural generative mechanisms and diverse situational contexts that are both resilient and evolving. They subconsciously self-assessed their contextual positioning during the exercise of their situational agency. Simultaneously, when needed, they chose to enact patterns of 'respectable femininity' (Radhakrishnan, 2014: 238–39; 2009) to conform and reinforce meanings of what is understood as decent and apposite by their male superiors by drawing from the larger normative societal script of the educated modern upper class and caste Indian womanhood to endure harassment of different kinds sometimes obvious otherwise implied.

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Although individuals may share a similar set of organizational constraints about their personal and professional endeavors, their emotions, experiences, and perceived cost of such constraints vary. Additionally, working women in India have varying personal and professional priorities and projects at various stages of their lives as they perform multiple gender roles.

Cultural, Spatial, Social Workplace Context

We begin by establishing a larger Indian socio-cultural context and situating the

mid-sized city of Vadodara within it. We then understand what the literature shows when it talks about collectivist Indian managerial repertoires coexisting with more individualist Western managerial repertoires. After that, we will outline the significance and operational context of our study's work organization. As we will see through the words and situations of respondents, these contextual variables intermingle and impact one another varyingly to shape individual reflexivity and sensemaking.

a) Vadodara's Socio-cultural Spatial Context

The sensemaking process of Indian women managers occurs in a hugely different socio-cultural context than that of the West. Thus, we must first situate our respondents within the geographical context of Vadodara, a mid-sized city with a social milieu marked by concurrent change and continuity. They are part of India's new aspirational insular upper middle class (Bhatt, 2018:107-09). They have an aspirational growth mindset in their personal and professional lives, and they have an evolving global and local sense of who they are as modern Indian women. They are 'independent, hardworking individuals whose employers expect them to personify a confident 'enterprising self'² as professional women (Blake-beard, 2015), who

² The enterprising self is an implicit organizational injunction wherein the individual is expected to practice autonomy, independence, and self-reliance and treat the self as a 'project' that can be worked on and, if not improved, then at least maintained for as long as possible (Brown, 2020: 17129-31 in productive ways (Berglund et al, 2017: 901)

have 'studied hard' to arrive here with their professional degrees. In a changing liquid modern world (Bauman, 2015: 30), their professional priorities are intertwined with their aspirations for a good life and lifestyle (Fernandes, 2000; 2009; Brosious, 2012), along with material comfort that cognitively cleans away suffering and grime. Simultaneously, their aspirations are shaped by their relational beliefs and thought processes, which are influenced by the emotions and opinions of immediate family members as well as the larger normative social milieu of the mid-sized city of Vadodara, where they live and work (Netting, 2010: 9-17; Hegde, 1999: 6).

With its many cafes and malls, our field setting, Vadodara, offers the flavor of a big city while having all the conveniences of a mid-sized city, as well as a long, well-established set of social networks for respondents (Jayaram, 2015: 8). Second, despite being a part of Gujarat, it has kept much of its sheltered identity, with its distinct flavor of cosmopolitan westernization and self-autonomy. Still, it is also normatively and collectively conservative. The insular nature of cities like this one encourages, comforts, and simultaneously constrains the thinking process of each respondent.

b) Work Ethos

Panda & Gupta (2019: 72) discovered six pan-Indian cultural characteristics: (1) a collectivist orientation; (2) a respect for power and status; (3) the importance of personal relationships; (4) a desire to belong to an in-group; (5) a

family focus; and (6) context-sensitive or situational behavior. "In general, Indians perceive a situation and then respond to it as one episode in an ongoing flow of interactive relationships between situations and responses" (Sinha & Sinha, 1995] and try to avoid confrontation.

Employees in India generally tend to accept external factors as a given and respond prudently depending on the situation, making their behavior highly context-sensitive and fatalistic. They often must reconcile the contradictory demands of Indian managerial traits embedded in a hierarchy coexisting with contemporary Western individualist managerial templates.

C) Work Organization & Decision-making

The cultural traits have an important impact on how women respondents pragmatically take stock of situations. Given the preceding literature on Indian managerial repertoires, we turn to the Finance and Accounts [F&A] department (Appendix 1), which has a mechanistic organizational structure. However, McKinsey, KPMG, Accenture, and other consulting firms that visit Power Ltd regularly have suggested adding more agility. Scholars ranging from Fox (1966) to Taylor and Bain (2005) and Ashcraft (2013) have emphasized the significance of work organization in shaping and institutionalizing organizational and individual understandings of any workplace labor process.

Department heads preferred to stick with 'safe' financial, standard operating

procedures and continuity in reporting relationships rather than embrace disruptive innovation. Other Power Ltd functional departments have greater flexibility in adopting more organic design configurations (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Fox, 1966: 19 and implementing newer organizational and consultant-driven HR paradigms. However, because of the process continuity provided by the F&A department, this manufacturing firm's integrative bottleneck functional department has a low margin for errors. Its employees seamlessly synchronize their bodies, emotions, and tasks through correct procedures and sequenced tasks to continue all components of the F&A workflow.

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However, having a mechanistic structure does not make it very bureaucratic, nor does it become rigid or unadaptable in its operations. Viewing the F&A department through an 'interpretivist' lens informs our understanding, drawing on Grey (2008), Brown (2020), and Crozier (2017). In this context, the F&A work ethos values the male breadwinner paradigm's (Collinson, 2003), strength, aggressiveness, and competitiveness. Its design, work activities have, and tasks inbuilt implicit assumptions about what constitutes adequate job performance (Acker, 1990, in Valentine et al., 2020;1994; 2006) which forms the substantive foundation on which any sensemaking activity occurs.

Methodology

Our methodological journey draws inspiration from the phenomenological pathway inspired by the likes of Merleau Ponty (Raju, 2006), which was the best pathway to understand and live through the intersection of cognition action and emotion in the sensemaking process to address our research questions. Additionally, we believe that studying such Indian working women respondents needs to develop new subaltern localized forms of contextual consciousness (Connell, 2020:168; Coleman, 20 39-59; Mohanty, 2006: 409-19; Narayan, 2004) and fresh localized dynamic perspective (Jammulamadaka, 2019). Possessing this level of contextual sensitivity does not prejudice and standardize each lived experience. We chose Power Ltd because this paper's co-author worked in it for a long time and could relate and grasp the verbalized and unarticulated implied dimensions of each lived experience.

Unlike a methodological strategy of grasping sensemaking at various moments, the co-author, having worked in Power Ltd, could, firstly, relate and intuitively understand the verbalized and un verbalized dimension of the sensemaking of experience as it evolved over time (Bradbury et al.,200o: 558). Secondly, she was well attuned to the department and its work ethos and processes. She could easily integrate the viewpoints situationally immanently and intuitively and from the highlights on seeing how it leads to the F&A department being what it is. We have an essential contextual methodological intervention in

studying sensemaking and how gender is constructed in Indian workplaces by relating and living through the sensemaking process over time rather than accumulating and analyzing various instances of sensemaking. Our phenomenological interviews with 14 respondents delved and assimilated their fleeting intra-subjective life worlds as they saw and understood them (Seidman, 2013:15-16).

Respondent Profile

Table 1 Respondents Profile

Sr No	Name	Age	Education	Children
1	Sujitha	40	Bachlors of Business Administration	2
2	Mira	35	Masters of Business Administration (Finance)	None
3	Ira	32	Chartered Accountant	1
4	Priyanka	27	Bachlors of Commerce	None
5	Renuka	33	Chartered Accountant	1
6	Mansi	34	Chartered Accountant	None
7	Bhumi	33	Masters of Commerce	1
8	Dhara	32	Masters of Commerce	1
9	Shirin	36	Cost Accountant	2
10	Sweta	31	Masters of Commerce	1
11	Snehal	32	Masters of Commerce	1
12	Komal	34	Masters of Commerce	2
13	Ami	26	Bachlors of Commerce	None
14	Saloni	31	Masters of Business Administration (Finance)	1

emotion for vivid accounts of working at Power Ltd's F&A department. We resumed unstructured in-person interactions in December 2020, February, and October 2021 and 2023, with each interaction lasting several hours and relying on purposive sampling. The memories were of shared experiences and vividly living one another's lives individually and collectively in the interaction, paying close attention to language and strong workplace emotions and inquiring further about their causes. We also tried to decipher the subtext of stated and unstated organiza-

Data Collection

Due to the researchers' mobility limitations resulting from the COVID 19 pandemic, face-to-face interactions became impossible. We communicated via messaging and phone over several hours, taking on the character of non-judgemental spontaneous conversation, allowing the respondents to speak freely without any premeditated answer. This unstructured dialogue was brimming with

tional norms and values by carefully drawing on various moments, situations, and multiple identities expressed during the interactions. Apart from the representative respondent quotes we have cited from our interactions, we tried to draw upon other earlier conversations with these and other female respondents. We then believed that recording the interviews would make the respondents self-conscious and interfere with the flow and spontaneity of the interaction, we documented each interview in our notes at once after every interaction.

Data Analysis

We bracketed ourselves (Kostera, 2021:31) from our respondents and vividly visualized and carefully captured each sensemaking moment conveyed to us and integrated causally with its backward and forward linkages to analyze the causal and structural configurations of social relations (Fava, 2021:138).

Integrating and comparing data from many such immersive accounts inspired us to create vignettes for each respondent. Throughout our analysis, we verified and revisited these narratives with the respondents. After that, we iteratively analyzed the data from each interaction. We extracted significant statements from the respondents from our notes. We contextualized each statement by comparing them individually and to one other: to their larger temporal existential context. We deeply reflected on our participant observation respondent accounts, reconfirmed them repeatedly and assimilated and synthesized them to derive our triangulated insights and composite structural description.

Three Sensemaking Scenarios

1. Making sense by seeking equivocality: Mansi is a Chartered Accountant by profession. She was a rank holder in her CA (Chartered Accountant) examination. She had an excellent academic background that gave her a plum job in Power Ltd, which augmented her social and economic status. Earlier on good equations with her superiors and her work competence made her get an exceptional promotion in the department.

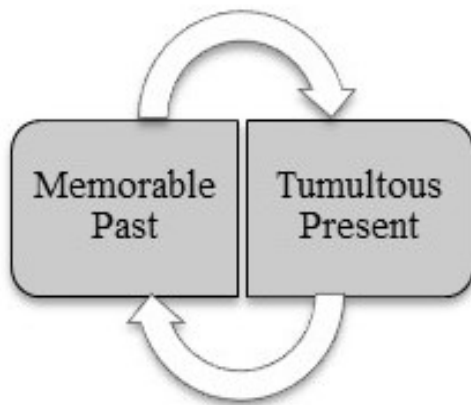
Power Ltd is her first job, and life was peaceful until the arrival of her new boss. During the weekend commute from Vadodara to Ahmedabad, she met her spouse. Mansi recalls -"By performing diverse tasks within the workgroup, I gained a lot of knowledge. Upon the arrival of Mr Gurinder as Section-head, many changes appeared around her. Each task was highlighted for importance, and the work pressure increased drastically. Moreover, he was abrasive and rude, which affected the section's employees' morale. The organizational climate was no longer the same."

Mr Gurinder's superiors overlooked his impudent behavior towards his junior colleagues because of his functional utility to Power Ltd and connections with Important stakeholders such as the government authorities and institutions. Mansi was anxious and in a dilemma about her future and rued over losing professional growth opportunities going by as she had unconsciously become attuned to her present job and lost valuable time in her career. She had subconsciously accepted Mr.Gurinder's intimidation and his demand of presenteeism. Her situational recognition (Weick, 1995:111) by retrospection finds herself interconnecting her past while simultaneously contemplating what she must do now. In this iterative temporal reflection, her fractured reflexivity unsuccessfully tries to find consolation by weighing in on her future. Her current worsened emotional state and personal, monetary and professional insecurities.

Her worries are numerous, but the time she can give to think them through

is limited in her work routine. She realizes and accepts that she cannot change her stressful everyday routine and environment and is yet indecisive of what she must do next professionally. Besides stomaching the monotonous workplace grind, she has nothing to look forward to professionally at present unless a better opportunity in Vadodara presents itself. She needs a safe learning ground to develop new skillsets in a new work context which the few large manufacturing companies here are reluctant to grant.

Fig. 1 Cycle of Worries



Likewise, Sujitha, as a secretary to the F&A head, ‘deliberates’ on her multiple identities through her fractured reflexivity (Archer, 2007: 19-22) by considering her gendered roles at home and unending emotional labor. She strings together situations and events to question her current circumstances.

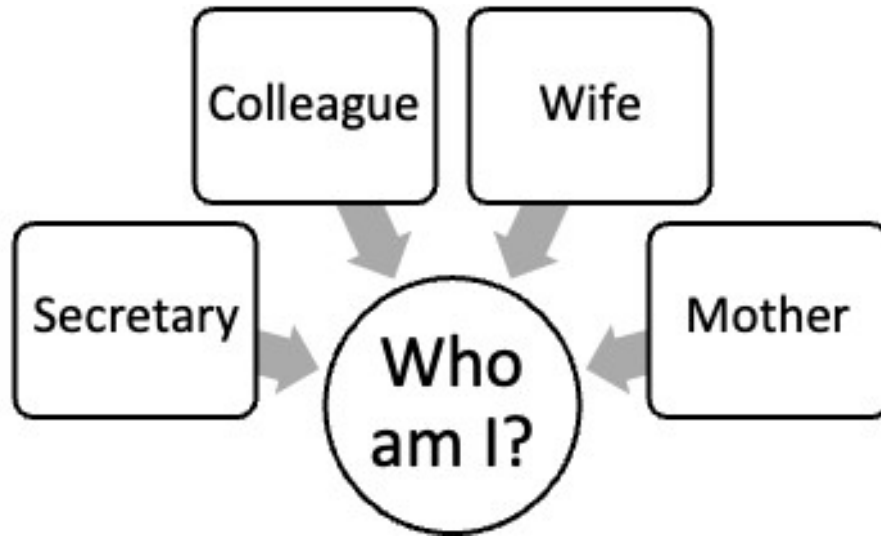
As a liaison between the head of finance and accounting and his subordinates in a transactional interactional environment, she is often subjected to

the patrimony of her boss. (Kanter, 1993; 1609;1766). Sujitha is perplexed as to why she must listen to everyone’s grievance but is still expected to remain unaffected and yet put up a cheerful face to all. She says-”When I arrive at work, I set the agenda for my boss’s meetings, plan his daily schedule, and remind him of any priority tasks or deadlines. During our meetings, my boss expresses his displeasure with other departmental colleagues. I must listen to endless complaints from subordinates about the boss and his unrealistic expectations, while they believe I can help.”

Sujitha also absorbs a broad spectrum of emotions from her spouse and child at home. The different gamut of emotions thrown at her office and home left her bereft of enthusiasm and energy. Her emotional labor of anchoring causes her to question who she is: a secretary, a wife, a mother, a professional. Frustrated, often misunderstood, and feeling used and abused emotionally at many times of the working day, she questions herself, in her fractured internal conversation, who I am, as she juggles multiple roles. She experiences periodic feelings of self-doubt as she goes about her front-stage face-work. She reflects and searches for answers in her internal conflict, “Who am I as an individual while juggling these multiple roles?”

Mansi tries finding solace in her time and memory, but Sujitha, despite her excellent interpersonal skills and ability at work, is struggling to deal with her emo-

Fig. 2 Identity Crisis- Depiction of Roles



tional and physical exhaustion caused by the tightrope walking she must do day in and day out at her workplace, as well as being an emotional sponge.

Retrospect on their life scripts through random thoughts and difficult workplace situations only to discover they are emotionally exhausted but must draw from inner resilience to be confident (Gill & Orgad, 2022) and cheerful. Seeking alternative employment was not an option because it would need to be counterbalanced against overlapping financial and familial considerations.

2. Making Sense through Discrimination: Interactional dynamics within large organizations having departments such as the F&A department projected simultaneous contradictory encouraging and negative meanings to respondents. Couched in their words was an impersonal positive corporate intonation.

Senior managers of Power Ltd, often in their late fifties, tended to have internalized a guarded understanding of a married woman's priorities towards her work, which indirectly affected their outlook and unconsciously molded their interactions with their female subordinates. Such situational and long-prevalent paternalistic attitudes reinforced glass ceilings (Basu, 2008: 396-506). Their polite and respectful tone took care of those female respondents who were to be managed very politely instead of being treated equally and those who needed to be progressively ignored and silenced. Each respondent met varying experiences that felt their careers were in the doldrums. Respondents' immediate and long-term concerns and fluctuating emotional tensions; establish their reflexivity, which in turn feeds their internal conversation that molds their sensemaking.

A perplexed Renuka recalls her disappointment after returning to work from maternity leave after knowing about her low-performance appraisal ratings. Before her break, she believed that she had done her job to the satisfaction of her superiors and wondered what had gone wrong. The interpretive narrative mental job script of her 'commitment' to career advancement, based on her expectations of a good rating and later financial gain, was in disarray. Visibly shaken from that fateful day, her evolving foundational identity work of counterbalancing her commitments to her role as a successful working woman and a young mother is now broken, even as she copes with this development and tries reframing it.

Renuka laments: "For the fiscal year, April 2018 to March 2019, the performance appraisal procedure falls due in the month of April-May 2019. My maternity leave was due in May 2019. That implies my rating, which I get for the financial year 2018-19, will be protected for the financial year 2019-20 under HR rules for maternity breaks. However, my rating for 2018-19 itself was dropped by the departmental head to play safe, so that the protected rating for the next year also remained low. He did this, assuming I may not return from my maternity break or extend my break. However, neither of these happened."

Her superior, who did not think much about a lowered rating and Renuka's immediate and long-term aspirations, turned out to be completely mismatched. The task and available

resources to meet his interpretation of important functional priorities; at that juncture; guided his sensemaking on hand more than anything else. Renuka felt hurt by her superior's biased and impersonal attitude. Constantly questioning and reliving the memory and continuing professional impact of this event trigger lowered her self-esteem. Unable to focus and fully come to grips with her present situation, she ambivalently wonders during her time at work about what is next in her fractured and meta-reflexive conversation within herself because she questions and endures the pain.

She tries to cope with such anxious sense breaking bouts in her sense work, finding calm by diverting her thoughts elsewhere and suppressing and ignoring negativity through detachment, resulting in brief moments of self-reaffirmation. Moreover, as she moves iteratively in her internal conversation by seeking cues from her surroundings within and beyond her workplace, she has her infant to consider in her delimited decision making which nobody in the workplace is really concerned about. She cannot share her frustration freely in a competitive workplace.

Meanwhile, Priyanka, who works tirelessly without recognition, stays trapped in her current situation. Her alternating feelings of suppressed pent-up anger and frustration arise from being misunderstood or unheard. These vex her daily, framing her communicative reflexivity as she wonders what she needs to do to persuade her boss to un-

derstand her predicament. Priyanka's muddled multi-layered internal conversation centers and orchestrates her self-reflection on a mistake she believes she did not make. Her current sensemaking connects with past recollected events and the present moments of her failed communication attempts with her superior, thereby amplifying her anxiety with her stone-deaf superiors. Harassment takes on many forms, some out of pressure, some not concerned, some indirect. Priyanka justifies: "I update our accounting system's foreign exchange rates as soon as I arrive. This activity is followed by a cash flow update to Head F&A. After completing these two critical steps, I issue an eBRC (electronic bank realisation certificate). This activity involves various stakeholders such as the company's export department; and PowerLtd's bankers, where claims are settled. After a year, I still had issues issuing eBRCs for one of our international projects due to a backlog. This type of project was the first of its kind for our company, and our section was not fully aware of the process of availing the government export benefits."

The F&A head was displeased as the firm was not getting the export benefits, which he believed had financial implications and made his conversations with her terse and matter-of-fact. He had already typecast her in his mind and did not want too much to do with her. Furthermore, she asks herself: "I felt that instead of being appreciated for identifying the anomaly for not availing the government

export benefit, I was victimized for a mistake committed much earlier by somebody else."

Living through, being wholly ignored and silently snubbed every day at work harmed Priyanka. Secondly, a young Priyanka's uncertainty compounded the road ahead did not give any closure or plausibility to her sensemaking. She could never fathom her current reality before joining.

A young Priyanka's uncertainty compounded the road ahead did not give any closure or plausibility to her sensemaking.

Others, such as Ira, were confronted with a similar but distinct challenge of career stagnation. She has been married for a year and lives in Vadodara with her in-laws. Despite being a qualified banker, she felt that her current assignment was not equal to her qualifications. She continued to feel lackluster during her workday while also dithering to approach her boss about a role change. She reflects: "I relocated here because of my arranged marriage to my engineer spouse. I applied to Power Ltd and was placed in the F&A department. I was posted to the treasury section that deals with banking and foreign exchange, premised on my earlier banking experience. I am reporting to an MBA who has considerable experience. Although I can move to other departments as a CA, one must prove oneself in one department in Power Ltd for three to five years before considering job rotation. If I remain working here

without exposure, I will feel stifled. For the time being, I am fine with my profile.”

She assumed that the F&A head saw her as just another ambitious female upstart whose zeal would fade with time. That seemingly necessary trade-off of leaving an MNC banking in a large city like Bombay for the sake of her marriage shapes her immediate and long-term decision-making, leading to cycles of self-doubt and regret about that choice in her meta-reflexive internal conversation. Each based on their framing of their situational context had different assumptions about one other.

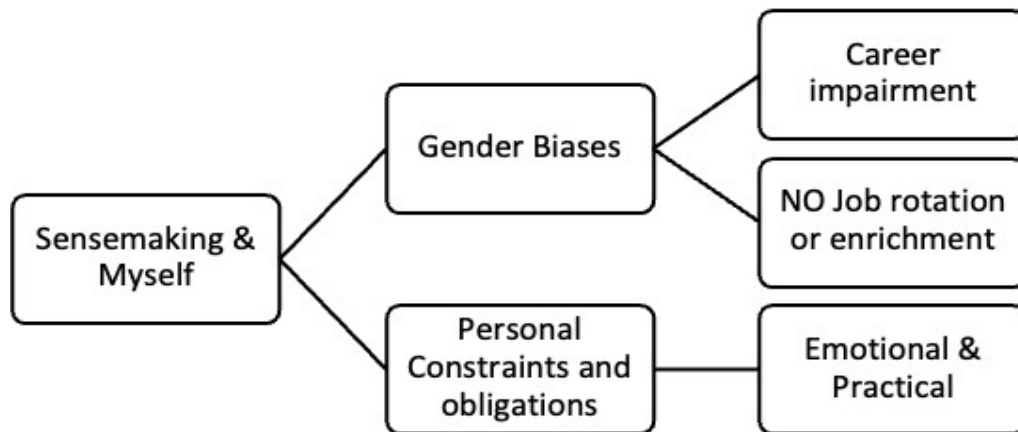
She goes about surface-acting instead and seeks to anchor solace in prioritizing the work required to grow into love and nurture her marriage rather than her career. Her current life stage corresponds and is attuned to Indian societal expectations of nurturing a successful arranged marriage of an affluent upper-caste woman, while her professional goals are that of an independent, motivated work-

ing woman (norms and real cause of harassment)

Each respondent’s situational helplessness emerges in an indeterminate piecemeal manner linked with either past or current workplace developments. It does not fit into any predictable cycle or pathway, even as respondents try to explain away their difficult situations after assessing their current circumstances.

Organizational decisions over time appear rational and gender agnostic; nonetheless, they tend to shape and confine respondents’ thinking knowingly or unknowingly. These decisions’ cumulative impact and situational context often muzzle troubling critical questions in the respondents’ minds. Such vital questions challenging policies and superiors are essential, but as in this context and other similar large busy Indian manufacturing firms’ F&A departments, many working women rarely think and express themselves due to their multifaceted contextual constraints and instead believe that part of their predicament may be caused

Fig. 3 Sensemaking through Navigating Power



by their past unreflective situational and long-term communication and choices or untactful actions.

3. Making Sense Through Navigating Power: The F&A department by design was a contested, varying work context with heterogeneous individual goals and values. Power at the situational level entails continual context and discourse control. Each incumbent male superior picked up the department's associated work conventions and related interaction patterns.

Senior careerist managers, such as the F&A head, had a blinkered career vision towards the corporate headquarters' high table and did not have mobility and familial concerns of their female subordinates. He quietly projected authority while being decisive and had a hurried impatience associated with constant busyness. They were equally worried about their careers, working here for many years.

Employees' full productive ability would remain unutilized if superiors tried to micromanage their working lives. They preferred clear presentations and solutions that provided a bird's-eye view of the roadmap ahead. In practice, they countenanced creativity from 'responsibly autonomous' employees as long as the flow of the F&A system was unhindered.

Respondents had performatively demonstrated opposite gendered behavior in a mutually competitive environment. Most respondents had to communicate a consistent and enthusiastic presence,

appear to deliver consistent performance and be sociable while not being ingratiating. To create positive impression management, they had to project and enact quiet efficiency, self-disciplined presence, sincere delivery, and a silent cheerful, can-do attitude. Deep down, they felt that their self-interests mattered most for self-preservation, and they were transactional and inauthentic with many of their colleagues.

Dhara feels herself side-lined by a new boss from a different unit. She is convinced that he assigns 'important work' to those who belong to his clique, and she is intentionally excluded from the loop. She rues: "There is so much negativity and maneuvering behind my back. My misogynist boss belittles me and assigns me difficult and unrealistic tasks and timelines, knowing fully well that I would fail in my efforts!" I know he is ready to sabotage my work and ensure that I err."

Dhara's immediate boss was admired and respected in Power Ltd. She believed that her exit would be contrived, and he could not be blamed. She was distraught, preoccupied with her work and apprehensive about avoiding mistakes. Dhara tries reframing her situation, seeing it through detached lenses, and not attributing emotions to her boss. Seeking peace away from her home was impossible as she donned the emotional labor of a wife and daughter-in-law. On most days, she returns home late, which strains her marriage and meets the cold indifference of her in-laws. Notwithstanding the handsome remuneration, her fractured reflexivity constantly echoes her

sense-breaking cues, with no pathway appearing out of her zero-sum competitive environment where such passive bullying was not seen as bullying at all.

Conversely, some respondents dynamically created and reconfigured, exercised and received power through everyday interaction with diverse motives in which they exercised situational pro-social expressiveness or feminine self-restraint.

Those with superior communication and persuasive skills subtly countered managerial prerogatives.

Those with superior communication and persuasive skills subtly countered managerial prerogatives. Their internal conversations were more deliberately calculative than affective and strove for communicative reflexivity. It translated into embodied endeavors to give unequivocal timely inputs and strategic sense-giving to their superiors without being conspicuous. They strategically managed their bosses and eventually won them over. Analysis of the two respondents' accounts below reveals how managing/manipulating their superiors' egos and thoughts tactfully over time steadily increased their dependence on them. Mira remembers: "I foresaw the challenges of my section head and volunteered for more work. I progressively started taking on greater parts of his workload, and over time, his dependency and consideration for me expanded. Upon his departure, much of his work organically came to my profile. I tried broad-

ening my understanding of F&A work. Incremental power can be accumulated only by seizing situational opportunities and creating such dependencies."

Likewise, Saloni unknowingly grew into the office daughter of the F&A head and acquired considerable influence and informal power. She strove for plausibility in situations and tried projecting a self-assurance that needed her boss's final validation. Mentally at various moments, she channeled positive emotions that prioritized self-confidence over self-doubt, and her reflexivity strove for autonomous and communicative reflexivity. She says: "Manage your boss, make his responsibility as a father, invoke guilt, and you can get seemingly impossible things done, pay raises, promotions and out of turn transfers and Learning & Development opportunities. I emphasized my femininity and brought out that parental instinct to care for and nurture me. He is my workplace father now, who always protects and guides me. I seek his wise counsel and feel happy."

Self-assured employees such as Saloni always had the mentoring and handholding of their superiors and balanced the right measure of vulnerability and competence. When she relocated because of her spouse got a new job in Mumbai, the F&A head eased her transition to a higher role of her choice with better pay.

Another psychological bullying tactic was to hasten Komal's sense-breaking by the F&A head and section head by ignoring Komal's existence, reminding her to regret her mistake she had

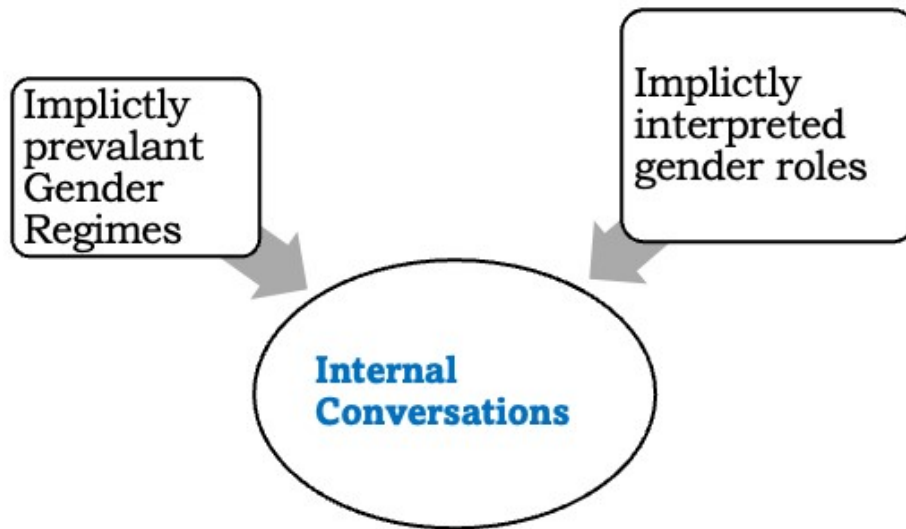
earlier made in vendor payments. As we see each respondent’s subjectivity and the coherence of their sensemaking and sense-breaking were shaped in both intermittent and systematic ways for professional survival and advancement through their interaction affected them differently.

Gossip about a person’s character and mannerisms is spread through the grapevine surreptitiously by skillful players until it reaches the F&A head. Employees not only tried to understand and respond to gossip but also aligned their responses in different ways to align with

their work environment in their interpersonal interactions. Such male communication channels withheld work-related information to employees like Ami and gave urgent work at short notice to ensure that made her panic.

Respondents adapted to this changing process of power relations ranging from acceptance without reconciliation and depression to playing the game. The thoughts and varied responses at various times and situations tended to strengthen gendered stereotyping and morphostatis rather than any collective morphogenesis possibility.

Fig. 4 Internal Conversations



Progressive	Gradual attempts, that reorient significant superiors & colleague’s assumptions and behaviours oriented bring about change in her workplace’s structural normative context
Morphostatis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing reproduction of unchanged or worsening experience • Encountering an intensified hostile work environment – the eventual outcome of sense-breaking and self-quitting

Fig. 4 diagrammatically illuminates a relational illustration of how both gender regimes and gender roles mutually mold and inform individual Internal Conversations situationally and longitudinally.

Applying Archer's terms to Power Ltd's Respondents

This heuristic diagram brings out the concurrent and asynchronous character of Morphogenesis and Morphostatis through the individual agency of Power Ltd's respondents.

Progressive Morphostatis

We are utilizing Archer's concepts to analyze Power Ltd's respondents, examining whether certain individuals, through their asynchronous actions at various times, could encourage incremental alterations in their conjectural situational context.

Consequently, over time, they, through their agency, had progressively managed to some extent to modify the experiential generative normative causal mechanisms they encountered within their workplace, resulting in a cumulative collective experience of progressive morphogenesis for such respondents that gradually alters their internal conversations and, therefore, the sensemaking of their workplace lived experiences and their understanding of their agency.

Such asynchronous individual agency knowingly or unknowingly indirectly brings positive change through some improvement of normative generative mechanisms

such respondents encountered, leading to some underlying changes and some new patterns in their structural context of the organizational gender regime of and gender roles and verbalized and implied work expectations.

Morphostatis

For substantially other respondents in this paper, the experiential, structural, normative, and causal mechanisms of their workplace continued to adversely impact them, intensifying their helplessness in their internal conversations and therefore sense-breaking against resilient gender regimes and taken for granted implicit gender roles leading to morphostatis.

Their individual agency was inadequate to effect change, resulting in a cumulative experience of morphogenesis that led to either further deterioration or stagnation in personal circumstances, which, for many others like them in similar situations, have remained essentially unchanged or worsened for respondents like themselves.

Our derived conceptual cyclical framework of how each respondent navigated their world through thoughts, emotions and actions iteratively shaping their workplace with their reflexive internal conversations being the foundational basis of their sensemaking.

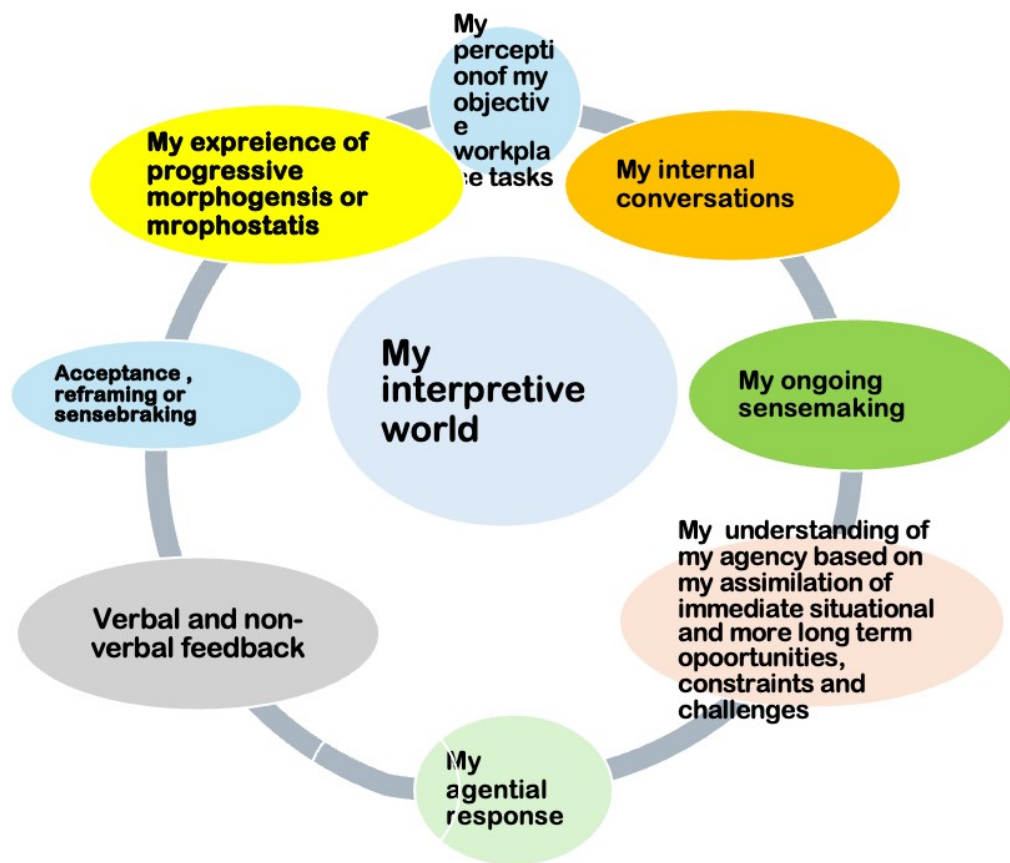
Concluding Discussion

This study brought out our understanding of the distinct phases of lived experience, both contextual and situ-

ational of explicit, extrinsic and intrinsic. The varied fluid, ongoing lived experience of each respondent’s workplace sensemaking at her workplace and beyond was akin to that of a flowing river with its ebbs and tides that she could navigate at certain times and at other times rendered helpless. We show why and how large manufacturing firms lack female workplace engagement and gender diversity. Large corporates such as Power Ltd, invariably refocus attention on the self-managing gendered self, whereby each respondent is always on the lookout for negative cues to avoid sense-breaking.

The Indian social milieu is evolving in its own unique manner, which, broadly put, oscillates between tradition and consumeristic modernity and plays a significant role in shaping the respondents’ sensemaking. The sensemaking process of each respondent appears within and through her contextual gendered performativity, which is not only her adaptation to her cultural surroundings and conventions but also her evolving interpretation of the changing workplace dynamics and at the same time illustrates her struggle to get on, through mobilizing hegemonically positivity.

Fig. 5 The Derived Conceptual Framework



The respondents tried to navigate their workplace role with their individual assessments of the power dynamics.

Concurrently, women respondents contingently responded to workplace situations by consciously taking cues, measuring the outcome of their impression management by moving in and out of a dynamic imagined contextual role and strategically evaluating their immediate short and long-term alternatives. These thoughts resonated with self-preservation and bounded rationality rather than offering a possibility of collective resistance or its active vocalization. Despite the situational challenges that existed, the respondents tried to navigate their workplace role with their individual assessments of the power dynamics. While some succeeded, others failed. Through her thoughts and actions, a respondent may or may not gradually lead to either gradual individual or collective morphogenesis resulting in some incremental change in the tapestry of the normative gender regime or morphostatis. The complexities of the thoughts the respondents underwent that shaped their sensemaking call for a new sociological understanding of workplace realities leading to a multifaceted reading of sensemaking in rapidly transforming companies in India.

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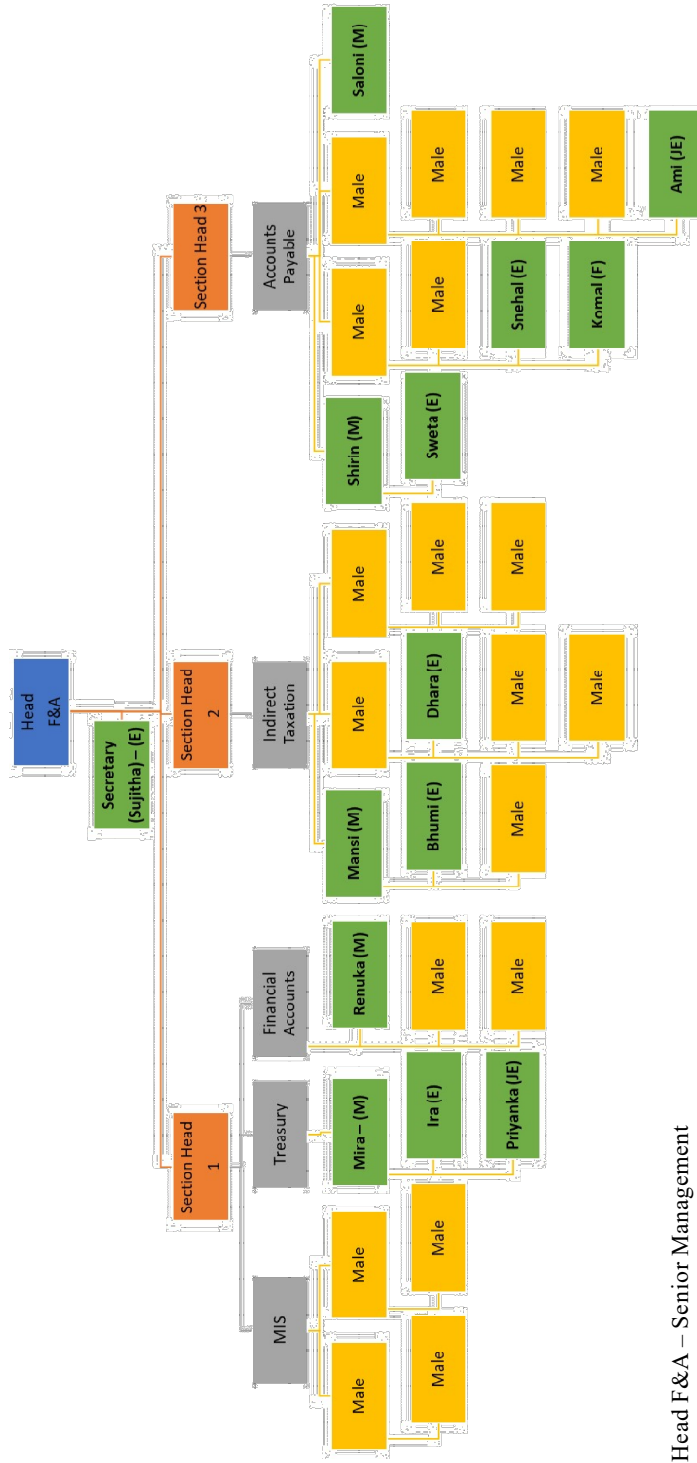
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Appendix I Organization Chart of Female Respondents within the F&A Department of Power Ltd



Head F&A – Senior Management
 Section Head & Managers comprise Middle Management - [M]
 Executive cadre – [E]
 Junior Executive cadre – [JE]

The activities of each section are mentioned broadly:
Management Information System [MIS] - Prepares relevant reports for the senior management's review.
Treasury - A critical section that deals with cash, forex and all bank-related activities.
Financial Accounts - Responsible for the closing of books of accounts, along with all accounting-related activities.
Taxation - Looks after all types of tax-related compliance and issues if any.
Accounts payable – Ensure proper scrutiny of vendor bills and process payments.