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Managerial Moral Agency and Wider Institutional Factors in the Enactment of Workplace Safety Practices

by

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Abstract

The apparel production industry has become a springboard for economic growth and is the typical starter industry in several low-income, highly populated developing nations. This study was focused on the apparel factories located in Bangladesh—an emerging nation of the Global South—where the apparel industry has recently faced a severe image crisis and has become the subject of great concern due to its substandard working conditions and safety violations. Hence, it has become a matter of urgency for such sector to undergo a workplace safety makeover suited to deal with this unnerving situation and to gain and strengthen consumer confidence, which is crucial to building a more reliable ‘manufacturer-retailer-consumer’ relationship.

The extant literature has adequately addressed factory working conditions and workplace safety issues, thus aiding our understanding of the reasons that have led to accidents and their adverse effect on the people involved in the sector. However, these studies have stopped short of shedding light on the aspect of the attitudes that lead supplier factory managers to behave in a certain manner—i.e., engage in compliance or avoidance of safety provisions. Therefore, this study sought to both theoretically and empirically understand such managers’ moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices and how wider institutional factors can influence managerial attitudes towards safety. The fieldwork was conducted in Bangladesh, collecting qualitative data mainly by conducting semi-structured interviews. The interviews were supported and validated by data collected from non-participant observations. The data were then subjected to thematic analysis. Bandura’s moral disengagement theoretical lens was adopted for this investigation.

The empirical findings revealed some interesting and unique wider institutional factors that significantly influence and shape managerial moral agency towards safety. While Bandura’s moral disengagement theory appears to be capable of capturing immoral behaviour at the individual level, it shows its limitations to do so in a collective construct, as was evidenced in this study. Therefore, a moral agency spectrum consisting of four salient agency types is proposed as an extension of the theory in order to investigate moral agency in social and organisational settings. This study makes several empirical contributions to knowledge. It provides insights into the business ethics literature in applying the concept of moral agency in the investigation of safety practices in apparel factories of global supply chains. document. In the process, it documents the lived experiences of individual actors embedded in the supply chain network and contributes to our understanding of the potential causes of the apparel industry’s poor safety records which carries policy implications.

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Research Dissemination

Conferences

Chowdhury, M. F. (2021) Safety culture in global apparel supply chains and managerial attitude towards workplace safety governance mechanisms. In: *28th Annual International Vincentian Business Business Ethics Conference*, 21-23 October, DePaul University, USA.

Chowdhury, M. F. (2021) Workplace safety and managerial moral agency in global apparel supply chain networks. In: *PRME Regional Chapter UK and Ireland 7th Annual Conference*, 6-7 July. University of Lincoln, UK.

Chowdhury, M. F. (2021) Managerial moral agency and wider institutional factors in workplace safety practices. *Doctoral Conference in Strategy, Corporate Governance, Innovation, and International Business*, 24 March. British Academy of Management & De MontFort University, UK.

Seminars

Chowdhury, M. F. (2022) Workplace safety in readymade garments industry in Bangladesh. Talha Group of Companies, 3 January. Dhaka, Bangladesh

Chowdhury, M. F. (2018) In the wake of Rana Plaza: workplace safety practices in Bangladesh apparel industry. In: *1138 Festival: The Fashion Revolution Scotland*, 24 April. University of Edinburgh, UK.

Journal Article (in progress)

1. Safety behaviour at work: managerial interpretations of workplace safety in apparel factories of the global supply chain network.
2. Safety behaviour at work: managerial responses to institutional safety governance mechanism enacted in apparel factories of the global supply chain network.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Muhammad Faisal Chowdhury

Signature

Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AGM	Assistant General Manager
BCI	Better Cotton Initiative
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BGMEA	Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association
BNBC	Bangladesh National Building Code
BSCI	The Business Social Compliance Initiative
BSR	Business for Social Responsibility
CCC	Clean Clothes Campaign
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CID	Corporate Internal Decision
CIP	Commercially Important Person
CMT	Cut, Make, Trim
CoC	Codes of Conduct
CPI	Corruption Perceptions Index
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DGM	Deputy General Manager
DIFE	Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments
EFS	Electrical, Fire, Structural
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
ETI	Ethical Trading Initiative
FLA	Fair Labor Association
FWF	Fair Wear Foundation
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GBP	Great Britain Pound
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GM	General Manager
GSP	Generalized System of Preferences
HAZMAT	Hazardous Material
HR	Human Resource
ILO	International Labour Organization

ISO	International Organization for Standardization
KYC	Know Your Customer
MFA	Multi Fibre Agreement
MD	Managing Director
MP	Member of Parliament
MRes	Master of Research
NFPA	National Fire Protection Association
NGO	Non-government Organisation
NTPA	National Tripartite Plan of Action
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturing
PLS	Plain Language Statement
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PWE	Protestant Work Ethic
QC	Quality Control
RCC	Remediation Coordination Cell
RSC	Readymade Garment Sustainability Council
SAI	Social Accountability International
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEDEX	Supplier Ethical Data Exchange
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USD	United States Dollar
VoIP	Voice over Internet Protocol
WPC	Worker Participation Committee
WRAP	Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production
WRC	Worker Rights Consortium
WTO-ATC	World Trade Organization's Agreement on Textile and Clothing

1. Introduction

Research is formalised curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.¹

Zora Neale Hurston

Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the study and provides the layout of the thesis. It starts with presenting the context of the study followed by the motivation behind the research. It briefly highlights the theoretical gap from which the research questions and objectives emerged. The chapter ends by providing a summary of the thesis.

1.1 The Context

Long before it relocated to the emerging nations of the Global South, apparel manufacturing was already notorious for being a “sweated trade” (Jenkins & Blyton, 2017:90). Today’s global apparel supply chains are characterised by widespread offshore outsourcing operations in the emerging nations in which most of the apparel suppliers are located. The global apparel industry is now valued at £1.1 trillion and employs tens of millions of workers (Lissaman, 2019). Apparel production has become a springboard for economic growth and is the typical starter industry in several low-income but highly-populated developing nations of the Global South. Due to its labour-intensive manufacturing processes and low fixed costs, apparel manufacturing and exporting has become one of the largest export-oriented industries for many Southeast Asian nations like Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, and Vietnam—the Southeast Asian Big Four—where it has become an economic prosperity lifeline (Brown et al., 2014; Islam & Sobhani, 2010; WTO, 2019).

However, this exponential growth has been tarnished by many tragic incidents. Over the past two decades, the workplace disasters occurring in the supplier factories located in these countries have caught the public’s attention and have brought renewed focus on workplace safety. The empirical evidence shows that supplier factories continue to engage in irresponsible business practices and circumvent the institutional and legal requisites for workplace safety, resulting in the continued occurrence of numerous accidents (Chowdhury & Tanim 2016; Handfield et al., 2020; Jamali et al., 2015; Khan & Lund-Thomsen, 2011; Rossi et al., 2014; Soundararajan et al., 2018). Substantial significance is therefore linked to the safety violations that persist in supplier factories, as the safety governance mechanisms enacted in them

¹ Quote taken from Artsjournal, available at: <https://www.artsjournal.com/artfulmanager/main/poking-and-prying-with-a-purpose.php>

are the result of various private and public institutional responses aimed at improving their work environments. Therefore, in order to investigate the safety practices followed in supplier factories, it is crucial to explore what is happening in the global supply chains and the wider institutional factors associated with them. This research focuses on the workplace safety practices enacted in the apparel manufacturing factories of global supply chains located in the Southeast Asian region. In particular, it aims at investigating managerial moral agency in the workplace safety practices enacted in the apparel factories located in Bangladesh—an emerging nation of the Global South.

A focus on the Bangladeshi apparel industry is warranted for two quintessential reasons. First, it is the country's largest business sector and a significant component of the global apparel supply chain, with Bangladesh currently being the second-largest apparel manufacturer and exporter after China (World Bank, 2017). In 2016-2017, the industry's exports totalled £22 billion, contributing around 80% of the country's total export earnings (12% of its GDP) (Hossain & Latifee, 2017). The industry is claimed to employ approximately 4.2 million people, 80% of whom are women, in about 5,000 apparel factories scattered across the country (Mottaleb & Sonobe, 2011; Mahmud & Afrin, 2017). However, while the growth of the country's apparel industry has become a lifeline for both its urban and rural populations and has provided women with unprecedented employment opportunities, its profitability has also experienced a sharp decline in recent years. The industry has recently faced a severe image crisis and has notoriously become the subject of great concern due to its substandard working conditions and safety violations, which are paving the way towards a quick downturn (Mahmud & Afrin, 2017; Turker & Altuntas, 2014). Empirical evidence shows that some incidents have been due to factory managers actively engaging in irresponsible business practices and in flouting the institutional and legal requirements aimed at improving working conditions (Chowdhury & Tanim 2016; Soundararajan et al., 2018). The inadequacy of the industry's safety practices can be attested not only by the two mammoth catastrophes² that took place in 2012 and 2013, but also by the numerous small- and medium-scale incidents that have been occurring every year. A great number of occurrences vividly showcase the reality of substandard working conditions, which not only endanger the safety of workers and adversely affect the livelihood of their families and of those who live in the vicinity of the establishments, but also disempower the workforce and contravene any framework agreements reached in the global apparel supply chain network.

² The 2012 fire at the Tazreen Fashions factory, which caused the death of 117 workers and severe injuries to a further 200, remains the worst factory fire in the nation's history; and the 2013 collapse of the eight-storey Rana Plaza (that housed five garment factories), which caused the death of 1,129 workers and life-threatening injuries to a further 2,515, is considered the worst garment-factory disaster in history (Chowdhury & Tanim, 2016).

The second reason is that, in 2018, as an affirmation of the country's overall economic growth, the United Nations forecasted Bangladesh—which is currently classified as a 'least developed country'—as being eligible to graduate to 'developing country' status by 2025 (United Nations, 2018). As apparel is the country's largest industrial sector and its biggest source of export earnings (Bangladesh Bank, 2018), it will play a crucial role in determining this graduation process. However, there is a quite understandable growing speculation that the industry's safety inadequacies—and the resulting questionable working conditions—may be the biggest obstacle to the country achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG) and to its journey towards 'developing country' status (Barua & Ansary, 2017; Hasan, et al., 2017; UNDP, 2021). Therefore, it has become a matter of urgency for the apparel sector to undergo a workplace safety makeover suited to deal with this unnerving situation and to gain and strengthen consumer confidence, which is crucial in building a more reliable 'manufacturer-retailer-consumer' relationship.

As a result, critical voices have been raised in calls for the improvement of workplace safety practices enacted in the apparel factories of Bangladesh. Especially after the 2012 fire at Tazreen Fashions and the 2013 collapse of Rana Plaza—the two worst tragedies in a string of disasters (see section 2.3 for details)—the key actors of global apparel supply chains realised that the industry needed an overhaul in relation to its electrical, fire, and structural (EFS) safety areas in order to protect the lives and health of the millions of vulnerable people associated with it. The following section briefly introduces the EFS and other safety areas emphasised in this study.

1.2 The Workplace Safety Areas Emphasised in this Study

An electrical safety programme involves a workplace electrical plant design that ensures that neither workplace conditions nor personnel actions will cause unnecessary exposure to electrical hazards (Jones & Jones, 2000). Ensuring workplace electrical safety is crucial because any related failure can kill or seriously injure people and damage property. The empirical evidence shows that most of the accidents occurring in Bangladeshi apparel factories are related to unsafe electrical systems and to a lack of maintenance (Islam et al., 2017). Similarly, the main objective of a fire safety plan is to reduce—to acceptable levels—the probability of death, injury, property loss, and environmental damage caused by fire incidents (Buchanan & Abu, 2017). According to the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence Authority, about 75% of fire incidents in apparel factories are caused by electrical issues (Bhuiyan et al., 2018). A building's structural safety or integrity plan ensures that its structures are fit to meet their design specifications under normal operating conditions and to remain safe when those conditions exceed such

specifications (Purkiss & Li, 2014). The idiom ‘house of cards’ has repeatedly been used to epitomise the building safety situation in the Bangladeshi apparel industry where building collapse is nothing new (Ashraf, 2017:253; Nasrullah & Rahim, 2014:167). Even before the 2013 Rana Plaza incident, Phoenix Garments had collapsed in 2006, and Spectrum Sweater and Shahriar Fabrics had collapsed in 2005; however, being the deadliest, the enormity of the Rana Plaza collapse has been compared to the 9/11 collapse of the World Trade Centre in New York (Prentice & Neve, 2017).

The positive organisational-level impacts of EFS safety protocols, both on the reduction of hazards and risks and on productivity, are recognised by the supply chain actors. As these serious safety shortcomings have pushed the industry into a quagmire, urgent comprehensive EFS safety plans have been recommended by the supply chain actors along with all-encompassing training plans aimed at developing appropriate behaviours among the occupants of the factory buildings. That is why several institutional safety governance mechanisms have recently been put in place to conduct industry-wide EFS audits and to recommend a series of remedial steps suited to address the unsafe factory circumstances that are commonplace in those areas. Therefore, EFS is the first workplace safety category focussed upon by this study.

However, workplace safety issues are not limited to the EFS category. A range of other significant ‘occupational safety’ issues are being dealt with regularly by workers and employees during their working hours. Therefore, besides the EFS, the second category of safety issues upon which this study has focussed is those related to the physical and mental health and well-being of the workers including those who handle hazardous materials and equipment (commonly known as HAZMAT), and to other welfare support aspects (see appendix 2 for the full list of safety issues noted through non-participant observation). Together with the EFS, these well-being- and welfare-related issues have also been emphasised by the global brands and a growing number of them do not continue their business relationship with the supplier factories if these safety issues are not offered.

1.3 Research Motivation

The motivation behind this research primarily came from my personal experience with the Bangladeshi apparel sector. As a Human Resource Management professional turned academic, I had the opportunity to work in some of the largest apparel factories in Bangladesh, where one of my major job responsibilities was to oversee factory safety and compliance issues in accordance with the company’s business objectives and international social audit standards. During my employment in this sector, it was insightful

to observe the complexities that surround the workplace safety practice decisions made by factory owners and senior managers—i.e., their moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices. It was interesting to find that their decision-making process was frequently influenced by various institutional and contextual factors, which compelled them to rationally weigh the chances of being caught—and the severity of the resulting punitive measures—against the benefits stemming from circumventing factory safety protocols.

Previous empirical evidence in this regard shows that a cost-benefit analysis is common among factory owners and managers in the Southeast Asian region, where the benefits resulting from avoiding safety protocols are deemed to outweigh compliance; that is to say that the rational choice depends upon the factory management's knowledge of the 'benefits of not being caught', rather than of the 'risks of being caught' (Chowdhury, 2014a; Haque & Faruq, 2010; Soundararajan et al., 2018). The literature further establishes that an agent's rational choice depends upon two things; first, on an agent having adequate knowledge of the risk of being caught, and second, on an agent being capable of exercising rational judgement (Tombs and Whyte, 2013). Bourdieu (1998) highlighted that the precondition for all rational conduct is an agent's ability to imagine the future consequences of any decision. In the context of this research, it was critical to find that a large number of factory owners and managers have a tendency to ignore safety governance mechanisms to increase their gain—i.e., they take a utilitarian approach, as they view the odds of getting caught and sanctioned to be acceptable, and thereby, placing greater emphasis on producing results than on following rules (a detailed discussion is presented in Chapters 2 and 5).

The extant literature on workplace safety has immeasurably expanded our knowledge of the safety practices enacted in global apparel supply chain networks. Interestingly, most of these studies have either blamed global buyers for not maintaining adequate supply chain transparency and turning a blind eye to the safety violations taking place at the supplier factories (Sodhi & Tang, 2019; Vaughn et al., 2019) or scapegoated the supplier factories for their irresponsible business practices and negligence towards safety (Bossavie et al., 2019; Williamson & Lutz, 2019). Other scholarly works (e.g., Barua & Ansary, 2017; Hasan & Mahmud, 2017; Lindholm et al., 2016; Wadud & Huda, 2017) have addressed various aspects of workplace safety and the impacts accidents have on the people associated with this industry but have often failed to adequately cover the institutional factors that affect managerial moral agency—i.e., the supply chain factors and local contextual elements that shape or influence the managers' attitude towards workplace safety practices. Moral agency defines people's ethical/moral judgements and actions based on their subjective understanding of right/wrong and good/bad, and remaining accountable for their actions

(MacIntyre, 1999). This study posits that, in order to develop effective policies and frameworks suited to redress the workplace safety violations of global apparel supply chains, it is crucial to attain an in-depth understanding of managerial moral agency in relation to safety practices, and exploration of those institutional factors which are likely to influence managerial moral agency in this regard, which most contemporary research has mostly overlooked.

Hence, this study posits that any investigation of moral agency must rest on the exploration of the factory managers' attitudes towards safety practices. Such attitudes can be explained through their interpretations of safety culture and responses towards institutional safety governance mechanisms enacted in their factories by various institutional actors. It is also important to explore the wider institutional factors (e.g., supply chain factors and local contextual elements) that influence the managers' moral agency. As Croucher et al. (2013:49) stated, "Research needs to take into account the differential resources and capabilities and owner/manager motivations, as well as the varied nature of markets and associated regulatory/institutional contexts. However, these influences are widely under-addressed in the body of research reviewed." Other researchers also support this assertion by arguing for the underestimation of the combined influences of institutional and contextual factors mentioned in similar works (Harney & Dundon, 2006; Ram & Edwards, 2003). All these considerations, by and large, led to the development of this study's research objectives and questions.

1.4 Research Questions and Objectives

As mentioned in the previous section, the link between moral agency and workplace safety practices has not been adequately clarified by the literature. Very few scholarly works (e.g., Eriksson, 2016; Eriksson & Svensson, 2016; Johnson & Buckley, 2015; Petitta et al., 2017) have attempted to integrate moral agency and workplace safety in global supply chains, and these studies have done so at an abstract level. Despite being conceptually insightful, these studies have not engaged in any empirical investigation aimed at confirming any real-life relevance or the application of any theory. Hence, this study was aimed at both theoretically and empirically understanding managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety and to the institutional factors that influence such agency. The study, therefore, sought to answer the following two questions:

Question 1: What do managerial interpretations of, and responses to, workplace safety practices reveal about their moral agency?

Question 2: How do different institutional factors likely influence managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices?

The first question aims at exploring managerial attitudes towards workplace safety practices in factories operated under global apparel supply chains. Their attitudes can be explored through managers' interpretations of safety culture and responses towards institutional safety governance mechanisms. These interpretations and responses are crucial to understand the construct of moral agency. The second question aims at investigating wider institutional factors such as supply chain and local contextual issues that can influence managerial moral agency. Empirical studies showed that apparel factory managers are engaged in irresponsible business practices and in flouting the institutional and legal requirements aimed at improving working conditions (Chowdhury & Tanim 2016; Soundararajan et al., 2018). Therefore, while looking into the managerial moral agency, this study aims to look for evidence of morally disengaged behaviour in relation to workplace safety practices.

The apparel manufacturing factories (suppliers) in Bangladesh operating under global supply chains were selected as the research context. Therefore, the objectives of this study were: (i) to provide an overview of the global operations of apparel supply chains; (ii) to provide an overview of the supplier factories in Bangladesh and their safety situations; (iii) to understand the construction of managerial moral agency; (iv) to investigate the managerial attitudes (interpretations and responses) towards workplace safety governance mechanisms; (v) to investigate the institutional and contextual factors that influence managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices; and (vi) to draw empirical, theoretical, and methodological inferences and offer proposals for improving workplace safety situations and of possible future research directions in apparel supply chain networks.

In order to address the research questions, first, the relevant literature was reviewed to attain an awareness of the body of knowledge and to seek to identify any gaps that needed filling. An empirical investigation using qualitative methods was then conducted in Dhaka, Bangladesh, where most apparel factories are located. The data collection process began with a pilot study which was then followed by the main data collection phase. To increase the validity of the findings, the interviews were further supported and validated by data collected from non-participant observation and informal talks. After the completion of the interview recordings, the data transcription and translation process began. Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis tool was chosen for data analysis. Both the interview and observational data were used as the main sources of evidence in this study to develop a substantial case, where the interview responses

were compared with the actual safety practices observed in the apparel factories. In this regard, the interview data were used to generate themes and the observational ones to substantiate and reinforce those themes. Having provided a synopsis of the study, the next section provides brief summaries of the contents of each remaining chapter.

1.5 The Thesis Layout

This thesis is organised into eight chapters (including the current one)

Chapter Two. This chapter delineates and develops a review of the relevant literature on the global operations of apparel supply chains and on the workplace safety situations in supplier factories in Bangladesh. It presents an exploration of the private and public safety governance mechanisms enacted in the supplier factories by various institutional actors and an investigation of the various institutional factors that influence workplace safety practices. While portraying these issues, the gaps in the literature addressed by this study are also identified. The chapter concludes by presenting a conceptual model that indicates the link between institutional factors and managers' moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices and shows the gap that needs to be addressed. Overall, the chapter attempts to illustrate the intricate and opaque nature of the safety practices enacted in supplier factories and to justify the need for an empirical investigation aimed at gaining a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Chapter Three. This chapter introduces the main theoretical lens adopted to address the research objectives. The chapter starts with a philosophical portrayal of moral agency and moral obligations drawn from the dominant ancient and modern normative ethical theories. It then presents a detailed discussion of the construct of moral disengagement theory—the theoretical lens of this study—and explains how this theory is relevant in the context of this research. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of how moral agency and workplace safety can be bridged via the moral disengagement theory to form a robust theoretical framework that can provide a foundation to understand the research topic.

Chapter Four. This chapter discusses the overall research approach of this study. It begins with its philosophical orientation (e.g., its ontological, epistemological, and axiological standpoints), followed by a detailed explanation of the fieldwork and of the research methods adopted (e.g., selecting the participants, gaining access, collecting the data). Then, a detailed discussion of the data analysis techniques is presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical issues considered throughout the course of the research process.

Chapter Five. This chapter concentrates on exploring the first research question. In doing so, based on the collected data, the first half of the chapter explains the workplace safety categories emphasised in this study and further illustrates the current institutional responses (i.e., private and public safety governance mechanisms) enacted in the supplier factories. The second half of the chapter focuses on explaining the managerial attitudes (i.e., interpretations and responses) held towards these workplace safety governance mechanisms. In this regard, the chapter presents a discussion of the various ways in which the participants had interpreted and responded to the institutional safety governance mechanisms showing their engagement (committed) and disengagement (avoidance) attitudes towards workplace safety.

Chapter Six. This chapter expands the discussions presented in Chapter Five by attempting to answer the second research question. It concentrates on explaining the wider institutional factors of global supply chains and the local contextual issues that influence the managerial moral agency in the research context. The discussion explores how any positive attitudes held towards safety practices collide with economic interests as a result of the various institutional and social factors, thus establishing the fact that managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices is significantly shaped and influenced by a complex interplay between global supply chain factors and local contextual elements.

Chapter Seven. This chapter explains the major inferences derived from the empirical findings and presents the study's theoretical and methodological contributions. Reflecting back on the literature and moral disengagement theory, a moral agency spectrum is proposed to bridge the concept of moral disengagement with some of the dominant normative ethical theories. A theoretical framework is then extracted from the overall discussion which connects the proposed moral agency spectrum with the wider institutional factors influencing managerial attitudes towards workplace safety practices.

Chapter Eight: This chapter closes the thesis by summarising the overall study. In the process, it highlights the research intention and its background, identifies the issues that have been overlooked in the literature and makes an attempt to explore and investigate those, presents the limitations faced during the research process, offers future research directions, and provides some practical recommendations. The chapter then brings the thesis to an end by presenting some concluding remarks.

2. Workplace Safety in Apparel Factories of Global Supply Chains

*Put a good person in a bad system and the bad system wins, no contest.*³

William Edwards Deming

Chapter Overview

The previous chapter laid the foundation of this thesis and highlighted the aims of this study—i.e., to investigate managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices and to explore the wider institutional factors influencing moral agency. As the first step of this investigation, this chapter provides a review of the literature on the global operations of apparel supply chains and the workplace safety situation in the supplier factories operated within the supply chain network. In the process, the review centres on the wider institutional factors (dominant themes such as corruption, power, and globalisation, which emerged from the literature and are associated with the economic models of the Global North) that influence workplace safety practices in supplier factories of Southeast Asia. The chapter further examines managerial moral agency towards various workplace safety governance mechanisms enacted by different institutional actors. The chapter ends by presenting a conceptual model derived from the discussion.

2.1 The Global Operation of Apparel Supply Chains

The global apparel industry in today's world is a quintessential example of a buyer-driven supply chain network of production in which the buyers⁴ are 'manufacturers without factories' (Jenkins & Blyton, 2017). This complex and opaque production network is often marked by power asymmetries between buyers and suppliers. The evidence shows that, in the supply chain networks, buyers exercise considerable control over what is to be produced, how, when, where, and at what price (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Fernandez-Stark et al., 2011; Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003). Competitive product pricing is one of the most sensitive elements in defining the buyers' competitive position in the market, and consumers are found to evaluate the quality of brands or retailers based on the prices of their products (Graciola et al., 2018; Troiville et al., 2019). The evidence also shows that the general public has little information about the locations in which the products of fashion brands are manufactured, by whom and under what working conditions (Jestratijevic, et al. 2018; Marshall et al., 2016; Modi & Zhao, 2020; Stauffer, 2017). In this competitive business process based on the cheapest price offer, buyers outsource

³ Quote taken from The W. Edwards Deming Institute, available: <https://deming.org>

⁴ Multinational fashion brands or clothing retailers, often highlighted as the 'lead firms' who are positioned at the top of the supply chain network.

or contract their manufacturing work to a network of suppliers located mostly in developing nations in Southeast Asia. In doing so, they mostly rely on various international social accountability standards to coordinate the production activities and monitor their supplier factories' workplace safety situation—which is audited periodically—and the delivery, quality, and price of the products (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2011). These audits are usually performed, firstly, when national governments become unable to ensure people and product-related issues such as product quality, worker rights, workplace democracy, and factory safety as required by the global buyers (Egels-Zandén & Lindholm, 2015); and secondly, as an exercise of power by the buyers over their suppliers to validate that the suppliers meet or exceed the standards or requirements set forth by them (Köksal et al., 2018).

In this regard, scholars argue that global buyers have neither the right nor the obligation to interfere with the business practices enacted in their supplier factories located in developing countries (Hoque & Faruq, 2009). Following this notion, the buyers follow two different types of strategies—i.e., defensive and proactive—to maintain their business relationship with their suppliers. In their defensive approach, the buyers emphasise the economic benefits, and in doing so, acknowledge the host country's business and legal contexts, maintain the minimum legal requirements necessary to conduct business, and avoid playing any part in the policy implementation processes in the supplier factories (Blowfield, 2005; Rahim, 2017). By contrast, in the proactive approach, buyers are more focussed on the social and environmental sustainability of the business, and therefore actively participate in the creation and implementation of policies in supplier factories (Nicholls, 2002; Rahim, 2017).

More recently, buyers tend to merge these two types of strategies, which assists them in legitimising their authority over the supplier factories while helping them to maintain a cost advantage (Rahim, 2017; Soundararajan, et al. 2021). As a result, buyers have started to depend on safety governance mechanisms in the form of obligatory codes of conduct (CoCs) (Jiang, 2009; Stevens, 2008). The CoCs are a set of standards by which the buyers manage and monitor the ethical and social responsibilities of their supplier factories (Jiang, 2009). These are also written documents aimed at stating the major philosophical principles and articulating the values that should be embraced by the buyers (Stevens, 2008). Being the main actors of supply chains, buyers enjoy the authority of developing, defining, and imposing their codes on supplier factories that are in manufacturing agreement with them (Bartley, 2005; Huq et al., 2014). The basic principles of these CoCs are generally taken from international conventions on issues like human rights, working conditions, and workplace governance delineated by international bodies like the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations (UN) (Das, 2007). These CoCs serve

several purposes: they define the responsibilities of the supplier factories and the social behaviours expected of them (Kaptein & Schwartz, 2008), they establish ethical parameters by which the supplier factories should conduct business in supply chains (Stevens, 2008), they act as instruments for the enhancement of the factories' social responsibility (Adam & Rachman-Moore, 2004), and they work as a mechanism for the buyers to control the supplier factories (Mullins & Christy, 2016).

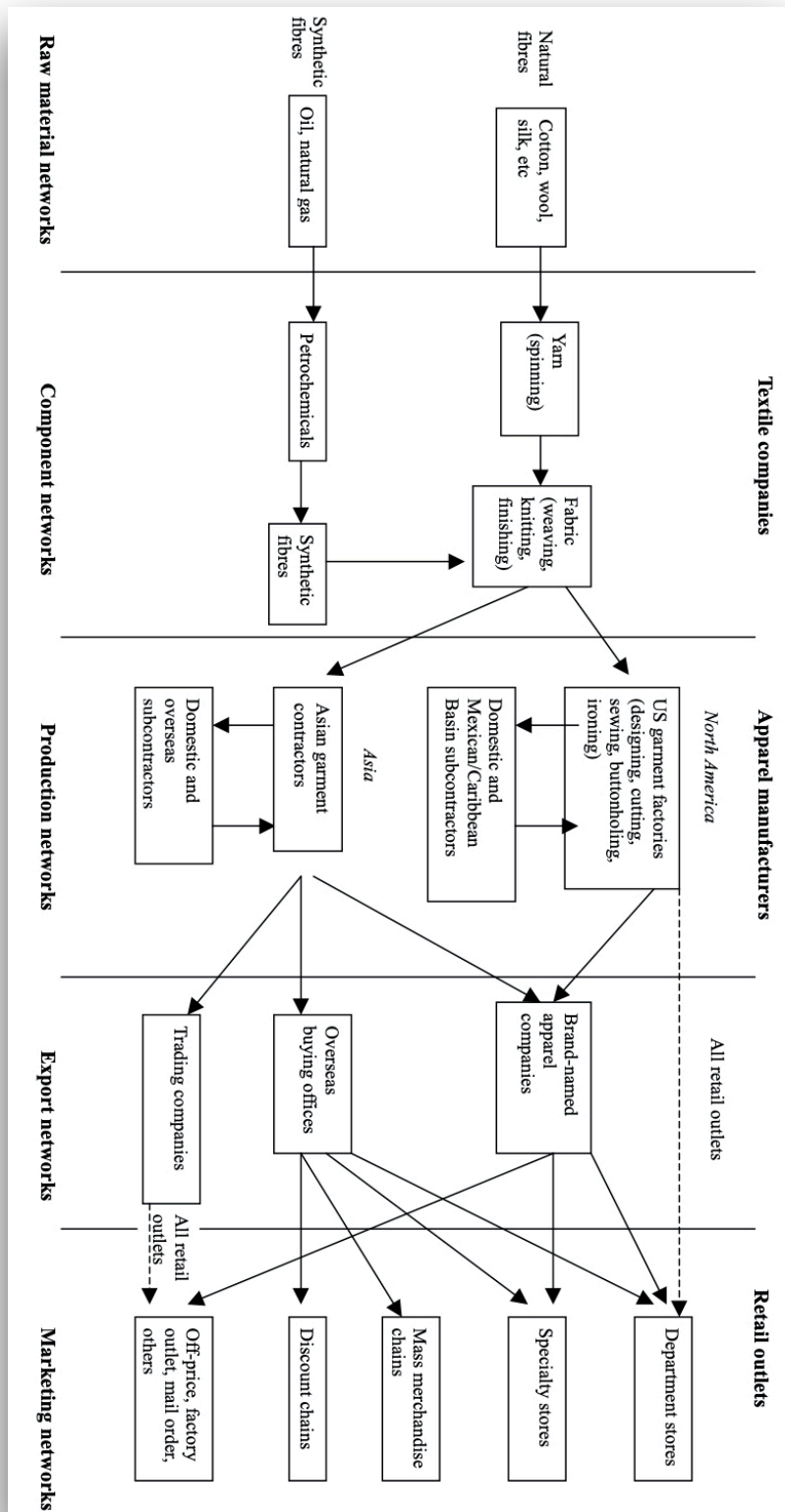
Supply chain demands for social compliance are further transmitted through third-party social accountability standards developed and implemented by internationally recognised social compliance/audit companies (Rahman & Hossain, 2010). Social accountability standards are “voluntary predefined rules, procedures and methods to systematically assess, measure, audit and/or communicate the social and environmental behaviour and/or performance of firms” (Gilbert et al., 2010:24). Non-business actors—such as international labour activists, human rights, and environmental protection groups—are usually involved in the formulation of these standards (Rasche, 2010).

Since the adoption of the global outsourcing model by apparel brands during the 1970s, a plethora of trade agreements—such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the Multi Fibre Arrangement (MFA), the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Textile and Clothing (WTO-ATC), the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), etc.—have certainly been contributed immensely in reducing international trade impediments and contributing to economic growth in the outsourced countries of the Global South. However, some scholars debate that these agreements have also created a variety of economic growth patterns across these outsourced countries (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2011), and as a result, some countries have faced a slow and steady rise in their apparel market share, and a few others have experienced exponential growth in their apparel manufacturing and exporting business (Ear, 2016; Rahman & Chowdhury, 2020). “The future is already here—it's just not evenly distributed”—while Gibson⁵ might not have had the apparel business in mind when he coined this phrase, the point is highly relevant in representing the success stories of apparel-producing countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, and Vietnam (WTO, 2019).

Nonetheless, to outline the vast and complex global apparel supply chain network, Appelbaum and Gereffi's (1994) portrayal of the five segments of global value chains (Figure 2.1) is perhaps one of the most detailed and useful representations for this study.

⁵ William Ford Gibson is a novelist and speculative fiction writer who pioneered the science fiction sub-genre known as cyberpunk. This quote is from the article ‘Broadband Blues’, published in *The Economist* on 21/6/2001 and available here: <https://www.economist.com/business/2001/06/21/broadband-blues>

Figure 2.1: Applebaum & Gereffi's (1994) apparel commodity chain



It is important to mention that workplace safety is a highly important matter and it is entwined across the entire apparel commodity chain. But due to its immense size and complexity, it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the safety practices enacted in all five segments. Hence, this study is focused on the ‘component’ and ‘production’ networks; the segments in which the supplier factories—the main emphasis of this research—operate. In this regard, this study concentrates on the supplier factories in Bangladesh—a significant component of the global apparel supply chain network. The following sections provide an overview of the supplier factories in Bangladesh and present a review of the current workplace safety situation in these factories.

2.2 Supplier Factories in Bangladesh

Over the last three decades, the apparel manufacturing and exporting industry has made a crucial contribution to the transformation of the Bangladeshi economy. The industry is the country’s largest business sector and currently makes Bangladesh the second-largest apparel manufacturer and exporter, after China (World Bank, 2017). The industry’s exports totalled £20 billion in 2019, contributing around 84% of the country’s total export earnings and 23% of its GDP (BGMEA, 2020; Textile Today, 2020). The industry is claimed to employ approximately 4.4 million people, 80% of whom are women, in several thousand factories scattered across the country (BGMEA, 2020). However, while the growth of the industry has become a lifeline for both urban and rural people and has provided women with unprecedented employment opportunities, its financial prosperity and sustainability have also recently experienced a sharp decline.

Before moving on to the discussion of the condition of workplace safety currently evident, it is necessary to highlight some important characteristics of the country’s apparel industry, which consists of three categories of manufacturers and suppliers. First, there are vertically integrated OEM (original equipment manufacturing) producers, whereby factories import cotton and perform the entire required production process—spinning, weaving/knitting, dyeing, and finishing—autonomously (Akbar & Ahsan, 2019). These manufacturers are very large, own multiple establishments for each production process, and operate as large family-run business groups. In the second category are those factories that import yarn or purchase it from local spinning mills and then take care of the rest of the manufacturing. Lastly, there are CMT (cut, make, and trim) factories, which import fabrics or purchase them from local textile mills and only perform the cutting and stitching (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2011). Most of the supplier factories belong to this last category.

An important but often overlooked characteristic of the apparel production system in Bangladesh is its ‘two-layer’ structure. Generally, the first-layer factories are Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)⁶ registered and supply chain enlisted and are actively involved in apparel production as part of the global supply chain network. The buyers place their production orders directly to these factories, which operate under CoC agreements. As these factories are directly linked with the supply chain and maintain long-term business relations with the buyers, they have to maintain a minimum level of safety standards (Khan & Wichterich, 2015). The second-layer subcontracting factories are unregistered and unregulated, are generally smaller in size, and often operate in the shadow of the first-layer ones. When a buyer places a work order with a first-layer supplier, the supplier, for various reasons, may subcontract that work to another factory that does not maintain any direct relationship with the buyer (French & Martin, 2013). The first-layer supplier breaks up the work order into several small batches which are then processed by these subcontracting factories. The finished products are then sent back to the first-layer supplier for shipment to the buyer. There are thousands of these subcontractor factories which play a critical role in helping the first-layer factories to maintain low production costs and manage the ebb and flow of export orders (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Barrett et al., 2018). Second-layer factories are deemed to be the most dangerous in terms of workplace safety negligence and poor working conditions (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2020).

Interestingly, since the emergence of the industry in the early 80s, the Bangladeshi government has never carried out an industry census; therefore, there is no actual data on the total number of export-oriented supplier factories (Bain, 2015; Barrett et al., 2018). According to the latest BGMEA record, there are currently 4,621 enlisted factories⁷ scattered across the urban areas of the country that work under direct contracts with global buyers (BGMEA, 2020). This number does not include the subcontracting factories; studies conducted by the New York University’s Stern Business School and BRAC University’s Centre for Entrepreneurship Development show that the total number of apparel factories in Bangladesh is somewhere between 7,100 and 8,000 (BRAC University, 2016; Labowitz & Baumann-Pauly, 2015).

While the workplace safety practices in the first-layer factories have already been questioned, the fact that the millions of workers in the subcontracting factories fall outside the protection of international and local safety governance mechanisms has worsened the overall safety conditions in the industry and has further

⁶ The nationwide BGMEA is the largest trade association representing apparel (woven and denim) manufacturers in Bangladesh (BGMEA, 2011).

⁷ This is the number of registered factories as per the BGMEA database updated on 6/1/2020. The actual number may vary as establishments open and close.

fueled the debate on the safety inspection and remediation processes currently in practice. Following this, the next section focuses on the various institutional responses aimed at addressing workplace safety in supplier factories in Bangladesh.

2.3 Workplace Safety in the Supplier Factories in Bangladesh

The inadequacy of the safety practices in Bangladeshi supplier factories can be attested by the accidents that have been occurring every year (James et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2018). The empirical data shows that, in the last decade alone, 180 incidents in supplier factories have resulted in almost 4,000 injuries and more than 2,000 deaths, the highest number of casualties among Southeast Asian countries (Hasan et al., 2017; Solidarity Center, 2019). However, the two greatest catastrophes—i.e., the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse⁸ and the 2012 Tazreen Fashions fire⁹—have painted a grim picture of the substandard workplace safety situation (Chowdhury & Tanim 2016; Taplin, 2014a). These two unspeakable disasters are examples of just a few straws in the bale which generated widespread negative publicity like no other incident in the history of the global apparel business. Interestingly, at the time of the disasters, both those establishments were subcontracting for a large number of European and American fashion brands (Claeson, 2012; Khan & Wichterich, 2015). Until the tragedies occurred, no public information had been available concerning the global fashion brands that were sourcing from the factories involved; the way they were identified after the fact had been by interviewing the survivors and rummaging through the rubble to find brand labels (Stauffer, 2017; Taplin, 2014a). However, the investigation later revealed that the Rana Plaza had been issued compliance certificates by the BSCI—a reputed international social compliance authority with more than 1,000 European and American brands as its members—just weeks before the collapse (Khan & Wichterich, 2015). Similarly, Tazreen Fashions had also been identified as ‘risky’ by another audit; yet, the buyers had ignored the audit report and failed to stop production (Rahim, 2017). Initially, all the buyers denied any involvement with these factories. However, the investigations

⁸ On 24 April 2013, the Rana Plaza, an eight-storey building in Savar, Dhaka, collapsed, causing the death of 1,135 workers and life-threatening injuries to a further 2,515. It is considered the deadliest instance of structural failure and the worst apparel factory disaster in history (Chowdhury & Tanim, 2016). The building had been constructed illegally on a filled-in pond—ignoring building codes—housed five factories, a bank, and several apartments and shops. At the time of the collapse, the supplier factories it housed were manufacturing clothing for at least 28 European and American brands. The building owner—Sohel Rana, a local politician—along with the factory owners, had dismissed earlier warnings to avoid using the building after cracks had appeared. They lied to their labourers that the factory safety situations are properly taken care of and the building will last for 100 years, thereby, had instructed their labourers to return to work (Barrett et al., 2018).

⁹ On 24 November 2012 a devastating fire at the Tazreen Fashions factory in Ashulia, Dhaka, caused the death of 117 workers and severely injured a further 200. It is considered the deadliest factory fire in the nation’s history (Chowdhury & Tanim, 2016). At the time of the fire, the factory was manufacturing for at least 13 European and American brands. The actual cause of the fire has never been identified, leading to speculations such as an electrical short-circuit, arson, and sabotage (Prentice, 2018).

later revealed that the buyers had long turned a blind eye to the prevailing subcontracting practices (Bain, 2015; Evans, 2015; Singer, 2018).

While these two incidents have become “fodder for the perennial debate” over supply chain transparency and worker safety, scholars, human-rights activists, and labour advocates are divided over who should be held responsible for them (Rahim, 2017:807). Some have argued that the buyers should be held accountable for any workplace safety violations in supplier factories because, as ‘lead firms’, they have the most control over and responsibility towards supply chain activities (BHRRC, 2017; Jestratijevic et al., 2018; Köksal et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2015; Ndubisi & Nygaard, 2018; Taplin, 2014a). Others have claimed that the supplier factories (i.e., their owners and managers) are to be blamed for their negligence or evasive attitudes towards workplace safety (Arrigo, 2020; Auke & Simaens, 2019; French & Martin, 2013; Hasan et al., 2017; Nasrullah & Rahim, 2014). Nonetheless, due to the social pressures unleashed by the consumers and wider public concerns about the failure to address the underlying causes of the accidents occurring in factories, a myriad of local and international institutional actors—e.g., buyers, social compliance authorities, labour confederations, and foreign and local governments—have responded to the need for a safety overhaul; each seeking, in one way or another, to stimulate managerial awareness of workplace safety and to establish common safety governance mechanisms across the industry. Such mechanisms can be multi-stakeholder agreements, buyer-driven CoCs, and national laws and policies—and operate at both the national and international levels. Table 2.1 shows a list of the most commonly enacted safety governance mechanisms in the supplier factories in Bangladesh.

Table 2.1: Commonly applied public and private safety governance mechanisms

#	Governance Mechanism / Audit Programme / Certification	Type of Regulatory/Governing Authority
1	The Accord on Fire & Building Safety in Bangladesh (the Accord)	European private multi-stakeholder agreement applicable only to the Bangladeshi apparel industry.
2	The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety (the Alliance)	North-American private multi-stakeholder agreement applicable only to the Bangladeshi apparel industry.
3	The Bangladesh Boiler Act, 1921	Act implemented by the Office of the Chief Inspector of Boilers, Government of Bangladesh. (Boiler is an essential production element of apparel factories.)

4	The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)	Bangladeshi private association that regularly provides training and certification on various safety related issues and periodically inspects members' factories for safety compliance.
5	The Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 with the Bangladesh Labour [Amendment] Bill, 2013	The national labour law of Bangladesh, implemented by the Ministry of Labour & Employment.
6	The Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC)	Building standards implemented by the Ministry of Works, Government of Bangladesh (see section 6.2.1)
7	The Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI)	European private multi-stakeholder governance mechanism.
8	The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI)	Global private multi-stakeholder governance mechanism.
9	Business for Social Responsibility (BSR)	Global private multi-stakeholder supply chain governance mechanism.
10	The Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC)	Global independent private alliance.
11	Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (CTPAT)	US Customs & Border Protection.
12	The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) (UK)	UK-based independent private authority.
13	The Fair Labor Association (FLA)	North-American independent private multi-stakeholder initiative.
14	The Fair Wear Foundation (FWF)	European independent private multi-stakeholder organisation.
15	Fashion Revolution	Global independent private organisation.
16	International Organisation for Standardization (ISO). Applied codes: 9000 (quality management systems) and 14000 (environmental management).	Global independent private standardisation authority.
17	National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA)	Bangladesh government's initiative for factory inspection and certification, under the Department of Inspection for Factories & Establishments (DIFE), Ministry of Labour & Employment (see section 6.2.2 for details).
18	The Readymade Garment Sustainability Council (RSC)	Bangladeshi private tripartite initiative (see section 6.2.1 for details).
19	Social Accountability International (SAI)	North-American private multi-stakeholder advisory board.

20	The Supplier Ethical Data Exchange (SEDEX)	Global independent private organisation.
21	Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production (WRAP)	American private independent organisation.
22	The Worker Rights Consortium (WRC)	American private independent organisation.

The table clearly shows the disproportion between the private and public safety governance mechanisms enacted in the supplier factories. One main reason for the inordinate number of private governance mechanisms was the Rana Plaza collapse, which motivated buyers to stop aligning their CoCs with the country's public safety mechanisms. For example, the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006¹⁰ defines the minimum legal requirements to which the supplier factories must comply in relation to workplace safety and labour management. Since the existing act falls below ILO and other global standards in several aspects, to bring the law more in line with international labour standards, the Bangladeshi government, as part of its recently introduced National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA), has attempted to improve workplace safety conditions and boost workers' rights, including better access to freedom of association in the form of trade unions (ILO, n.d.). The NTPA (designed for fire safety and structural integrity) is a guideline developed in 2013 by the Remediation Coordination Cell (RCC), Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, Ministry of Labour and Employment of the Government of Bangladesh. Its aim is to provide a common platform for all those involved in the apparel industry to assess the structural integrity of existing factory buildings (DIFE, 2018). The tripartite partners are the government of Bangladesh, apparel factory owners, and apparel workers, with the assistance of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The guideline establishes the minimum criteria for the assessment of the structural integrity of existing apparel factory buildings against danger to life from building collapse (ILO, 2020).

However, international reporting authorities have claimed that the government's efforts and willingness to keep its commitments fall short of international standards (European Commission, 2018; United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2020), which further spurred the buyers to be more dominant in governing the safety standards of the supplier factories through private initiatives. Supply chain actors have argued that, even though the apparel business network is very global in nature, the blame for disasters like building collapses and fires should primarily be local; i.e., apportioned to the local governance inadequacies, corruption, and ineptitude that allow non-compliant suppliers and

¹⁰ The Bangladesh labour law is implemented by the Bangladesh Ministry of Labour and Employment. Currently, the government is preparing a draft of the Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Act, 2018 (Bhuiyan, 2018).

subcontracting factories—like the Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions—to be established and operated (Akhter, 2014; Gomes, 2013; Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015).

2.3.1 Private Safety Governance Responses

The government's apparent inability to ensure workplace safety in Bangladesh is well documented (Ahmed et al., 2014; Berliner et al., 2015; Hasan et al., 2017). Even though it has promulgated fairly detailed laws and policies aimed at safeguarding both people and property, due to various levels of corruption, favouritism, and weak monitoring (see section 2.4 for details) by the government have always been under scrutiny due to the pressing gap between the initiation and implementation, and practice and outcomes of public safety governance mechanisms (Elliott & Freeman, 2003; Hasan & Mahmud, 2017; Kurpad, 2014; Rahim, 2017). As a result, increasing private forms of governance mechanisms have been laid out by supply chain actors in response to growing social pressure unleashed by consumers, social awareness campaigns, and western governments to regulate unethical and irresponsible business practices (Berliner & Prakash, 2014; Mayer & Pickles, 2014). In the context of this research, such private safety governance mechanisms take three different forms: (i) multi-stakeholder framework agreements, (ii) buyer-driven CoCs, and (iii) certifications issued by international social compliance authorities/companies. In their design of safety guidelines, these mechanisms tend to include local and global standards such as Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC)¹¹, Bangladesh Labour Law, and widely accepted international electrical safety standards such as NFPA 70 and NFPA 70E¹².

In the immediate aftermath of the Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions incidents, the supply chain actors formalised two private and independent multi-stakeholder agreements—the European-led 'Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety' and the American-led 'Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety'—(henceforth referred to as the Accord and the Alliance). The Accord was a consortium signed by over 180 clothing retailers and importers from over 20 countries in Europe, Asia, and Australia; two global trade unions; eight Bangladeshi trade unions; and four NGO (non-government organisation) witnesses (Bangladesh Accord, 2017). The Alliance was a consortium of North American retailers. Both these initiatives were signed and launched in 2013, and were five-year independent and legally binding global

¹¹ The purpose of the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) is to establish minimum standards for the design, construction, quality of materials, use and occupancy, location and maintenance of all buildings within Bangladesh in order to safeguard, within achievable limits, life, limb, health, property, and public welfare (BNBC, 2015). The first BNBC was developed in 1993 and enacted in 2006, following the amendment of the Building Construction Act-1952. Currently, the draft version of a newer BNBC is under preparation (Sadeque, 2019).

¹² The NFPA 70 is the 'National Electrical Code' and 70E is 'the Standard for Electrical Safety in the Workplace', provided by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)—a global self-funded nonprofit organisation devoted to eliminating death, injury, property and economic loss due to fire, electrical and related hazards (NFPA, 2019).

framework agreements between global buyers and trade unions, initiated to ensure that the factory safety improvements were technically sound, impactful, and sustainable (Bangladesh Worker Safety, 2018). These two initiatives are considered to be the most substantial and stringent safety governance mechanisms ever implemented for the apparel industry in the history of Bangladesh (Ahlquist & Mosley, 2021; Barrett, 2018; Croucher et al., 2019). With the aim of mandating inspection, remediation, and the ongoing monitoring of the supplier factories of their member global brands, from 2013 to 2018, they jointly instigated an EFS safety inspection programme across 2,300 factories¹³ (Bangladesh Accord, 2018; Bangladesh Worker Safety, 2018). In comparing the functions of the Accord and the Alliance, Donaghey and Reinecke (2017) concluded that the Accord is based on principles of industrial democracy and illustrated the potential of an inclusive approach in the form of greater industrial democracy in enhancing the enjoyment of the labour rights. Whereas, Alliance qualifies as a traditional CSR-based approach that had varying and limited impacts in creating an inclusive environment in which workers can easily enjoy their rights (Donaghey & Reinecke, 2017).

Despite the fact that these two initiatives were, in principle, ‘voluntary’, since their initiation in 2013, supply chain actors implemented them as ‘compulsory’ or ‘legally binding’ for their supplier factories. The suppliers were made legally obliged to participate in these inspection and remediation programmes, which were added to the obligatory adherence to the buyers’ safety codes, third-party compliance audits, and certifications. Many scholars have highlighted the mandatory nature of the governance mechanisms as institutional demands¹⁴ (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Gilbert et al., 2010). These mechanisms held non-complying suppliers liable for breach of agreement, and thereby, on numerous occasions, trade agreements were either withheld or cancelled, or the factories were just cut off from the supply chains (Alam et al., 2017; Barrett et al., 2018).

Both the Accord and the Alliance expired on 31 December 2018 and since ceased their operations. Interestingly, upon expiration, both these agreements were successful for renewal for another five years, however, this attempt became unsuccessful after a year or so. For example, in 2019, the Alliance made an attempt to transition into ‘Nirapon’, a multi-stakeholder successor that involved previous Alliance members and a handful of local large apparel business groups. The word ‘Nirapon’ is a blend of two

¹³ The Accord independently inspected 1,600 factories and the Alliance inspected 714. Initially, 414 factories were inspected by both by mistake (Labour Behind the Label, 2019).

¹⁴ Institutional demands refer to the overlapping workplace safety related regulations, standards, codes of conduct, and compliance certifications imposed on the supplier factories by the supply chain actors (e.g., buyers, international social compliance authorities, global trade unions bodies) (Gilbert et al., 2010).

Bengali words 'Nirapodh' and 'Abashon' which together mean 'Safe Place' in English. The purpose of Nirapon was to foster a safe working environment for the apparel factories, workers, managers, and owners, by serving as the local point of contact in Dhaka for the collective efforts of its North American member brands (Nirapon, 2019). However, when Nirapon started overseeing the Alliance's functions, some factory owners raised concerns over its activities, alleging that it had been creating confusion over safety standards and adding new cost burdens in the name of monitoring and training (Dhaka Tribune, 2019; Glover, 2019). They further alleged that Nirapon was creating a market favourable to local safety training providers and audit firms, which they could not afford after the huge investments they had made to comply with the Accord and the Alliance remediation plans (New Age, 2019). Since then, the High Court of Bangladesh has imposed a ban on Nirapon and has asked why it should not be ordered to join the RMG Sustainability Council (RSC)¹⁵—the newly formed national tripartite initiative that is now responsible for conducting regular factory safety inspections and for monitoring the industry's safety under its own standards (Textile Today, 2019). On the other hand, due to the accusations of wrongdoing made by some factory owners, the Accord also faced a high court ban on its renewal in 2018. Upon appeal, the Supreme Court eventually granted the Accord to continue its operations for another year. Hence, the Accord successfully progressed into the '2018 Transition Accord' with the aim of handing its responsibilities over to the RSC (Ahmed, 2019; Uni Global Union, 2018).

Despite the Accord and the Alliance being the most comprehensive and rigid safety governance mechanisms ever implemented in the Bangladesh apparel sector, industry experts expressed mixed reactions in relation to their scope and overall effectiveness (Ahlquist & Mosley, 2021; Barrett, 2018). On the one hand, scholars have discussed and praised them as promising and unique initiatives aimed at establishing labour rights in the factories (Croucher et al., 2019; Donaghey & Reinecke, 2017; Schübler, et al., 2019; TUAC, 2017). Interest groups and general reporting have labelled them as “ground-breaking beacons of hope” (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2020:29), “game changers” (Conradt, 2013), and a ‘major breakthrough’ (Hensler & Blasi, 2013). Industry experts, on the other hand, have questioned their narrow scope and actual impact on workers' lives. For instance, the subcontracting factories, where the safety conditions are much worse and the workers are most vulnerable, fell outside the scope of their inspection schemes. It is likely that the number of factories inspected by the Accord and the Alliance represents no more than one-third of the total—“just the tip of the iceberg” (Labowitz &

¹⁵ The RSC (RMG Sustainability Council) is the newly formed national tripartite platform of global buyers, labour unions, and local manufacturers aimed at ensuring sustainable solutions suited to carry forward the accomplishments achieved in workplace safety in Bangladesh in the last five years. Its purpose is to conduct safety inspections, monitor safety practices and compliance, and provide certifications for the factories (TBS, 2020). It is a private initiative separate from, but complementary to, the government's regulatory powers and bodies (Mowbray, 2020).

Baumann-Pauly, 2015:14), covering only about 45% of the workers of the industry (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019).

Furthermore, within the broad realm of occupational safety, the Accord and the Alliance focussed only on the EFS categories of workplace safety and ignored other aspects. Therefore, their success in achieving workplace safety across the industry and protecting labour rights has also been questioned (Smith, 2014). Some scholars even see these initiatives as heralding a new corporate social responsibility (CSR) paradigm that affords global buyers leeway to transfer to the supplier factories their responsibility and liability in relation to any safety violations or wrongdoing, thereby presenting a clean image of themselves to their consumers (Donaghey & Reinecke, 2017; Salminen, 2018). For example, the member brands of the Accord and the Alliance agreed to ostracise any supplier factory that would fail to meet the EFS safety protocols they had set or refuse to participate in their audit programmes (Barrett et al., 2018); something that had never been tried before in this industry. Therefore, these initiatives have been labelled as a “tokenistic but victorious effort” for the well-funded global union confederations and elite clothing brands that were the key stakeholders of the Accord and Alliance, which, in reality, had done little to actually address the exploitive working conditions found at the bottom of the supply chain network (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019:292).

The second form of private governance response is represented by buyer-driven supplier CoCs. Over the last few decades, as part of the anti-sweatshop movements, global buyers have increasingly become dependent on their CoCs to manage and monitor their suppliers’ ethical and socially responsible practices and to promote supply chain transparency (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Blackburn, 1991; Waddock et al., 2002). While the Accord and the Alliance had kept factory-based day-to-day occupational safety issues outside of their scope, independent code agreements—such as H&M’s Code of Ethics, Marks and Spencer’s Code of Ethics and Behaviours, Next’s Code of Practice, etc.—bridge this gap by setting out the minimum safety standards that must be maintained regularly in supplier factories. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that, long before the execution of the multi-stakeholder Accord and Alliance agreements, the global buyers had always held the absolute power and authority to decide upon the working conditions, policies, rules, and safety monitoring systems to be adopted in their partner factories (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003). Accordingly, fashion brands have legitimised their involvement as the dominant players in the global apparel supply chain networks and, naturally, wield the greatest influence on the workplace safety practices enacted in their supplier factories (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Huq et al., 2014; Perry & Wood, 2018).

The third form of private governance mechanism is provided by internationally recognised social audit companies. To determine the credibility of the suppliers' claims of compliance with CoCs, buyers frequently conduct factory audits through these companies to ensure that the suppliers have actually done what they claimed (Jiang, 2009). Furthermore, due to the escalation of consumer concerns and awareness movements like 'Who made my clothes?', 'Where are my clothes made?' (Fashion Revolution, n.d.), and 'ethical and sustainable purchase' (Miemczyk & Johnsen, 2012), and stakeholder pressure for increased levels of CSR activities (Hasan, 2016; Perry & Towers, 2013), supplier factories have been facing demands to obtain various types of compliance certifications issued by third-party auditors (see table 2.1 for the list). In an effort to ensure that their global buyers can uphold their brand reputation, the supplier factories are required to obtain as many certifications as possible to represent themselves as providers of safe workplaces and implementers of ethical and sustainable business practices.

The following section provides an overview of the public governance mechanisms recently implemented to address workplace safety issues in those factories that fall both inside and outside of the scope of the private safety governance mechanisms.

2.3.2 Public Safety Governance Responses

The apparel industry in Bangladesh started from scratch four decades ago and has experienced exponential growth over the last two decades. The industry was initiated during the early 1980s only by a handful of businesspersons who established a few factories. They sent a few hundred trainee workers to South Korea where they learned how to produce apparel (BGMEA, 2020; Mottaleb & Sonobe, 2011). Now, this is the largest industry in the country with several thousand factories (BRAC University, 2016; Labowitz & Baumann-Pauly, 2015). In order to let the industry grow rapidly, for all these years, the governments deliberately overlooked the matter that the country's industrial policies and workplace safety regulations have grossly been ignored by the industrialists (Islam et al., 2016; Mottaleb & Sonobe, 2011). More than 30 years of intentional state deregulation and weak monitoring further incited a large number of businesspeople to establish factories in an unplanned manner with inadequate safety measures (Akbar & Ahsan, 2019; Farhana et al., 2015; Muhammad, 2006). However, in recent times, especially because of the growing social pressure after the Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions incident, the need for robust public governance has become a pressing issue for the government. As a result, in 2013, the government developed an ambitious initiative—the National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA)—on fire safety and structural integrity. The NTPA is governed by complex accountability mechanisms, having 25 action items in three workplace safety areas—policy and legislation, administration, and practical activities—

and also calls for the submission of a labour law reform package and the amendment of the national labour law, the recruitment of more safety inspectors, the creation of a factory information database, and the establishment of a worker safety hotline (DIFE, 2018).

The NTPA is supposed to perform three important tasks: first, to continue the inspection and remediation regime initiated by the Accord and the Alliance for their member suppliers; second, to conduct safety audits within those factories that do not have any business relationships with the member brands of the Accord and the Alliance and manufacture apparel for non-European and non-American buyers; and third, to locate those subcontracting and unregistered factories the business model of which is based on exploitative sweatshop conditions and do not maintain any direct business relations with any global buyers (DIFE, 2018; ILO, 2017; Khan & Wichterich, 2015). However, there are ongoing concerns about the government's commitment and the NTPA's lack of capacity. The NTPA implementation authority—i.e., the government's Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) is still not fully functional, understaffed, and lacks the capacity needed to carry out its tasks (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2019). Furthermore, the NTPA appears to have somehow only managed to implement five out of its 25 action commitments in the last seven years (European Commission, 2018). As a result, it is argued that the quality of the safety inspections and other works carried out under the NTPA does not meet the standards already set by the Accord and Alliance. Hence, the progress made possible by Accord and Alliance initiatives could be undone if the focus on compliance is not maintained (Khan & Wichterich, 2015).

Literature shows that past initiatives taken by the government had been unsuccessful to ensure safety in the apparel industry (Akbar & Ahsan, 2019; Islam et al., 2016; Mottaleb & Sonobe, 2011). About the inception of NTPA, international labour rights experts and compliance monitoring authorities also question how effective this new regulatory regime will be (European Commission, 2018; United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2020). In an ideal world, the government would competently oversee the entire industry, without any need for private intervention. But the world, of course, is far from ideal, and the evidence suggests that the government may not have done its job in a satisfactory fashion. While the industry-state nexus can point to the recent safety governance mechanisms to demonstrate that the industry and the government take workplace safety seriously by showcasing only a few large factories that have implemented these new safety procedures in the last few years, the dangerous and exploitive working conditions in the vast majority of subcontracted and unregistered factories remain unchanged (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019). From this angle, it can be argued that the government's aim of promoting

the country's exports as a means to development may imply utilitarian instrumentalism (see chapter 3 for more discussion). In other words, the apparel industry as a whole was viewed as a means to an end, and workplace safety as an inconvenience—a hindrance to industrial growth.

2.4 The Institutional Factors Influencing Workplace Safety

The literature shows that institutions can normalise behaviours and shape the nature of much economic activity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; North, 1990), thus influencing the attitudes and actions of different economic actors in a given environment (Scott, 2013). Scholars such as Hodgson (2006, 2003), March & Olsen (2010), and Stocking & Watkins (2013) have long developed the original insights on institutionalism associated with Thorsten Veblen (and the original institutionalist school of thought). On institutionalism, these authors suggest that individual thinking can be shaped, constrained, and enabled by evolving and emergent institutional rule systems. So, agents' attitudes and behaviours are partly instinctive and socially conditioned. Hence, to some extent, people's values emerge from interactions with their institutional environment.

In this regard, this study adopts the definition of 'institution' from Hodgson's (2006:18) seminal contribution on the topic which is built upon North's (1990) work, i.e., "systems of established and embedded social rules that structure social interaction". Scholars argue that by structuring, constraining, and enabling people's attitudes, institutions have the capacity to shape or influence their attitudes and motives that drive their intentions (Gräbner & Ghorbani, 2019; Searl, 2005). This means, institutions do not stand separately from the group of agents involved, rather, they depend for their existence on their agents, their interactions, and shared patterns of thoughts. This is because every agent is born into a pre-existing institutional world that confronts him/her with its norms and rules (Hodgson, 2006). Hence, this study posits that organisations are a particular legal form of institution consisting of structures and networks of agents, and so, organisations cannot function without rules of communication, membership, or sovereignty (North, 1990; Scott, 2013). Hodgson (2006) in this regard defines organisations with the following three measures: (i) criteria to establish their boundaries and to distinguish their members from nonmembers; (ii) principles of sovereignty concerning who is in charge; and (iii) chains of command delineating responsibilities within the organisation.

This study acknowledges that agents have certain moral obligations within the organisational context, however, their moral obligations can be shaped, constrained, enabled, and influenced by various institutional factors. In the context of this study, this can be argued that various supply chain and local

contextual factors can affect managerial attitudes towards workplace safety. The following sections present an exploratory literature analysis to identify such institutional factors affecting managerial moral agency.

2.4.1 Corruption

Corruption is a social process that requires the understanding of the individual actors who are the participants in the social system (Agyei-Mensah, 2017; Warburton, 2013). To explain it from an institutional perspective, scholars have emphasised the exploration of the organisational contexts, ethical climate, behaviours, and processes that support it (Gorsira et al., 2018; Luo, 2005; Pillay, 2014), while others have focussed on the culture, structure, and cognition found within organisations as a means for understanding the development of corruption (Misangyi et al., 2008; Pillay & Kluvers, 2014). A few scholars have attempted to discuss corruption in relation to the attributes of individuals and have examined peoples' moral agency, which reframes individuals and their actions in different social and organisational settings (Bandura, 2002; Eriksson, 2016; Manning, 1988; Moore, 2007; Velasquez, 1983, Zipparo, 1998). Hodgson & Jiang (2007) described corruption in terms of moral deterioration and spoiling of something for private gain. In this regard, scholars further suggest many forms and orders through which corruption occurs by individuals and groups (Jain, 1998; Rose-Ackerman, 2006). For example, first-order corruption is the abuse of power for private gains within a system of existing rules or norms, and second-order is the abuse of power for private gains by changing an existing system of rules or norms (Zyglidopoulos, 2016).

Most empirical corruption studies emphasised differences between countries and looked for macro-level determinants of corruption such as political institutions and cultures (Jha & Panda, 2017; Lederman et al., 2005). Such research has offered explanations for why corruption is more common in some countries than in others, however, has not revealed why within organisations some people engage in corruption while others do not. Hence, this discussion attempts an examination of organisational and individual factors which may explain managerial engagement in corruption. In this regard, while, the 'use of public resources for private gain' remains the most popular way among scholars to define corruption, (see Larmour & Wolanin, 2013; Luo, 2005), this study prefers to use corruption as defined by Transparency International as an abuse of entrusted power for private gain which can be classified as grand, petty, and political depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs (Transparency, 2022). Transparency International's yearly Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is the most widely used indicator of worldwide corruption which ranks Bangladesh 146th out of 180 countries and as the most corrupt in

South Asia (Transparency, 2021). According to the CPI, in Bangladesh, the most common forms of corruption involve cronyism, misuse of public resources/funds, misuse of power for personal gain, and bribery. The following sections provide a review of these forms in the context of this study.

2.4.2 Cronyism

The literature explains cronyism as the practice of offering favouritism based on long-term political and social networks, including “kindship, friendship, ethnicity, religion, school, workplace, mutual interest, and other grouping categories” (Andrews et al., 2019; Khatri et al., 2016:35). The worldview of cronyism also sees it as informal networks of ‘rent-seeking’ activities embedded in cultural orientation (Hudson & Claasen, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2019). Literature also shows how entrepreneurs in manufacturing countries of Asia utilise cronyism to acquire resources (Yu et al., 2021).

Cronyism has a considerable impact on the country’s apparel sector. As such, in the context of this study, the apparent nexus between the apparel industry and the country’s policymakers is not limited to the long-term enterprise-government relationship only but also focuses on a variety of economic favours and unethical advantages given to the factory owners by the policymakers, which are seen as a major hindrance to workplace safety progression in the industry (Khan & Wichterich, 2015). For example, an imprudent and flexible industrial investment policy was adopted by the government to support the growth of the apparel industry, which was characterised by a series of favours offered to apparel entrepreneurs. One such preference was to offer credit facilities in favourable conditions. In response to government directives, the banks provided large amounts of loans to apparel entrepreneurs without due regard to KYC (know your customer) verification, often at interest rates below the bank’s cost of funds (IMF, 2019; Yardley, 2013). The entrepreneurs were greatly advantaged by this easy source of money and, within a decade or so, large numbers of small entrepreneurs became large multiple factory owners, some operating 20 to 30 factories in their portfolios, with worker numbers frequently topping the 30 to 40 thousand mark. Hence, the apparel businesspeople emerged as a powerful class or oligarch in society, also showing an interest in politics. The evidence shows that, at present, more than 61% of all the members of parliaments (MPs) are businessmen and, at any given point in time, at least 10% of all MPs were apparel factory owners, while most others had some kind of indirect financial interest in the industry through friends, relatives, and family ties (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Prothom Alo, 2019; The Daily Star, 2018; Yardley, 2013). The evidence also shows that, on several occasions, these apparel business-owner MPs blocked the parliamentary adoption of stricter regulations pertaining to the industry’s safety (Khan & Wichterich, 2015; Khan & Ahmed, 2011). In fact, most of the owners of the factories that either collapsed or were

destroyed by fire over the last two decades were either politicians or family members of politicians and MPs where none of the factory owners or concerned factory managers was brought under justice for workplace safety violations (Allchin, 2014; Christie, 2016; Islam & Ashraf, 2005; Mustafa & Islam, 2013).

Cronyism further facilitated an unjustifiable form of income inequality and power imbalance based on the ability of well-connected apparel businesspeople to take a larger share of the existing wealth—rather than creating new wealth—through their involvement in the apparel business (Stiglitz, 2012). Ongoing hostility toward trade unions and collective bargaining on the part of successive regimes can be traced to the ample political and economic incentives for business elites to keep wages low and workers disempowered. It is common to see influential business people (who are also MPs) using their position to harness political power to rig the system in their favour in taking ownership of most commercial banks and financial institutions as well as in establishing several new banks operated by their family members and friends (Ahmed et al., 2014; Berliner et al., 2015). In such a scenario, the owners of large apparel businesses are also directors of banks and financial institutions, which evidences a potential conflict of interest. Factory owners regularly secure preferential treatment from their banks or those owned by their friends and colleagues. This has led to inefficient fund allocation and widespread loan delinquency (IMF, 2019). As of 2019, the country's banking sector's total defaulted loans stood at over BDT 1.12 trillion [£10.2 billion] among 700 borrowers, which is around 12% of the total outstanding loan (Byron, 2019). The total amount of bad debts would have been estimated at around BDT 2.5 trillion [£23 billion] had the central bank also taken into account rescheduled loans, regularised debts, and those frozen in courts (Harmachi, 2019). As a result, the banking sector has been undergoing a critical situation whereby several banks have already collapsed in recent years and a dozen more are standing on the verge of failure (Babu, 2019; Ovi, 2019; TBS, 2022).

The negative consequences of cronyism also extend into various levels of unethical activities (Gregg, 2016; Salter, 2014). The sponsors, promoters, and beneficiaries of this cronyism all belong to society's upper strata and protect each other. All the benefits of state patronage are provided to the rich, even though most of them do not pay their taxes, have amassed huge wealth, and are involved in money laundering (Khan, 2010). Likewise, rich and powerful apparel factory owners have also subverted institutional policies and legal systems by maintaining mutually profitable relationships with regulators, legislators, law enforcement agencies, and the government in order to continue their unethical practices. For example, the measurement of the success of the apparel business was never pivoted around shared

economic prosperity through ethical business practices, rather towards the accumulation of personal wealth by unethical means (GAN, 2018; Uddin, 2019). Therefore, business owners secure huge bank loans and, instead of investing the funds in their business, e.g., as workplace safety improvements—they invest the minimum amount required to continue the basic operation of their factories and used the remaining funds to accumulate personal wealth at home and abroad (Ovi, 2019, 2020; Oxford Analytica, 2019). The evidence shows that the total amount of money laundered from Bangladesh between 2005 and 2014 was £50 billion, which is equivalent to 25% of the country's GDP in 2016–2017 (Abedin, 2018; GFI, 2019; Jamal, 2020; Ovi, 2020). It has also become a common practice for banks to write-off or waive loans against wilful defaulters (the defaulters often being the banks' own directors/owners, politicians and MPs, or their families and friends), which benefits the borrowers and severely affects the growth and development of the economy (Oxford Analytica, 2019; Uddin, 2019). In this regard, the government's support for apparel business owners facing workplace safety violations and corruption allegations has led to the perception of impunity. The empirical evidence further shows that apparel business owners also maintain effective control over the judicial system and law enforcement agencies by bestowing political and financial patronage on them and fostering a culture of impunity (GAN, 2018). Therefore, no mechanism aimed at bringing the offenders to justice has ever been deployed, promoting a culture of immunity.

2.4.3 Bribery

The mainstream literature on corruption shows the prevalence of bribery as a major reason for deficiencies in the enforcement of safety governance mechanisms in developing nations (Ahmed et al., 2014; Berliner et al., 2015; Olken & Pande, 2012). Bribery practices are extremely damaging and bring catastrophic social and economic consequences under any utilitarian assessments (Linstead et al., 2009). Scholars have also argued that businesses in highly corrupt countries take advantage of various forms of corruption and bribery to boost their efficiency and growth (Harstad & Svensson, 2011; Kreps, 1997; Samphantharak & Malesky, 2008). Studies specific to global apparel supply chains share the same argument, viewing bribery as grease—rather than sand—in the wheel of increased efficiency (Manners-Bell, 2018; Méon & Sekkat, 2005:69; Xiao et al., 2017).

In the context of Bangladesh, scholars have argued that bribery is perhaps the most ubiquitous and damaging form of corruption, whereby nothing can be achieved without bribing the concerned individuals (Hashmi, 2017; Kishore, 2019; Zafarullah & Siddiquee, 2001). Considering the change of mentality from 'need for profit' to 'greed for profit' among all resource management groups—such as politicians,

bureaucrats, businesspersons, professionals, and union leaders—bribery has become the main medium for satisfying their insatiable demand, termed as ‘bulge hunger’ by Alam (2016:1). While the host governments in every corner of the world have made bribery illegal on their own land, sarcastically, bribery has been promoted as a common business norm of doing any business dealings in Bangladesh. This was also made evident by a comment of the former finance minister of the country, who attempted to provide bribery with a veneer of legality by calling it ‘speed money’ and claiming that the giving and receiving of bribes is not illegal and that developed countries should also legalise it (Banglanews, 2014; Tritiyomatra, 2020).

In this regard, ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’ is a very relevant phrase, whereby even the state makes an attempt to legalise bribery. As a result, the practice of bribery has become so firmly established in every business sector including the apparel industry that it is no longer considered an unethical act or a hindrance to doing business; rather, it is considered a legal transaction or a ‘facilitation fee’ to conduct business in a smart way (Hashmi, 2017; Khatun, 2015). The evidence shows that bribery, in the form of informal payments and gift-giving, is essential at various stages of conducting apparel business—from the import/purchase of the raw materials to the final shipment of the finished goods—and involves most public and private functions (Ahmed et al., 2014; GAN, 2018). Factory owners also maintain effective control over the police force of Bangladesh by bestowing bribe and political patronage on it and fostering a culture of impunity (GAN, 2019). It is particularly evident in relation to the activities involved in factory safety inspections, whereby factory owners and managers have been found to use bribes to create favourable impressions of their factories while evading or circumventing institutional safety governance mechanisms (see Chapter 5 for details). Bribes are commonly used to sway safety-audit reports or to produce evidence of superficial or misleading conformity to safety standards by the local auditors employed by global buyers or international social-audit companies (Bhuiyan & Haq, 2008; Huq et al., 2014; Kang, 2021; Khan et al., 2013). Government officials and labour inspectors also rarely have the resources (e.g., transport facility to travel between factories, decent salary, etc.) to resist any offer of bribes (Ahmed et al., 2014).

2.4.4 Factors Related to Authority, Control, and Dominance

In any organisational setting, there are issues such as networks, interdependences, and interactions, related to authority, control, and dominance among individuals and groups. Some networks are formally established and some are rather informal. Bangladesh’s business and financial sectors are dominated and controlled by privileged and well-connected families (Muttakin & Khan, 2014). Past studies show an

overwhelming degree of family dominance in the country's apparel industry, whereby the key managerial positions at most supplier factories are held by family members, their relatives, and friends (Farooque et al., 2007; Reaz & Arun, 2006; Uddin & Chowdhury, 2008).

Interestingly, the literature on the Asian context shows two relatively opposing viewpoints in relation to familial dominance and its impact on business. On the one hand, some studies show that family-owned businesses enact better overall governance mechanisms—with a variety of factors such as a family-style approach to working relationships, greater flexibility, healthier communication between managers and workers, preparing successors for future leadership, loyalty and trust, quicker decision making, etc.—leading to overall better working environments (Cennamo et al., 2012; Jackling & Johl, 2009; Morris et al., 1996; Neubauer & Lank, 1998; Pindado & Requejo, 2014; Wright et al., 2014). On the other hand, there are studies that found that familial control is more conducive to unethical business decisions, mismanagement, and corruption due to factors like the scope for evading accountability and transparency, keeping complete control over business activities, family feuds, resentment and rivalries, etc. (Chen & Nowland, 2010; Rama, 2012; Tagiuri & Davis, 1996; Villalonga et al., 2015).

In the context of this study, the actual issues that stem from businesses being family-owned and controlled may go deeper. For example, the practice of workplace safety can be influenced by factors such as the behavioural characteristics of family members, with varying levels of emphasis being given to safety practices; emotional attachment to the business and its subsequent impact on safety-related decision-making; the upholding of family honour, influence, and prestige; a greater emphasis on profit through the evasion of safety governance; a lack of mutual accord in prioritising activities related to safety compliance; confusion and rivalry among siblings in inheriting the businesses from parents; and varying levels of emphasis on safety-related training and awareness programmes, labour management, and CSR practices. Given the complexity of these features, empirical investigation is needed to better understand whether the impact of family dominance is either beneficial or detrimental, to workplace safety, which further points to the importance of this study.

An extension of familial dominance and nepotism is the link between authority and control over decision-making—i.e., high levels of familial dominance can result in high levels of authority and control over workplace safety-related decisions and practices. Scholars have emphasised that a sense of workplace safety should originate from a managerial sense of moral obligation (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Eckhardt, 2001; Hughes & Ferrett, 2011; Spence, 2016). However, the literature highlighted shows that the

accidents that have plagued the Bangladeshi apparel industry over the past two decades were mostly related to managerial negligence and avoidance of the required safety governance mechanisms (Ahmed & Hossain, 2009; Chowdhury, 2014a; Farhana et al., 2015; Hasan et al., 2017; Wadud et al., 2014). This clearly highlights the managerial struggle in relation to a moral consciousness of workplace safety practice.

A possible explanation for this lack of moral obligation may be provided by managerial authority and control over business decisions being regularly aimed at profit-maximisation and cost-minimisation, rather than at the investments needed to improve and maintain workplace safety. Factory owners and managers tend to favour quick and short-term profits over the steady growth and long-term sustainability of the business (Akbar & Ahsan, 2019); therefore, they consider the benefits brought by evading institutional demands for safety governance mechanisms to be greater than those linked to complying with them; that is to say that the rationale behind managerial decisions aimed at evading or circumventing safety practices is based upon the understanding that the ‘benefits of not being caught’ outweigh the ‘risks of being caught’ (Chowdhury, 2014a). Similar lines of argument have been presented by scholars in global contexts, showing managerial tendencies to make unethical business decisions—the most significant of which involve the circumventing of workplace safety practices—which enhance profit and personal gain and ignore stakeholder welfare (Jones et al., 2007; Nagin, 2013; Snyder 2010; Soundararajan et al. 2018; Tombs & Whyte, 2013). On the whole, business owners appear to view the apparel business as means to an end, and workplace safety as an inconvenience—a hindrance to their profits and personal wealth accumulation.

Furthermore, in the supplier factories of Bangladesh, managerial lack of moral obligation towards workplace safety practices may also be linked to personal values and characteristics. As highlighted earlier, the first-generation apparel business entrepreneurs took advantage of the state’s intentional deregulation and of various government favours. Many factory owners came from rural areas without any institutional education (or having completed only primary schools) and settled in major cities and were gradually involved in the apparel business (Ahmed et al., 2014; Sharif et al., 2015). Their dominant control over their businesses and non-complying attitudes towards workplace safety were perhaps governed by their ties to the political power base, low levels of education, lack of managerial and leadership skills, autocratic management style, poor understanding of human resource management practices, and lack of understanding of the importance of workplace safety (Alam et al., 2017; Barua & Ansary, 2017; Kurpad, 2014; Shadat et al., 2016). This lack of moral obligation has also resulted in the

unethical practices of deception, with previous research unearthing evidence of factory managers keeping two or more sets of records to hide various workplace violations (Jiang, 2009; McCafferty, 2005).

This premise is similar to that of the literature related to the international context, where scholars have pointed out that the personal characteristics and leadership styles of managers are reflected in the workplace safety practices they implement (see Hasle et al., 2012; Kerr et al., 2017; Levine & Rubinstein, 2017; Mallett & Wapshott, 2012; Martin, 2012; Miao et al., 2016; Patterson & Kerrin, 2014). These studies portray business owners as the dominant actors and sole decision-makers in their business enterprises, being responsible for any changes pertaining to the latter. In this regard, Bandura (1986) suggests that through the ‘modelling’ processes, managers influence their followers as this is how values and attitudes are transmitted within an organisation. In particular, modelling means that in the process of observing managers’ behaviour and the subsequent consequences thereof, employees learn what is accepted and what is not, and are likely to imitate the behaviour of those with authority. Thereby, it can be assumed that the values and attitudes that the factory owners demonstrate towards workplace safety are most likely to be emulated by the factory managers.

2.4.5 Religious Faith and Work Ethics

To conceptualise and understand managerial values and attitudes towards work, the characteristics of various religion-based work ethics have been used in the management literature (Ali et al., 2009; Reynolds & Newell 2011). The main idea underpinning this field of study involves investigating how a certain belief system determines the lives of those individuals who are born and brought up in a particular society. In this regard, Max Weber’s notion of *Lebensführung*—which relates to a specific Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) framework that captures the manner in which an individual can encompass religious ethics at work—has gained broad attention in empirical studies (Feess et al., 2014; Schaltegger & Torgler, 2010; Uygur et al., 2016; Weber, 2002). In order to investigate the influences of religious faiths on work ethics in countries in which the majority of the population is Muslim, scholars have developed and applied an ‘Islamic work ethics’ framework based on the moral principles drawn upon from the Al-Qur’an (the central religious text of Islam) and the Sunnah (the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him). Generally, Islamic work ethics are exemplified by virtuous work-life characteristics—e.g., good intentions, honesty, sincerity, responsibility, generosity, trustworthiness, and balance in one’s life (Karakas et al., 2014; Winter, 2016). Interestingly, the empirical evidence shows that, in American and European countries, the more religious Muslim individuals are, the more they practice their work ethics (Feess et al., 2014; Zulfikar, 2011). However, in the context of some Asian countries,

there is mixed evidence whereby the degree of religiosity of individuals has been found to have no significant or varying levels of impact on their work ethics (Clobert, 2021; Jagodzinski, 2009; Soleman et al., 2019).

Scant research has been conducted in relation to religion and work ethics in the context of Bangladesh and no religion-based framework has ever been developed or applied to study the influence of religion on attitudes towards work. In this regard, the relationship between religion and personal work ethics in Bangladesh may appear peculiar and gain special importance for several reasons. First, although the population of Bangladesh is predominantly Muslim, a large segment of it has adopted a lifestyle that does not fall within Islamic values or practices. Once considered taboo, the growth of atheist and agnostic movements has gained traction in recent times (Ebert, 2015; Islam, 2015). Second, while Islam is stipulated to be the state religion of Bangladesh and secularism is one of the four fundamental principles of the country's constitution, along with nationalism, socialism, and democracy, the government is more inclined towards the latter to promote an image of a non-extremist country, especially after the terrorist incidents caused by various Islamist extremist militant groups over the last decade (Bhuiyan, 2017; Khan, 2017; SATP, 2017). Therefore, more contemporary understandings and interpretations of Islamic values and practices now sit side by side with traditional rulings and 'fatwas' (non-binding legal opinions of Islamic law). Third, in a country that is routinely ranked among the most corrupt in the world from a moral point of view, the degradation of the people's moral values may be an indication of their dissociation from any particular belief system (Noor, 2008). All these premises can have a significant impact on individuals' work and business ethics. As a result, the scope for an empirical investigation to explore how religious moral principles, as a compass for living one's life, construct the work ethics found in Bangladeshi apparel business owners and the relationship between religion and business and economic activities remains open.

2.4.6 Supply Chain Factors

In recent years, the power wielded in supply chains by global fashion brands has moved to the forefront of the research agenda, especially in the wake of the Rana Plaza tragedy. The immense size and sheer buying power of global fashion brands leave their supplier factories with very little bargaining power in the negotiation of work contracts. Esbenshade's (2004:37) quote "You don't tell Walmart your price, Walmart tells you"—to represent the power yielded by the global supply chain buyers, the buyers almost unilaterally determine price, product quality, and lead time and the supplier factories just carry out their production tasks without any authority or freedom in the overall business process (Snyder, 2010).

Long-term business relationships with buyers are a major factor enabling supplier factories to survive in a highly competitive market. These relationships mostly depend on the four aspects of cost, quality, compliance, and time (Jiang, 2009; Sorenson, 2003). On the surface, business agreements may appear to be based on ethical trading terms, e.g., long-term partnership agreements, fair price negotiation and reasonable lead times, safety compliance, healthy labour management, the ethical sourcing of raw materials, and ethical manufacturing. However, in reality, the empirical evidence shows that the buyers adopt various creative and manipulative practices aimed at dictating business terms that are often unethical—e.g., unfair pricing and delayed payments, demand for quickest lead times, penalties or sometimes payment cancellations for delayed shipment caused by various external conditions, and strict demands for workplace safety practices as per the CoC standards (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Hossain & Roy, 2016; Hughes et al., 2007; Islam & Liang, 2012; Macdonald, 2014).

One way though in which buyers place tremendous pressure on their supplier factories is the global introduction of the ‘lean retailing’ business model. This requires the latter to adopt a ‘quick response’ strategy of frequent shipment suited to fill ongoing replenishment orders. Global fashion brands constantly refresh their product ranges with the latest seasonal fashion trends and keep small stocks of merchandise, thus encouraging consumers to visit their stores more frequently by way of the ‘Here Today, Gone Tomorrow’ ideology (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2009). This ensures shorter product life spans and higher profit margins from quick sales (Cachon & Swinney, 2011). As a response to this ‘fast-fashion’ movement, buyers “chase the cheapest needle around the planet” (Blanchard, 2018; O’Connor, 2018), adopt just-in-time delivery strategies based on the real-time sales and stock information of their retail outlets, seek to reduce any risk of over- or under-buying, and place work-orders to supplier factories accordingly (Dong et al., 2001; Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003). Moreover, buyers deliberately defer their decisions until the last possible moment in order to better understand what their competitors might do and to more accurately reflect the latest fashion trends and consumer demands, either in terms of volume or product specification (Plinke & Ashida, 2004, cited in Jiang, 2009). This results in year-round pressure being placed on suppliers to meet strict delivery deadlines, as well as in strong cost mandates, often resulting in extreme work intensification in supplier factories to the adoption of safety shortcuts (Taplin, 2014a). Supplier factory owners and managers end up passing the continuous pressure for low prices down to their workers by eroding the latter’s welfare (e.g., low wages, no job and social security) and evading required workplace safety practices (Arnold & Hartman, 2005; Jiang, 2009). Furthermore, the buyers are well aware that, due to their high volume of work orders, and to keep their production costs down, their suppliers often subcontract production to unregistered factories (Bain, 2015; Evans, 2015;

Singer, 2018). Scholars have argued that the buyers' silent support for this subcontracting system actively shields them from their responsibilities in relation to the sweatshop conditions that exist in subcontracting factories, enabling them to reap enormous profits in the process (Macdonald, 2014).

Another critical way that supply chain pressure is placed on supplier factories is the application of various types and kinds of workplace safety governance standards and certification systems (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Christopherson & Lillie, 2005; James et al., 2019). While receiving work orders, suppliers are provided with the mandatory CoC and notified that they are required to subject themselves to frequent audits and to obtain a certain number of certifications from various third-party audit companies as per the codes of agreement. In such a situation, suppliers who are already passive players, have no power to discuss how and when these audits will take place and which safety conditions are practical and achievable given the negotiated product price point. As a result, the limitations inherent in the buyer-dominated atmosphere usually lead to buyers setting unachievable targets and to the corresponding responsibilities being unfairly weighted towards the suppliers (Gould, 2005; Jiang, 2009).

The lack of transparency found in supply chains is another type of concerning factor. There is some evidence that buyers and suppliers have little awareness or understanding of each other and that the former simply pass the responsibility for labour exploitation down the supply chain while steering clear of any form of accountability (Parliament, 2019). A UK government parliamentary investigation report described supply chain production in South Asian countries as being the scene of low-cost, high-volume, and zero-consequence production methods that leave fashion brands free from any responsibilities for the effects of safety and labour rights violations, factory disasters, low wages, and the ongoing violent treatment of workers simply because they do not own the factories (Eco Age, 2018; Fashion Revolution, 2018). A few other investigations have reported a similarly dire picture of factory safety and worker negligence in supplier factories working for North American and Australian buyers, which had no knowledge of whence their raw materials came from, did not know where their supplier factories sourced the fabrics, and could not trace the factories where their products were manufactured (ABC, nd; Khurana & Ricchetti, 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2015). This 'invisibilisation' of the business model and 'nonrecognition' of workers thereby enable buyers to avoid making publicly available the necessary information about their sourcing of raw materials, where their products are being made and by whom, whether the workers are being treated fairly, and what health and safety conditions are enacted in the factories (Alamgir & Alakavuklar, 2020; Parliament, 2019).

From the above discussion, it emerges that both private and public safety governance mechanisms can have a potentially significant effect on workplace safety practices in supplier factories. Similarly, on the surface, the various local contextual elements and global supply chain factors highlighted above can also considerably influence workplace safety practices. The available literature on workplace safety would prima facie appear to be useful in terms of understanding topics such as safety practices, violations and remedies, the evaluation of private and public safety governance mechanisms, and the role that can be played by various institutions; however, to portray a complete picture of workplace safety practices in the industry, it is crucial to establish the connection between managerial moral agency and workplace safety practices—i.e, to explore the aspect of the attitudes that lead the factory managers to either comply or circumvent workplace safety practices. In this regard, Chapter 3 presents a detailed review of moral agency and moral obligations, and highlights the moral disengagement theory in the process.

2.5 Safety Culture and Managerial Obligation

For the purpose of this research, it is important to understand what workplace safety is and how it is related to managerial obligation. The concept of workplace safety varies across countries, business sectors, and social groups (Mullen, 2004; Nuwayhid, 2004). Scholars have recognised and explained the relationships that exist between various organisational and behavioural aspects and workplace safety; thus, the attainment of a clearer understanding of the factors that affect workplace safety is not always a straightforward process (Flin et al., 2000; Khan et al., 2019; Petitta et al., 2017; Wachter & Yorio, 2014). Earlier studies on workplace safety were very much focused on individual workers, the design of their jobs, and their basic protection (Hoffman et al., 2017). In modern times, workplace safety has been expanded to cover a wide range of issues related to psychological (Sulzer-Azaroff & Austin, 2000), organisational (Akram, 2014; Kaila, 2019; Zohar & Hofmann, 2012), and social (Roughton et al., 2019; Salas et al., 2020) factors, thus presenting a more holistic view of safety that is often termed as ‘safety culture’ (Cunningham & Jacobson, 2018; Petitta et al., 2017). Nonetheless, ILO (2016) defined workplace safety as the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental, and social well-being of workers.

However, from the extant literature, this study synthesises workplace safety as an attribute of work systems that reflect the low likelihood of physical harm—whether immediate or delayed—being suffered by persons, property, or the environment during the performance of work (Beus, et al., 2016). A safe workplace is therefore one in which any exposure to hazards is avoided or minimised (Jones & Jones, 2000). While linking it with managerial obligation, this study views safety in terms of managerial

responsibilities and factory welfare activities aimed towards ensuring an overall safety culture at work (Hofmann, et al., 2017). From this angle, an organisation's safety culture reflects the beliefs, perceptions, values, and attitudes that its people share in relation to safety (Cox & Cox, 1991). In regard to this study, this should necessarily imply that the practice of safety culture in the global apparel supply chains should involve a set of beliefs, values, and attitudes that are shared by its actors—which include global buyers, trade unions, third-party compliance companies and supplier factories. Through the development and implementation of various safety governance mechanisms, the maintenance of transparent safety culture across the supply chain network becomes an important obligation for its actors. Interestingly, while it is a legal obligation for factory managers to follow the safety governance mechanisms enacted in their factories, empirical evidence presented earlier shows that due to a culture of impunity, managers do a cost-benefit analysis where circumventing safety protocols is prioritised over compliance. Therefore, this study emphasises that the biggest motivation to comply with any safety practice initiatives should first come from their sense of moral obligation—e.g., the moral agency that enables managers to decide what is the right thing to do and to remain accountable for their actions. Hence, it is compelling to explore how do these beliefs and values translate to managers as main actors 'on the ground' and how do their consciousness of moral obligations is constructed or emerge in organisational settings (see Chapter 3 for details).

In this regard, the safety culture topic gains further interest, especially in terms of the study of people's obligation to safety—i.e., how people understand and define workplace safety and how a safety culture be established in their workplaces. With respect to this, scholars have identified two main components that construct individuals' attitudes towards workplace safety: the 'objects' (i.e., the constituents of the attitudes); and the 'subjects' (i.e., the agents to whom those attitudes belong) (Cox & Cox, 1991; Purdham, 1984; Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982). Safety attitude objects can be further divided into two categories: (i) safety hardware and physical hazards, and (ii) safety software and concepts (Cox & Cox, 1991).

A variety of different physical constituents of safety hardware and physical hazards have been treated as the objects of individual understanding of workplace safety (Cox & Cox, 1991). In the context of this research, the safety hardware issues that have been most commonly addressed by literature are the EFS integrity of factory buildings (Ansary & Barua, 2015; Hodgson & Khan, 2016; Liu et al., 2019; Motlagh & Saha, 2014; Wadud & Huda, 2017), apparel manufacturing machinery, tools, and personal protective equipment (PPE) (Ashraf, 2017; Islam, 2013; Latif et al., 2018), and hazardous waste management

(Haque, 2017; Sakamoto et al., 2019). Individual attitudes towards physical hazards such as noisy and dusty environments and exposure to heat, various dyeing chemicals, and washing agents (Khandker et al., 2016; Mahmud et al., 2018), and other occupational hazards such as boiler explosions and the mishandling of chemicals and HAZMAT (Hasan & Mahmud, 2017; Lindholm et al., 2016; Prentice et al., 2017; Ruwanpura, 2013) have also been the subjects of research. A great body of research is also available on safety software, such as public and private safety governance mechanisms (including supply chain framework agreements, legislation, rules, regulations, and policies) (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Barrett et al., 2018; Baumann-Pauly et al., 2018; James et al., 2019; Khan & Wichterich, 2015; Yadlapalli et al., 2019), and on safety concepts, such as safety compliance, accident proneness and underreporting, cost-benefit analyses, and loss prevention (Ansary & Barua, 2015; Belal & Cooper, 2011; Hasan et al., 2019; Sattar & Laila, 2018; Shadat et al., 2016).

While a wealth of literature is available on the objects of attitudes to safety, the subject pool from which these attitudes are derived is somewhat limited. Despite various groups of people being present in global apparel supply chains, most studies have focused on the attitudes held by workers towards safety practices and on issues relating to their exploitation, violation of their rights, and unfair treatment (Akhter et al., 2019; Barua & Ansary, 2017; Bossavie et al., 2019; Foxvog et al., 2014; Hasan et al., 2017; Jenkins, 2020; Rashid et al., 2014). A few studies have further investigated the causes of accidents and their impact on workers and their families (Ahmed & Hossain, 2009; Alam et al., 2020; Chowdhury, 2014a; CPD, 2013; Khan & Khan, 2019; Parveen et al., 2019; Williamson & Lutz, 2019). This is not surprising given that, in most situations, workers are perceived to be the most vulnerable agents, and thus the most likely to suffer from workplace accidents. In recent times, a growing body of research has also focussed on supply chain transparency in regard to Bangladeshi supplier factories (Jacobs & Singhal, 2017; Short et al., 2016; Sodhi & Tang, 2019; Turker & Atlantus, 2014; Vaughn et al., 2019). This is also understandable, given that supply chain transparency has become increasingly important in the public, political, and research agendas in national and global economic governance and for global brands to avoid any repetitional spillovers that may arise from supplier factory workplace safety violations or circumventions.

Most of these studies have conveniently scapegoated suppliers for their negligence and have linked accidents to workplace safety practices. However, this study argues that, while the occurrence of accidents can be an indicator of unsafe workplaces, the absence of such events does not represent an indicator of workplace safety. This is because workplace accidents are generally contingent upon a

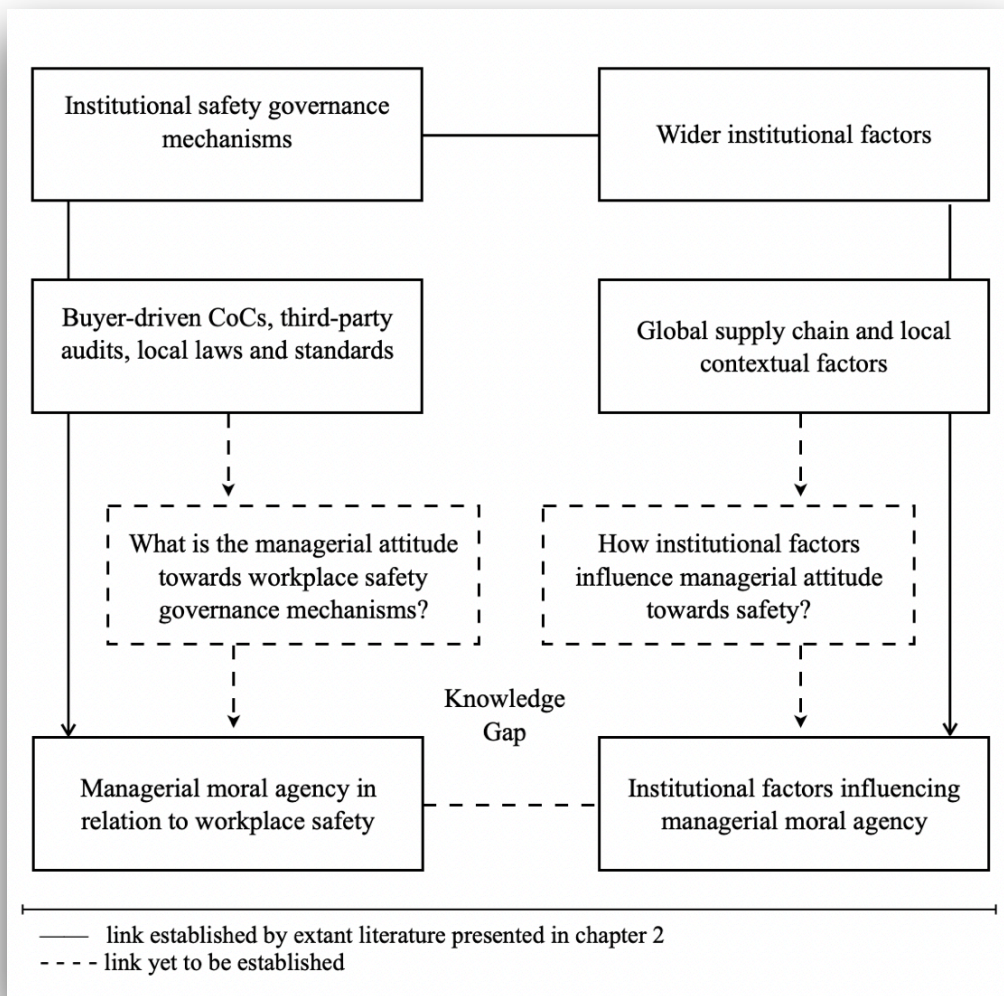
multitude of human, organisational, and institutional failures—such as negligent attitudes, a lack of organisational safety governance mechanisms, latent governmental weakness, etc.—which may not, however, always actually result in accidents (Beus et al., 2016; Reason, 1990). Individuals who disregard workplace safety practices will often continue to do so for as long as their negligent or circumventing attitudes do not actually result in an accident. Therefore, a factory having been hitherto free of accidents is not necessarily evidence of safety. Furthermore, certain managerial attitudes (e.g., negligence or circumvention) towards safety can communicate the absence of safety before any actual damage is caused by an accident, whereas, accidents are lagging indicators of safety because they only reflect the absence of safety after the damage has already occurred (Beus, et al., 2016). This study thus argues that, whereas accidents do indicate the absence of workplace safety, the lack thereof does not point to its presence; hence, managerial attitudes (either complying or circumventing) towards workplace safety mechanisms are a more convincing indicator because they can be used to infer both the absence and presence of safety (Beus, et al., 2016; Zohar, 2011). Scholars further support the view that complying attitudes towards workplace safety mechanisms imply a reduced likelihood of future accidents, whereas negligent ones imply a greater likelihood (Burke & Signal, 2010; Christian et al., 2009; Neal & Griffin, 2004).

2.6 The Conceptual Model in Progress

This chapter has provided a review of the relevant literature on workplace safety practices in supplier factories operating as part of global supply chains. It also highlighted the literature on various institutional factors that can influence workplace safety practices. Figure 2.2 shows the conceptual model that has been derived at this point of the discussion.

The model shows that the extant literature has established two undeniable links: first, the link between wider institutional factors (i.e., global supply chain and local contextual elements) and the workplace safety practices in supplier factories, and second, the link between institutional safety governance mechanisms (e.g., enacted by institutional actors) and managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety. However, why the managers of supplier factories behave in a certain manner—i.e., comply or circumvent—and how institutional factors can influence managerial attitudes towards workplace safety practices are aspects that have not hitherto been established in the literature. In this regard, the next chapter (chapter 3) provides a detailed review of the literature on moral agency, acts of compliance—i.e., moral obligation or virtue of obedience (Corlett, 2003; Quinn, 1998; Shaw, 2002)—and on those of negligence or circumvention—i.e., the moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999; 2002) that occurs when individuals are able to act unethically without any apparent feelings of guilt or self-censure.

Figure 2.2: Conceptual model derived from the chapter



Chapter Summary

The literature presented in this chapter has highlighted the intricate nature of global supply chains and the influence exerted on safety practices in supplier factories by various institutional factors. The related discussion has raised three issues. First, workplace safety practices in supplier factories are inadequate and questionable. Second, there are institutional demands for workplace safety compliance where the global buyers have been trying to enforce their safety governance mechanisms in a stringent way and the local government has very recently initiated a few ambitious plans to improve workplace safety situation. Third, managers have a legal and moral obligation to comply with safety governance requirements enacted in their factories.

Interestingly, while the extant literature has addressed the first two issues quite considerably, the third has mostly been overlooked and thus warrants further discussion. Extant studies on global supply chains argue that institutional safety compliance mechanisms enacted by the supply chain actors provide

legitimacy to global brands but do little to address the safety lapses arising from exploitative pricing and rigid procurement practices (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; McCarthy et al., 2020). Studies further show evidence of misrepresentation and nonrecognition of factory workers in the safety governance initiatives implemented by the supply chains which leads to a lack of consideration for the basic human rights of the workers (Alamgir & Alakavuklar, 2020). These are the key reasons for deplorable working conditions in the supplier factories operated under the global supply chain network.

Therefore, it is important to empirically investigate managerial interpretations of and responses to institutionally enacted safety governance mechanisms in the supplier factories in Bangladesh. In doing so, how various institutional factors likely influence managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices. In this regard, the next chapter provides a detailed review of the literature on moral agency, the consciousness of moral obligations, and moral disengagement theory in order to explore the connection between managerial moral agency and workplace safety practices.

3. Moral Agency and Workplace Safety

*Virtue lies in our power, and so too vice;
for where it is in our power to act, it is also in our power not to act.¹⁶*
Aristotle (2009:41)

Chapter Overview

The previous chapter presented a detailed review of the literature on global operations of apparel supply chains and highlighted the inadequate workplace safety situation in the supplier factories operated within the supply chain network. By illustrating a conceptual model, the discussion also showed the links between institutional factors and safety practices. However, it did not offer a clear understanding of managerial attitude towards safety governance mechanisms and how institutional factors influence this attitude—the knowledge gap that this chapter aims to address. Hence, this chapter starts with exploring the ideas of morality/ethics and discusses moral agency and the consciousness of moral obligation drawn from dominant normative ethical theories. The discussion then continues to review the concept of moral agency and evaluates the moral disengagement theory—the theoretical lens of this study—and highlights what is already known about it and what aspects of the theory are still open to be studied, thereby provides a theoretical framework combining the literature reviewed earlier in chapter 2 and the discussion presented in this chapter.

3.1 Morality and Ethics

‘Morality’ and ‘ethics’ are complex concepts due to their close resemblance in meaning and interchangeable usage. ‘Morality’ comes from the Latin word ‘*mōrālis*’, which means standards of behaviour and ‘customs’, which refers to personal and social values about what is good/bad, and right/wrong about an action or within a living space (Long & Sedley, 1987). It describes the principles that govern the behaviours of people embedded in wider social structures, traditions, or social norms (Linstead et al., 2009). On the other hand, the etymology of the word ‘ethics’ is Greek and has its roots in ‘*ethos*’, which also means the moral principles that govern an individual’s behaviours or ‘customs’ (Mackie, 1990). Both morality and ethics seek to address personal and social values in regard to issues such as good/bad, right/wrong, virtue/vice, and justice/crime (Fieser, 2017; Hauser, 2006).

¹⁶ The quote is taken from Aristotle (2009) *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford World’s Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Despite their ancient origins, no clear consensus has yet been coalesced to define the concepts of morality and ethics. At the height of Greek philosophy, the concept of ethics leaned towards human character and education, while morality was associated with rules and customs (McCloskey, 2006). In everyday parlance, people continue to use these words both interchangeably and separately, thus contributing to a great level of terminological complexity. One stream of scholarship (see Banks & Gallagher, 2009; McCloskey, 2006; Sayer, 2011) has opted to use ethics and morality as interchangeable and synonyms—“merely two words for the same thing, derived from different languages” (McCloskey, 2006:63). Another stream of research (see Hauser, 2006; Morrison, 2015; Shaw, 2015) has elected to draw a line between the two concepts to understand and separate their meanings depending on the environment or situation. Furthermore, some claim that ethics refer to the rules and norms established by social systems; thus, the term has come to acquire more of a technical, specialist, or ‘objective’ character suited to the discussion of topics such as business, nursing, the environment, etc. (Linstead et al., 2009). Conversely, morality is viewed as referring to the personal comprehension or self-judgement of the right/wrong behaviours that individuals adopt based on their religious orientations and surrounding social systems (Gert & Gert, 2020).

This study agrees with the former stream of scholars and considers the terms as being synonymous and interchangeable; it does so, first, due to their lack of terminological differentiation in language and literature, and, second, as it is the convention clearly adopted by large numbers of qualitative and ethnographic researchers (Mattingly & Throop, 2018). As discussed earlier (see section 2.4), this study recognises that agents’ moral/ethical values can be significantly influenced by various institutional (and organisational, as a form of special institutions) factors. Although ethical pluralists and moral relativists debate that as societies evolve, whether or not the moral/ethical values held by their members can change over time due to the spectrum of factors that influences their beliefs, values, and behaviours (Cavalier, 2014; Ciulla & Scharding, 2019; Ghosh, 2018; Roszkowska & Melé, 2020; Wolska, 2019), this further contributes to the fact that no single definition or theory is sufficient to elucidate the complexity and ambiguity that surrounds morality/ethics, and any attempt to differentiate between these two terms has no theoretical value in this study.

While this research aims at exploring managerial moral agency, it is important to conceptualise moral agency and obligation from an agent-centric theoretical perspective that emphasises morality/ethics in relation to human nature and looks for an explanation of the basic ideas of right/wrong and good/bad (and of those beyond). These ideas have always taken centre stage in philosophical discussions, and have

remained at the forefront of debates and arguments among scholars since ancient times. In this regard, the following sections provide a detailed philosophical account of moral agency and obligation in the context of this study.

3.1.1 Moral Agency

Moral agency defines people's ethical/moral judgements and actions based on their subjective understanding of right/wrong and good/bad. People's perceptions and judgements can stem from the customs, mores, laws, and rules of a particular culture or society (see cultural relativism in Frederick, 1995; Hauser, 2006; Williams, 1992). These perceptions and judgements can also be influenced by an individual's notion of 'self', and by various institutions such as family, education, society, religion, government, etc. (Bandura, 1986, 1999; Thornton et al., 2012). Fundamentally, moral agency has two dimensions; the 'moral' and philosophical one that underpins what is right/wrong; and the 'social' one, relating to how an individual acts within a specific social situation (Khan et al., 2019; Wilcox, 2012). MacIntyre (1999), in his notion of moral agency, argued that if social actors are to be moral agents, they need to have the capacity for self-reflection, a sense of accountability to others, and a critical examination of established social orders. McKenna and Tsahuridu (2001) similarly posited that people's ability to exercise moral agency will typically depend on their freedom to rationally examine society's norms and values, choose what values to make their own and use them in ethical decision-making. Hence, the field of moral agency is wide-ranging and is concerned with aspects of personhood, free will, rational choices, beliefs, values, knowledge, and understanding, as bases for human attitudes, actions, and obligations (duty and responsibility) (Boersema, 2014; Engster, 2005; Manning, 1988). The ancient philosophers emphasised human characteristics to explain why people ought to be moral in the community/society in which they live (e.g., Aristotle's eudaimonia). In modern times, the scope has been broadened and moral agency is studied in relation to wider social and business contexts and environments.

Bandura's contribution in this area is significant. His works on moral agency (see Bandura, 1999, 2002, 2012) have also drawn significant attention among scholars. In his earlier work on social learning theory, Bandura (1961, 1986) claimed that the fundamental property of moral agency holds people accountable for their actions given that they use their agency in a moral way. Through his social cognitive and social learning theories, he expounded the personal and social aspects of the control exerted over the values and conduct of a 'moral agent'. This theory focussed extensively upon studying people's judgements of their actions in different social and organisational settings and linked human reasoning to human activity

through the affective self-regulatory mechanisms by which individuals exercise their moral agency (Bandura, 2002, 2012).

In relation to this discussion, what makes an agent a moral one can be questioned. Many scholars, in this regard, assign moral agency to those adults who demonstrate the ability to discern right from wrong and good from bad; therefore, those agents who are capable of reasoning and rationality are considered to be paradigms of moral agents and are thus held morally accountable for their actions and consequences (McKenna & Tsahuridu, 2001; Taylor, 2009). Allen et al. (2000) defined a moral agent as an individual who takes the interests of others into consideration rather than acting solely to advance his or her self-interest. However, these definitions provide an incomplete picture. For instance, in order to qualify as a moral agent and to remain responsible for own actions, it is insufficient (and rather impossible) for an agent to know each and every right/wrong or good/bad thing in the world, as no number of individual precepts are adequate for this purpose (Parthemore & Whitby, 2013). Moreover, precepts cannot exist in isolation and context must be taken into consideration to determine the morality of an action; otherwise, there will be the concern of agents applying the labels of 'right' or 'wrong' randomly to justify their actions. Therefore, to be a moral agent, the individual must possess a sense of right/wrong independent of any particular precepts. This sense is more than just knowing the concept of morality and immorality, rather understanding "what it means to be moral within the context of its overall conception of the world" (Parthemore & Whitby, 2013:110).

Furthermore, while studying moral agency, many social scientists have also been found to accept two ideas about human nature. First, agents generally think rationally and their decision-making is normally sound. Second, emotions such as fear, anger, hatred, affection, etc. explain most of the occasions in which agents depart from rationality (Kahneman, 2011). However, these views appear to be narrow and both these assumptions have been challenged in those instances in which scholars, based on the Kantian sense of duty, have argued that agents get involved in actions without any advance knowledge of their consequences. This is because the consequences of such actions depend on uncertain events and the determination to engage in them may be construed as the acceptance of a gamble that can yield various outcomes with different degrees of likelihood (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Similarly, people can learn how to control their emotions and scholars explained how organisations tend to be guided by both rationality and emotionality in which the former is privileged over the latter (Lambie, 2009). Evidence also shows that agents in organisations tend to control their emotions through

denial of emotions and reframing their experiences by rationally reciting their emotional experiences or by relegating emotions at work to appropriate times and places (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006).

However, as a starting point, this research considers that to be moral, an agent must feel a sense of moral obligation that stems from a very broad and widely-accepted domain (e.g., a theological or recognised social authority) of morality/ethics in which the agent believes and within which all or most of his precepts may fit. While this research investigates managerial moral agency in workplace safety practices, the obvious question that emerges from this discussion here is, being moral agents if the supplier factory managers are exercising their power and due diligence to practice safety in a consistent way or not. From the literature presented in Chapter 2, it can be argued that, although the managers of supplier factories are governed—and even inhibited—by various institutional factors, their attitudes (of either conformity or circumvention) towards workplace safety practices are guided by their moral choices. It can be further argued that there can be circumstances under which managers may or may not feel morally obligated to comply with the safety governance mechanisms enacted by various institutional actors. This is maybe because of a degree of latitude in their interpretation of the concept of workplace safety or their sense of moral obligation is perhaps influenced by their predisposition towards different institutional, social, or theological explanations of morality/ethics that may diverge from each other. Therefore, at this point of the discussion, it is crucial to take a step back and reflect upon the idea of moral obligations and explore its managerial incarnation in workplace safety practices.

3.1.2 The Consciousness of Moral Obligation

“Bates: If his cause be wrong, our obedience to the King wipes the crime of it out of us.”

Williams: Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the King that led them to it. Tis certain, every man that dies ill, the ill upon his own head, the King is not to answer it.

King Henry V: Upon the King! Let us our lives, our souls, our debts, our careful wives, Our children and our sins lay on the King!”

The above dialogues have been excerpted from Shakespeare’s classic drama ‘The Life of King Henry V’ (Shakespeare MIT, 1993). This is the scene that takes place the night before the Battle of Agincourt. Two English soldiers, Bates and Williams, and King Henry (in disguise) debate the justness of the King’s resort to force (Just Cause) and to what degree the soldiers are morally responsible for their consequent actions. The scene conveys the seriousness of the arguments and the gravity of the actions that they are

about to undertake: are they justified in killing for the Just Cause of the State? Are these killings a crime, and hence immoral? (Kaurin, 2017).

The quest for moral grounding to certain authorities is an ancient one. Scholars are divided in their opinions about whether or not there is a moral obligation to obey the law. On one side, following the classical liberalism principle on individual liberty, opponents argue that there is no such obligation—not even a *prima facie* one—because it does not derive from more basic moral principles such as those of ‘consent’, ‘fairness’, ‘utility’, or ‘rationality’ (Bear, 2007; Smith, 1973). Prominent philosophers and theologians such as David Hume, Adam Smith, and Immanuel Kant were the proponents of this ideology. They argued that moral agents should be sceptical about being morally obligated to obey the law because, at face value, it is unknown whether or not a law is moral—the fact that something is enshrined in law or in any way legal does not automatically mean that people should assume or justify it as being right (Bear, 2007; Raz, 2009, 2010). On the other side, proponents debate that there are not only moral obligations *in* the law but also obligations *to* the law (Green, 2012). Honoré’s (1981) ‘principles of necessity’ and Walker’s (1988) ‘obligation to gratitude’ postulate that an agent has no option but to belong to a political society; therefore, of necessity and gratitude owed to his fellow citizens, the agent is put into a situation in which he has duties and obligations to obey the law. Therefore, scholars argue that all moral agents must be, in general, morally obligated to obey the law because to maintain a fair balance in the justice system and to ensure social coordination, demands certain behaviours in certain situations (Christie, 1990; Smith, 1973).

Smith’s moral sentimentalism is an interesting notion of human morality and actions highlighted in his theory of moral sentiments. It identifies some basic rules of justice and prudence that are needed for a society to survive and explains the actions that enable it to flourish (Butler, 2011). ‘Self-interest and sympathy’ is one such rule. Every individual has a natural tendency to look after themselves by the virtue of prudence. Smith extends this idea with ‘fellow feeling’—i.e., feeling a natural sympathy for others; when individuals find others distressed or happy, they feel for them, albeit less strongly, and others similarly seek our empathy and feel for us (Davis & McMaster, 2020). Another such rule is ‘justice and beneficence’ which seeks to find ways to live alongside others in harmony without bringing harm—an essential minimum for the survival of society (Samuel, 2020). The last rule is concerned with ‘virtue’ that lies within individuals’ self-command. While justice and beneficence are important, the ideal must be that any virtuous agent would fully empathise with the emotions and actions of others living in the society (Butler, 2011, Garnett, 2019; Samuel, 2020).

The judgement that a person is morally obligated to act and behave in certain ways in certain situations mainly depends on two things. First, the attribution of certain powers and capacities—e.g., power and virtue of choices (Kane, 1998; Strawson, 1994), the capacity of reasoning and rationality (Taylor, 2009), and the capacity of self-sanction in Bandura (1999, 2002, 2016)—to a person; and, second, viewing that person's attitudes and behaviours as being worthy of either praise or blame (see McKenna, 2012; Zimmerman, 1988; also for the reasons to allow for behaviours that are neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy) based on the fact that the person holds, and has exercised, such powers and capacities (Talbert, 2019). In this regard, praise is a response that may be elicited by the judgement that a person is morally responsible for any right or good behaviour; likewise, blame is the corresponding response in regard to any wrong or bad behaviour (see Coats & Tognazzini, 2013; Eshleman, 2014; Watson, 2004; for the symmetry and asymmetry between praise and blame). In a general sense, the correct account of possessing the above powers and capacities qualifies a person as morally responsible (Taylor, 2009). Kramer (2005) argued that rational agents who possess these powers and capacities are under a general obligation to obey the social norms and laws of the country in which they live. It is however not uncommon for rational agents with these capacities to relinquish this moral obligation. Classic experimental studies, such as Milgram's (1963, 2009) shock experiment¹⁷, Bandura's (1961) Bobo doll experiment¹⁸ (Graham & Arshad-Ayaz, 2016), and Zimbardo's (1973, 2009) Stanford prison experiment¹⁹ showed that adults, and even children, can be put into situations that may persuade them to engage in behaviours that they would usually consider wrong or socially unacceptable.

It can therefore be argued that an agent's moral agency (i.e., rational judgement) is very relevant in relation to his obedience to an authority/law. This means that moral agency plays a crucial role in developing the consciousness of an agent's moral obligation (i.e., an agent's attitudes and responses) towards a socially recognised authority (Schurman, 1894). Many sociologists believe that obligation is an objective force that leads agents to act in ways that societies deem acceptable (Ogien, 2016). This stems from Kant's categorical imperative which is characterised as an objective, rationally necessary and unconditional principle that agents must always follow despite any inclinations that they may have to the

¹⁷ The Milgram shock experiment was a series of experimental studies carried out by psychologist Stanley Milgram at Yale University in 1963. The experiment focused on the conflict between obedience to authority and personal conscience (McLeod, 2017).

¹⁸ The Bobo doll experiment is the collective name for a series of experiments performed between 1961 and 1963 by psychologist Albert Bandura to test his social learning theory. The aim was to demonstrate if children were witnesses to an aggressive display by an adult they would imitate this aggressive behaviour when given the opportunity (Do, 2011).

¹⁹ The Stanford prison experiment was conducted by psychologist Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University in 1971. The aim was to examine the effects of situational variables on participants' reactions and behaviours in a two-week simulation of a prison environment (McLeod, 2020).

contrary (Johnson & Cureton, 2021). Some scholars, on the other hand, posit that obligations are moral imperatives and that agents have the choice of either obeying or disobeying them (Ogien, 2016). These imperatives are what philosophers emphasise as the supremacy of conscience—considered from the subjective point of view—over the other principles of action embedded in an individual’s nature (Korsgaard, 1989). In other words, the sense of obligation represents an individual’s feelings in regard to the imperatives and motives (i.e., the underlying objectives behind the commission of an act) that drive their intentions (i.e., the conscious decision made and purposeful activities undertaken to perform an act) to adopt what is right and to eschew what is the wrong (Maranges et al., 2020; Schurman, 1894; Surbhi, 2017). In this regard, however, the majority of philosophers are found to have agreed with the Kantian view that says agents feel morally responsible to fulfil their obligations, and that ‘duty’ is the response to that sense of obligation (Hasnas, 2013; Ogien, 2016).

While this study focuses on exploring managerial moral agency in workplace safety practices, a key concern that needs to be explored is whether supplier factory managers are morally obliged to (i) practice workplace safety and (ii) obey the safety governance mechanisms enacted by various institutional actors. The two important issues here are, firstly, how do managers interpret safety—i.e., to understand what managers think of workplace safety in general and, secondly, to discover their attitudes (e.g., conforming or circumventing) towards institutional safety governance mechanisms. In this regard, based on the arguments presented earlier, one can simply argue that, as rational agents, factory managers are morally obligated to practice workplace safety and to comply with any relevant laws or institutionally imposed standards. However, this argument is unconvincing on the philosophical grounds that managers are legally obligated to obey any safety provisions does not mean that they are necessarily also morally obligated to do so. As shown earlier, rational agents have the choice of not obeying the law, or can simply find themselves in situations in which they do not feel obliged to conform to any authority. Similarly, they can also be bound to more important countervailing moral obligations, that may outweigh any legal ones (Christie, 1990). For example, in the context of this study, factory managers may justify their circumventing nature by presenting the argument of the high cost of safety compliance or perhaps highlighting that they are just ‘following what others are doing’—e.g., the industry-wide inconsistent safety practices or lack of concern towards safety (Ahmad; 2017; Ahmed et al., 2020). Nevertheless, this study argues that it would be both irrational and dangerous to state that rational agents are not morally obligated to follow the law simply because it involves merely legal obligations or that agents can exercise their free will in whether or not to do so (Love, 2014). Another predicament occurs in the presence of any differences between the theological and legal interpretations of an obligation—e.g., the law of a country

or the rules/policies provided by any authority may require an agent to do something that, according to his personal values or religious orientations, is an immoral act. As the British philosopher Austin (cited in Rumble, 1995) commented, any human laws that conflict with the Divine law are not binding; thus, the most pernicious laws are those that are most opposed to the will of God. Therefore, this discussion necessitates a deeper understanding of the role played by moral obligation in determining the moral/ethical intent of a judgement/decision or of the action itself under a set of principles, as well as the consequences that a decision/action may bring.

This deeper understanding requires us to reflect upon Western and Eastern philosophical thought, as anything that counts as morally obligatory is a principal concern of ethics. In this regard, this enquiry can be approached from agent-based ethical theoretical perspectives, such as virtue ethics (Aristotle, 2009) and ethics of nobility (Al-Ghazzali, cited in Winter, 2016), which ancient philosophers emphasised, and also from the perspectives of rule- or principle-based normative ethical theories such as Kantian ethics and deontology (Alexander & Moore, 2021), utilitarianism (Driver, 2014), and modern ethical thoughts such as Smith's theory of moral sentiments (Garnett, 2019), which modern philosophers have stressed.

Interestingly, the root of both these ancient and modern ideas can be traced back to the 'ethics of reciprocity' (also known as the Golden Rule) that prescribes "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Duxbury, 2009:1529). This rule, which is recognised and presented in a variety of forms, is seen as being deeply rooted in nearly every religious, philosophical, and cultural context across a wide range of times, places, and languages; as such, it appears to be a nearly universal maxim among humankind (Flew & Priest, 2002). Its main point summarises the notion of good conduct as the supreme moral principle of rightful action among moral agents (Parrott, 2017). This rule appears to have originated before the Hellenistic (ancient Greek) period, but its earliest possible affirmation remains unknown; yet, the formulation of most ethical theories appears to be underpinned by it. For instance, it appeared, in prohibitive form, both in Thales (624-546 BC)—"Avoid doing what you would blame others for doing"—and in Isocrates (436-338 BC)—"Do not do to others that which angers you when they do it to you" (cited in Epps, 2012:26). Therefore, many scholars believe the Golden Rule to be arguably the focal point of the philosophical dialogue on morality/ethics held among early thinkers, by which they coined their ideas of virtue and moral judgement (Sahakian & Sahakian, 1993).

Anscombe (1958) highlighted that, to properly understand moral obligation, one must start with what it is for an individual to flourish and live happily. This directs the discussion to ancient Greek philosophical

views on the nature of ‘virtue’ and ‘eudaimonia’—i.e., how one becomes virtuous and ensures happiness and prosperity, and on a sense of moral obligations, social systems, and institutions become necessary to achieving virtuosity (Homjak, 2019). The ideas began with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in the West, Confucius in the East, and Al-Razi, Avicenna, and Al-Ghazzali in the Middle East. These ancient and medieval polymaths asserted that the consciousness of moral obligation is the very same thing as the consciousness of goodness, whereby they expounded their ideas of moral obligation through the lens of virtue ethics and eudaimonia (Schurman, 1894). According to them, virtue is a human character trait, such as a habitual action, attitude, or settled sentiment (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2018), and eudaimonia is translated into the warranting of happiness, human prosperity/flourishing, well-being, or good life (Aristotle, 1999, 2009; Robinson, 1989). As a foundation of the ideas of virtue and eudaimonia, these moralists focussed on attitudes held and actions taken by people on the basis of their understanding and judgement of right/wrong and good/bad.

For example, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle prescribed eudaimonia as the ultimate goal for which all other intermediate goals are pursued; therefore, if anything has a function, its good lies in performing that function well (Aristotle, 1999, 2009). Within a community (*polis*), when an agent has a function, the human good or eudaimonia will be the good performance of that function (Korsgaard, 1986). In this regard, every virtue contains two characteristics: first, it causes things to be good in themselves and, second, it causes people to perform their functions well (Huby, 1999; Morrison, 2015). When people act in accordance with virtue, they do good and are content, and, when they act with iniquity, their wrongdoing causes unhappiness and frustration, and leads them towards failed goals and poor lives (Collins, 1987; Ross & Brown, 2009). Aristotelian virtue ethics, therefore, denote eudaimonia as living a happy and flourishing life within a community in accordance with good intentions and deeds, in which the rightful engagement of people’s moral agency (e.g., moral judgements) and the demonstration of excellent character traits in performing actions are foregrounded (Murphy, 1999; Nussbaum, 1999). Together with most other Greek philosophers, Aristotle posited that, if people are rational moral agents within a community, they aim for happiness, which is the ultimate goal of a meaningful life. Therefore, people need to constantly strive to attain eudaimonia, and this can be achieved by leading virtuous lives. As Aristotle (1962:23) said, “Happiness requires completeness in virtue as well as a complete lifetime”.

Alongside the Greek tradition, the ancient Stoic school of philosophy also established a notable founding approach to virtue ethics and eudaimonia (see Baltzly, 2019; Becker, 2017; Matthew, 2014), however, these ideas were massively expounded by the other dominant Western and Eastern theological

frameworks, such as Saint Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of double effect in Christianity (Cavanaugh, 2006; McIntyre, 2019), Confucius's Ruism (the Confucian virtue ethics) (Bonevac & Phillips, 2009), and Al-Ghazzali's 'ethics of nobility' and 'excellence of character' (Winter, 2016). In this regard, Al-Ghazzali's work on 'Sufism' (Islamic mysticism or inward dimension of Islam) is an influential source of ethical literature that addresses Greek philosophy and Aristotelian logic from a theological perspective. He explained the concept of virtue and eudaimonia through his notion of 'ethics of nobility' and 'excellence of character', which are a combination of human qualities and attributes—e.g., manner and personality, habit and style, belief and value, and judgement and decision—that make a person ethically and socially acceptable and admirable or, in one word 'virtuous' (Homiak, 2019; Winter, 2016). Unlike the secularist Greeks and Stoics, the medieval Islamic ideology on virtue ethics was firmly established within a theological constitution that positioned the spiritual form of happiness above that gained through materialistic possessions. This form of eudaimonia requires the completeness of a virtuous life, one in which people must take into account that a happy life is one lived by rational agents who act in accordance with a divine law/guideline and who are not simply victims of their worldly circumstances (Griffel, 2020; Parrott, 2017). It can be observed that the Al-Ghazzali linked eudaimonia with two conditions: (i) devotion towards God, and (ii) the virtue of moral agency in performing acts. Here, the former is represented by three human characteristics: (i) the love for God's rewards, (ii) the fear of God's punishments, and (iii) the hope for God's mercy or compassion (Winter, 2016). The latter is represented as having the right motives and intentions in acts²⁰ and as performing those acts.

Interestingly, prominent Islamic philosophers argued that the motive of an act affects its rightness and the consequences (whether good or bad or neutral) of an act are not the appropriate parameters by which to judge its rightness or wrongness (see Delorenzo, 2014; Khan, 1997; Winter, 2016). Therefore, the 'morality of an action' (i.e., the moral/ethical status of an act) depends on the moral agency of the agent—i.e., the agent's motives and intentions in regard to an act and his or her judgement of whether or not to go through with it (Nishijima, 1998). For example, when an agent acts with the intention of bringing harm to others, even if that action, by any chance, yields good outcomes, it is still worthy of condemnation due to the agent's immoral motives. Likewise, when an agent acts with the intention of bringing good to others but, accidentally, the outcome is detrimental, the act is still not sinful due to the agent's good motives. Apart from those acts that are clearly defined as sinful (e.g., theft, adultery, etc.) by the Qur'an (the central holy text of Islam) and the Hadith (the guidance/actions provided by the prophet Muhammad,

²⁰ "Human actions depend on their motives and intentions. Every man is credited only with that which he has intended" Hadith by the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him (Bukhari, cited in Khan, 1997). Al-Ghazzali's religious beliefs denote that humankind is consigned everlastingly to heaven or to hell only by virtue of its intentions (Winter, 2016).

peace be upon him), acts have no independent moral status; they are made either right or wrong, based upon having been carried out from virtuous or vicious motives (Shaker, 2014).

The literature on Islamic philosophy further highlights that the true sense of eudaimonia can be achieved by living a life in accordance with virtue; a virtue that begins with a belief in God and an understanding of God's intention with His creation—a recognition of the nature of the soul, its origin, its purpose, its return after death, and its ultimate destination to either eternal happiness or damnation in the afterlife (Quasem, 2011; Wattles, 1996). Al-Ghazzali and other contemporary mediaeval philosophers were the upholders of such ideologies, which expounded that the aim of humankind ought to be to achieve a harmonious relationship with God—i.e., to abide by the laws and rules given to humankind by God—and ought to be involved in the rigorous development of a noble character coupled with virtuous outward acts (Griffel, 2020; Parrott, 2017). The multifarious and untiring human cravings for wealth, power, fame, physical gratification, and so on draw people away from God and towards the lower possibilities of the human condition (e.g., acts based upon iniquity, which results in unhappiness and failed lives); therefore, all these attributes must be purged and replaced by their praiseworthy opposites (e.g., acts based upon virtue, resulting in meaningful and flourished lives) (Winter, 2016). Eudaimonia lies within conducting a virtuous life, as prescribed by God, with the Golden Rule of reciprocity and of refining the human character being implicitly deduced from the very essence of God's being (Parrot, 2017).

While the ancient philosophical ideas of virtue ethics possess great merit in explaining the nature of moral motivation and can be used as guiding principles to live virtuous and eudaimonic personal and social lives, in the context of this research, their capacity in investigating managerial moral agency is limited. Critics argue that the Aristotelian virtue ethics fail to capture the distinction between an agent's doing the right thing and his doing it for the right reason (Brady, 2004), thereby making it unsuitable to explain why an agent (e.g., the manager of a supplier factory) has a moral obligation or duty to perform a given action (e.g., complying with institutional safety governance mechanisms). Critics further debate that the Greek and Stoic versions of virtue ethics fail to answer why an agent should be viewed as having any moral obligations at all (e.g., in this research, the managerial self-acknowledgement of the importance of ensuring workplace safety) because they do not recognise that all interpretations of duty or compliance are subjective and seem to vary across cultures and institutions (Zyl, 2005). Furthermore, the Aristotelian logic of 'actions to be good in themselves' can also bring paradoxical results in many situations because virtuous rational acts may make agents morally good but may not make them happy and peaceful and vice versa (see Hoge et al., 2004; Stevelink et al., 2018). Overall, while the Aristotelian virtue characterised

virtuous agents as someone who sees or perceives what is good or right to do in any given situation (Aristotle, 2009), this characterisation limits the argument on the moral agency because modern experiments (see experiments conducted by Bandura, Milgram, and Zimbardo highlighted previously) showed that non-virtuous agents can be engaged in virtuous acts and virtuous agents can also be engaged in immoral acts—either willingly or under the direction of others, or by the institutions which they are a part of (Bandura, 2002; Korsgaard, 1986; Vaclair, 2010; Zyl, 2005). Similar arguments are also found whereby critics claim that virtue ethics do not provide sufficient insights into the linking of obligation and law, especially when it is argued whether factory managers are morally obligated to comply with workplace safety governance mechanisms, as the morality of an action may not always correspond to its legality and vice versa (Dworkin, 1986; Shaw, 2002).

It can also be argued that agents can always have their own interpretation of morality to rationally engage in the excellent performance of either praiseworthy or blameworthy activities, as Aristotelian virtue ethics focus mainly on the evaluation of agents based on their character traits, and overlooks the evaluation of their acts and the institutional structures where those acts take place (Slote, 1996, 2001). In this research context, this means that each factory manager can come to his own understanding and interpretation of workplace safety practices and can act upon it (e.g., denying the importance of any particular safety code and thereby ignoring it), regardless of whether or not it may comply with the safety governance mechanisms enacted by the institutional actors or with the wider social norms of right or wrong. This may also contribute to an industry-wide inconsistent and erratic practice of safety protocols.

In this regard, Islamic philosophy on moral agency has one advantage over the ancient philosophical viewpoints: the ideological harmony in defining both virtue and the conditions of right/wrong and good/bad that is found within Islamic jurisprudence. As highlighted earlier, Islamic philosophers claim that (with the exception of those explicitly declared sinful/forbidden in the Qur'an and Hadith) an action is right if it exhibits or expresses a virtuous motive or, at least, does not exhibit or express a vicious one (Nishijima, 1998; Shaker, 2014). This implies that it is a moral obligation for agents to use judgement and prudence in engaging in noble or virtuous acts because it is the right thing to do (Winter, 2016). Agents should not just blindly comply or obey the social norms and legal laws, but should also use the capacity (e.g., the virtue of choice, reasoning, rationality, wisdom, etc.) to justify their behaviours and actions which is consistent with the communally held beliefs and assumptions of right/wrong. This means that there can be circumstances in which an agent can, on moral grounds, violate the obligation to obey a law, such as driving over the speed limit or through a red light while rushing a heart attack victim to a hospital.

Here, even though the agent has violated a law, his action is nevertheless right for reasons of good motive—i.e., the virtue of choice, prudence, or judgement to value life—which represent a greater obligation than complying with the speed limit on empty roads or in a quiet night. Likewise, had the agent driven slowly and the victim died, his act, albeit conforming to a legal obligation, would have been devoid of any moral worth.

Historically, the specific form of morality/ethics adopted by society has largely depended on the religious orientation of its population (Gert & Gert, 2020). Many scholars, therefore, believe that moral agency steps from people's religious beliefs and prefer the idea that the consciousness of moral obligation should solely be based on religious guidance; this is due to two reasons: first, that, without religion, the agents would have no incentive towards or expect any reward from being moral; and, second, that only religion can provide moral guidance to individuals (Shaw, 2013). These scholars argue that religious beliefs overarch the concepts of morality/ethics; with the latter simply representing a guide and the former being more than that by covering a much greater array of aspects (Hare, 2019). In this regard, religion instils in agents a sense of moral obligation and value frameworks that are suited to guide them in regard to their characteristics and behaviours and a means suited to direct them in differentiating between right/wrong (Brent, 2013; Epstein, 2010). In contrast, there are also strong views in support of the idea that the human desire to be rewarded in the afterlife and avoid punishment (e.g., to go to heaven or to avoid hell) may not be the main reason behind moral/ethical behaviours (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2009). Many scholars argue that some religious teachings do not sit well within contemporary moral/ethical sensibilities, and thus that, without necessarily being religious, people can certainly act morally/ethically out of habit or simply because of the character dispositions developed in a particular institutional setting (Shaw, 2013). Furthermore, people can choose specific types of religious guidance or follow a particular religion based on the personal morality/ethics that they have developed by living within a social system—a situation whereby their morality/ethics guide their judgement/decision in choosing a particular religion at any point of their lives (Davies, 2018).

In modern times, the literature on the development of moral agency has expanded from ancient virtue ethics and medieval theological ideologies to several branches of moral philosophy. Table 3.1 shows some of the dominant ethical theories related to moral agency. These theories have contributed greatly to extending our knowledge on related topics like obedience to authority, duty to obey the law, conformity with institutional requirements, and regulatory compliance (see Hasnas, 2013; Milgram, 2009; Moka-Mubelo, 2016; Zimbardo, 2009).

Table 3.1: Dominant normative ethical theories related to moral agency

#	Theory	Definition	Scholars
1	Attachment	<p>“Lasting psychological connectedness between human beings”.</p> <p>The theory explains how the attachment behaviour between adults and children influence children behaviour and their subsequent moral development.</p>	Bowlby (1969:194); Chugh et al. (2014); Yip et al. (2017).
2	Blame	<p>The act of censuring, holding responsible, making negative statements about an agent that his/her actions or inaction are socially or morally irresponsible.</p> <p>It is an evaluative judgment that relies on social cognition. Blame’s primary and original function is to publicly regulate an agent’s conduct—i.e., a judgement directed at an agent’s moral agency involved in the production of an action that caused or done something norm violating.</p>	Malle et al. (2014); Tognazzini & Coates (2021); Roulet & Pichler (2020); Velasquez (1983, 1985).
3	Care	<p>Typically contrasted with deontological/Kantian and consequentialist/utilitarian ethics, care theory denotes that there is moral significance in the fundamental elements of relationships and dependencies in human life and actions. It constitutes an ethical approach in terms of which involvement, harmonious relations and the needs of others play an important part in ethical decision-making in each ethical situation.</p> <p>It emphasises the importance of responsibility, concern, and relationship over consequences (utilitarianism) or rules (deontology), and includes concern for transforming the social structures within which practices of care takes place, so that they are no longer oppressive.</p>	Botes (2001); Davis & McMaster, (2020); Engster (2005); Gilligan (2008); Held (2005); Shaw et al. (2017).

4	Justice	<p>The ethics of justice deals with moral agency through a measure of rights of the people involved and chooses the solution that appears to bring harm to fewest people.</p> <p>It constitutes an ethical/moral perspective in terms of which ethical decisions or moral judgements are made on the basis of universal principles and rules, and in an impartial and verifiable manner with a view to ensuring the fair and equitable action towards all people.</p>	<p>Batson et al. (2000); Botes (2001); Gilligan (2008); Locke (1986).</p>
5	Moral Sentiments	<p>Adam Smith's theory of moral sentiments postulates that a stable society depends on everyone's moral duty to have regard and sympathy for fellow human beings. Freedom of conscience is an antidote for competing objects of moral concern where individual's have right and duty to exercise his/her own ethical judgement.</p>	<p>Butler (2011); Davis & McMaster, (2020); Handy (1995); Garnett (2019).</p>

The resurgence of interest in these ethical theories has also involved some interesting thought experiments. The trolley problem²¹ is one such experiment, which presents a series of ethical/moral dilemmas that can affect people's judgements and decision-making processes whereby their moral agency may not accurately reflect their moral functioning under unusual circumstances (Foot, 1967; Thomson, 1985). Another such example is Kohlberg's (1981) Heinz dilemma²², which remained a mainstay of empirical investigations of moral agency for several decades. Kohlberg's theory focussed on moral reasoning to examine people's explanations of their judgements and behaviours (Kohlberg, 1981). Even though such thought experiments opened up new paths of enquiry and led researchers to think alternatively (see Cooper, 2005), sceptics argue that they are unrealistic and unrepresentative of the moral situations people encounter in the real world (Bauman et al., 2014). Furthermore, such situations lack external validity, i.e., people's responses to those dilemmas capture only a narrow and perhaps distorted view of moral agency, rather than projecting a comprehensive understanding of how people make moral judgements across the full range of everyday situations they encounter (Aronson et al., 1998; Bauman et al., 2014).

²¹ The trolley problem is a series of thought experiments in ethics and psychology involving several versions of an ethical/moral dilemma. The problem poses questions on human morality defined by the consequences of agentic actions and that the consequences are all that matter (Foot, 1967; Thomson, 1985). But the question remains, which consequences are allowable and under which circumstances?

²² The Heinz dilemma is a thought experiment used by psychologist Kohlberg to assess people's moral reasoning skills. The purpose is to identify what stage of moral development an individual is currently in (Kohlberg, 1981).

Nevertheless, to evaluate moral agency and obligations in such labyrinthine and similar moral/ethical situations, utilitarianism (a version of consequentialism) and deontology are two dominant rule- or principle-based normative ethical theories, with the former dictating that the most appropriate action is the one that achieves the greatest good for the greatest number of affected people (Mill, 1969), and the later asserting that certain actions are just wrong in principle, even if they do have good consequences (MacLagan, 1998). In the context of this study, both these ethical theories provide some interesting insights.

The basic tenet of utilitarianism, as put forwarded by English philosophers Bentham and Mill, advocates the principle of the maximisation of happiness and well-being, which holds that actions are moral if they create the maximum happiness for the maximum number of people, and are immoral if they produce the reverse (Linstead et al., 2009). This is a form of consequentialism in which the rightness or wrongness of actions depends on their consequences (Driver, 2014). An agent's motive/intention is not linked to his actions, and such motive/intention does not have the ability to affect any physical change (Bowen, 2014). In this regard, Velasquez (2017) explained that utilitarianism judges the moral worth of actions by the utility (surfeit of benefits over cost) of their foreseeable consequences for each and every person affected them. In relation to complex moral/ethical scenarios such as the trolley problem, utilitarians argue that whichever action would result in the greatest number of people surviving would be the moral one. However, they also argue that insensible dilemmas like these are ways to criticise utilitarian values, whereas, for the most part, being utilitarian is maximising welfare for all (Hooker, 2016).

In the context of this research, the literature presented in Chapter 2 showed that supplier factory managers have tended to prioritise quick profits over the long-term sustainability of the business, and they therefore constantly perform cost-benefit analyses that result in making safety shortcuts that enable more operational savings (Akbar & Ahsan, 2019; Chowdhury, 2014a). One way of interpreting this attitude, which is intentional, appears to involve managers performing a utilitarian cost and benefit weighing in which workers are perhaps considered as mere instruments of production; not possessing any value in themselves, but only possess by virtue of their ability/capacity to contribute to production. So, weighing the value of worker welfare and well-being against cost is risky in the face of the global competitive network of supply chains, as any investment in workplace safety improvements directly affects the profit margin, and is thus minimised or avoided. Following the utilitarian principle of promoting the greatest good for the greatest number of beneficiaries, this cost-cutting is translated into more savings, which

increases the survival potential of a business—thus ensuring the ‘greater good’ by benefiting both the factory owners in terms of profit and the workers in terms employability.

From the literature, another possible way of interpreting this attitude is if managers prioritise profits over people’s safety. But, this becomes inconsistent with the principal characteristics of utilitarianism—e.g., it does not maximise the happiness and well-being of people because avoiding or circumventing safety protocols may lead to workplace accidents costing human lives and property damage. This further reinforces the aim of this study—i.e., to empirically investigate the managerial interpretation of workplace safety to see how managers truly value their factory workers, either treating them merely as a means to an end or an end in themselves.

On the other hand, deontology (which is also described as an obligation- or rule-based ethics; Waller, 2011) implies a series of rules and principles suited to distinguish right from wrong, regardless of the consequences of an action (Frankena, 1980; 1988), and is often associated with Kantian ethics (see Johnson & Cureton, 2019). Kant argued that every agent endowed with rationality and free will is faced with a choice between actions based on inclinations and actions based on obligations to duty (Alexander & Moore, 2021). Agents can fulfil their duties by following their immediate inclinations (e.g., their passions or interests), seeking the happiness of the senses, or solely on the basis of moral obligations (e.g., with reason), which is obedience to the law as willed by the agents (Kant, 1968; Kant, cited in Paton, 2017). Kant imposed moral obligations (axioms), which he referred to as ‘categorical imperatives’ (see Alexander & Moore, 2021; Hubbs, 2016 for details), and claimed that rational agents must always follow them regardless of their own feelings or circumstances, as all rational agents are commanded by their morality and none can just opt out of it or state that it does not apply to them (Anscombe, 1958; O’Neill, 1995, 2013). For Kant, the rightness or wrongness of actions depends on whether said actions fulfil the ‘duty’ of the agents, who possess the correct intentions to perform it (Wilson & Denis, 2018). It mattered to Kant that people should act in such a manner that their actions could be followed universally: “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should be a universal law” (Kant, cited in Ellington, 1993:30). Therefore, an action is not made right or wrong by its consequences, but by the motives of the person who carries it out (Louden, 1986). Kant claimed that “The ground of obligation must be looked for, not in the nature of man nor in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but solely a priori in the concepts of pure reason” (Kant, cited in Pasternack, 2002:21).

Unlike utilitarianism, Kantian deontology does not weigh the costs and benefits of a situation, rather, its appeal lies in its consistency—e.g., by applying ethical duties to all people in all situations the theory is readily applied to most practical situations (Stern, 2015). Following Kantianism, it can be argued that supplier factory managers are rational agents with a moral obligation to obey the rules regardless of the consequences. Therefore, their duty to ensure workplace safety stems from (i) their personal interests (inclinations), (ii) their personal integrity (e.g., managers must do the right thing even when they do not personally have a vested interest in doing so) serving as a maxim for others, and (iii) their obedience to law/authority—i.e., to comply with the safety governance mechanisms enacted by various institutional actors. Moreover, Kantianism is compounded by the invocation of agents to rationally consider their actions, hence, in this study's context, offering workers a safe and healthy workplace and treating them with dignity and respect become tantamount in Kantian deontology.

Interestingly, although Kantian deontology can be contrasted with virtue ethics, it closely resembles the Islamic philosophical thoughts on the morality of an action. Rather than emphasising an agent's virtue (as done in Aristotelian virtue ethics), Kantian deontology suggests that the morality of an act should be based on whether the act itself is right or wrong in relation to a series of rules. This is close to the ideas of Islamic philosophy, especially with theological voluntarism (also referred to as divine command theory)—an approach of deontology that holds that moral obligations arise from God's commands and the rightness/wrongness of an action depends upon God's decree on its permissibility/non-permissibility (Murphy, 2019). By contrast, utilitarianism and Islamic philosophy differ in two key aspects. Firstly, utilitarianism emphasises the overall net impact of actions on the world at large (Linstead et al., 2009), whereas Islamic philosophy focuses on the impact of actions at the individual level, on the basis of the personal circumstances of the agents involved. Secondly, motives/intentions count for nothing in utilitarianism but are all-important in Islamic philosophy. This is very similarly echoed in Kantianism where, by focusing on agentic intentions, it places ethics/morality entirely within the agents' control, which means, agents cannot always control or predict the outcomes of their actions, but they are in complete control of their motives/intentions.

Despite their great capacity in explaining moral obligation and duty, utilitarianism and deontology are not beyond criticism. MacIntyre (2007) critiqued the utilitarian cost-benefit analysis and questioned who decides what counts as the cost and benefits that are to be measured. In the context of this study, it can also be questioned how a standard measurement of incommensurable elements such as worker lives with profit/cost can be determined, what counts as a consequence in relation to factory safety practices/

violations; and how far into the future the consequences of workplace safety practices/violations should be calculated. Without these answers, utilitarianism lacks the capacity of investigating managerial moral agency. Similarly, the Kantian deontological view of categorical imperatives also creates confusion in explaining managerial moral agency. For example, according to Kant, people should only engage in those actions that conform to rules and can be adopted universally. Following this axiom, the rule that lying can always be considered wrong has validity because: first, it can be adopted universally; and second, a rule stating that lying was to be considered right would defeat the purpose of universality because, if everyone would lie to each other, it would do no good to anyone and people would stop believing each other (Anscombe, 1958). Here, the problem is that the expectation that people will always subscribe to not lying universally could only apply to a utopian world. Interestingly, few scholars have recently argued that one way of resolving this problem is through an idea called threshold deontology, which argues that people should always obey the rules unless in an emergency situation, at which point they should revert to a consequentialist approach (Alexander & Moore, 2021).

Arguably, if everyone held to the principles of Kantian deontology, the world would be a better place overall (Linstead et al., 2009). But, in reality, people may follow a universally adopted maxim that permits lying in specific situations, such as saving a life or consoling a child. Similarly, a perpetrator can always lie to defend himself (see Bandura, 1999, 2002) or to pass the blame on to others (see Tognazzini & Coates, 2018) without any apparent guilt because his moral agency justifies that, under any circumstance, self-defence is always the right thing to do, and lying is thus used as a self-defence mechanism. In the case of this study, evidence was presented earlier (see section 2.3) of factory managers having been found to lie about practising workplace safety—immoral and negligent behaviour that resulted in catastrophic disasters.

To summarise the above discussion, while both utilitarianism and Kantian deontology offer good theoretical insights into establishing the foundation of moral obligation, they have some limitations in regard to capturing managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices. The empirical evidence presented in Chapter 2 showed that supplier factory managers are engaged in irresponsible business practices and avoid/circumvent the institutional and legal workplace safety requirements, resulting in numerous accidents. Yet, being rational agents, how managers of supplier factories get involved in immoral behaviours/actions without feeling any apparent guilt or self-censure, warrants further theoretical insights. In this regard, Bandura's (1999, 2002) moral disengagement theory has gained considerable attention among scholars in relation to explaining moral agency and capturing their

judgements in various social situations. The following section provides details on moral disengagement theory.

3.2 Moral Disengagement Theory

Moral disengagement theory asserts that rational agents are able to make immoral judgements without feeling any apparent guilt or self-censure—i.e., the process by which individuals convince themselves that ethical/moral standards do not apply to them in a particular situation or context (Bandura, 1999, 2002, 2016).

The theory emerged from Bandura's social cognitive theory of moral agency, which postulates that rational people are moral agents who continually apply control over their own thoughts, behaviours, and actions (Bandura, 1986, 1999; Bandura et al., 1996). This control is instilled in them through their social interactions and experiences and is composed of their standards or dispositions—i.e., their beliefs, values, norms, and rules. These dispositions may act as deterrents to immoral decisions and as incentives to ethical/moral ones unless they are negatively influenced by the social rule systems (Burns & Dietz, 1992; Gonin et al., 2011). This is because rational agents, first, want to avoid facing any negative repercussions linked to violating social norms (Johnson & Buckley, 2015) and, second, want to experience the self-satisfaction and self-respect that stems from following one's own moral standards that are constructed or conditioned by emergent institutional rule systems. (Detert et al., 2008). Thereby, the theory claims to explore people's judgements and actions and further helps in identifying the varying levels of individual predisposition towards immoral acts and behaviours (Newman et al., 2020).

Moral disengagement distinguished itself from the other ethical theories highlighted earlier as it asserts that human functioning relies on the important role played by agency in the dynamic interplay between personal, environmental, and behavioural influences, a process Bandura et al. (1996) labelled 'reciprocal determinism'. Bandura (1999, 2002, 2016) proposed that an agent's moral standard can selectively be decoupled from his or her actions through eight cognitive mechanisms: moral justification, euphemistic labelling, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, disregard or distortion of consequences, dehumanisation, and attribution of blame. These mechanisms fit into four categories that Bandura (1999) termed 'loci' or 'sets': behavioural, agency, outcomes, and victim, which, according to Bandura, occur in this specific order—i.e., an agent can only reach the last set of moral disengagement (victim) by progressing through the other three. However, research has neither confirmed nor refuted this view (Newman et al., 2020).

Table 3.2 shows how Bandura connected these eight mechanisms to people. He claimed that, although people’s understandings of morality may vary from one situation to another, the disengagement mechanisms remain the same regardless of any differences in cultural or geographical contexts (Eriksson, 2016). This claim has been further informed by other contemporary researchers (see Anderson & Kras, 2008; Burger, 2009; Carnahan & McFarland, 2007; Kulig et al., 2016; Russell & Gregory, 2010) who, by reproducing the findings of the experimental studies conducted half a century ago (e.g., Milgram’s obedience, Bandura’s Bobo doll, and Zimbardo’s Stanford prison experiment highlighted in section 3.1.2) insist that the phenomenon of moral disengagement is not bounded by time, place, or population, and the theory can perhaps be used to investigate the immoral behaviours of agents within various social, political, and organisational situations.

Table 3.2: Bandura’s examples of how moral disengagement is connected to people

Locus of Disengagement	Associated mechanism	Example Quotes from Bandura (1999, 2002)
Behavioural	1. Moral Justification	“People do not ordinarily engage in harmful conduct until they have justified, to themselves, the morality of their actions.”
	2. Euphemistic Labelling	“People behave much more cruelly when assaultive actions are given a sanitised label than when they are called aggression.”
	3. Advantageous Comparision	“How behaviour is viewed is coloured by what it is compared against. By exploiting the contrast principle reprehensible acts can be made righteous.”
Agency	4. Displacement of Responsibility	“People will behave in ways they normally repudiate if a legitimate authority accepts responsibility for the effects of their conduct.”
	5. Diffusion of Responsibility	“The exercise of moral control is also weakened when personal agency is obscured by diffusing responsibility for detrimental behaviour.”
Outcomes	6. Disregard or Distortion of Consequence	“When people pursue activities that harm others, they avoid facing the harm they cause or minimise it.”
Victim	7. Dehumanisation	“The strength of moral self-censure depends on how the perpetrators regard the people they mistreat.”
	8. Attribution to Blame	“People view themselves as faultless victims driven to injurious conduct by forcible provocation.”

Source: Adopted from Eriksson’s (2016) and Newman et al’s (2020) framework

‘Moral justification’, ‘euphemistic labelling’, and ‘advantageous comparison’ are the three mechanisms of ‘behavioural’ locus where an individual morally disengages himself by rationalising his immoral behaviour. ‘Moral justification’ is the process by which a person justifies his immoral act and accepts that the act serves a social or moral purpose. ‘Euphemistic labelling’ is the use of language by which the person verbally sanitises his immoral act and makes it seem respectable. In ‘advantageous comparison’, the person compares his immoral act against another perceivably worse conduct, making the immoral act more acceptable. The second locus ‘agency’ is concerned with a person making sense of his own immoral choices and associated actions. It includes two mechanisms, ‘displacement of responsibility’ and ‘diffusion of responsibility’. In ‘displacement of responsibility’, a person avoids his responsibility for any immoral act and passes it to some external force or decision-maker higher up in the organisational hierarchy. In ‘diffusion of responsibility’, a person remains unwilling to take responsibility for an immoral act of a group and argues that he does not feel personally liable for the act. The third locus is ‘outcomes’ which contains the ‘disregard or distortion of consequences’ mechanism. This refers to a situation in which a person disregards the consequences of any harm he has caused by any immoral act and points out to others that the consequence is less serious than what it actually is. The last locus ‘victim’ is concerned with how the victim of an immoral act is dehumanised and blamed by the wrongdoer. ‘Dumanisation’ and ‘attribution to blame’ are the two mechanisms of this locus. ‘Dehumanisation’ refers to the wrongdoer of an immoral act treating the victim as being worthy of harm or of being less human than others. ‘Attribution of blame’ refers to the situation in which the wrongdoer blames others, usually the victims, for the immoral acts to absolve himself of responsibility (Bandura, 1999; Broadley & Kavussanu, 2011; Newman et al., 2020).

3.2.1 Critiques of Moral Disengagement Theory

Although moral disengagement theory has been used in a limited number of empirical studies, it has garnered considerable attention among scholars in relation to examining individual moral agency within various social and organisational contexts. But, this study has identified some criticisms of this theory which are highlighted below.

First and foremost, while moral disengagement remains a promising theoretical framework to explain why agents engage in immoral/unethical behaviours at work, scholars have argued about whether the theory can be applied to investigate corporate transgressions. This enquiry predominantly comes from those scholars who attribute moral obligation to corporations in relation to the concept of corporate moral agency (also known as corporate moral personhood). Corporate moral agency implies that corporations

can be proper bearers of moral obligations in a manner that is distinct from their human agents (Werhane, 1985, 1989). This does not mean that corporations can perform any action without their agents, but it does mean that they can be morally responsible as units considered distinct from their members (Rönnegard, 2015). Scholars argue that corporations are moral agents because they have decision-making structures, intentions, and characters, and are therefore capable of intentional actions that may not necessarily be reducible to the contributions made by their members, as not all corporate actions can be attributed to the latter (French, 1979).

In this regard, in his notion of corporate personhood, French (1984, 1995) argued that corporations are persons in much the same sense as we are, and are thus entitled to the same rights. He developed his idea of intentionality in accordance with the foundations of criminal law (i.e., '*mens rea*' and '*actus reus*' elements found in the common law)²³ to claim that corporations—and not just the human agents who work in them—have their own reasons for doing what they do. He referred to a 'Corporate Internal Decision' (CID) structure and argued that, through this structure, an organisation incorporates the acts of a biological person; that is, a moral agent. "When operative and properly activated, the CID structure accomplishes a subordination and synthesis of the intentions and acts of various biological persons into a corporate decision" (French, 1979:212). French's argument holds that, under the *actus reus* element, an organisational act can be attributed only to the company and not to any of its agents, and that, considering the *mens rea* one, an organisation can perform any act with an intention that can be attributed only to itself and not to any of its agents. In short, French does not argue that corporations are biological persons, but he does claim that their intentional decision-making structures are sufficiently similar to human ones to ascribe them identifies as moral persons (Werhane, 2015). Other researchers have agreed with this idea with their analogy of moral agency between agents and corporations: "Goals, economic values, strategies, and other such personal attributes are often usefully projected to the corporate level by managers and researchers. Why should we not project the function of conscience in the same way?" (Goodpaster & Matthews, 2014:169).

In contrast, other researchers argue that corporations are only structures that coordinate the moral actions of their agents but are not moral agents in themselves. Therefore, corporations cannot be held morally responsible for what their agents do on their behalf (Werhane, 2015). In this regard, Manning (1988)

²³ A fundamental principle of Criminal Law is that a crime consists of both a mental and a physical element. The *Mens rea*—a person's awareness of the fact that his/her conduct is criminal—is the mental element, while the *actus reus*, the act itself, is the physical element (Legal Dictionary, 2018).

criticised French's portrayal of corporations as persons. She highlighted several business cases (e.g., AT&T, Bendix, Disney, and Martin Marietta) and argued that people do not instinctively feel that a crime has taken place when they hear or read the news that an organisation has been 'dismembered' (i.e., that regulatory bodies have broken-up or sold-off parts/divisions of a company), 'murdered' (i.e., that a company has been taken-over), or 'divorced' (i.e., that a company has been split into two or more parts). Conversely, attributing these words to any human being would give anyone the impression that an odious crime has been committed. To Manning's (1998:641) understanding, this is simply because "Corporations are not moral persons in the same sense as human persons". In short, the argument comes down to the point of whether the corporate culture and structures encourage or discourage behaviours, and whether managers act consistently or inconsistently with these elements.

French's attempt to establish the notion of 'personhood' in the moral and legal senses has appeared confusing and entangling to many contemporary researchers (see Manning, 1988; Moore, 1999). In response to French, Ozar (1985) differentiated between 'moral personhood' and 'moral agency' in terms of the concept of 'rights'. According to him, there are two types of rights— conventional and moral— which do not exist independently and always make reference to an agent. When a right is verified in reference to an institutional framework, a social rule, or a law system, it is a conventional right. Its existence depends upon it being accepted by the members of an organisation or society. A moral right, on the other hand, is a specific right that exists as part of the moral nature of things. People have moral rights "independently of anyone's choosing that this be so, because of their very nature—by virtue of their ontology" (Ozar, 1985:279). Organisations can only have conventional rights "as they are made to have by those who create them by accepting the relevant social rules...corporations than do not have moral rights" (Ozar, 1985:279). As such, corporate moral agency needs to be kept separate from notions of agent-based moral agency, which attributes moral obligation to the agents of corporations (Holmes 1979; Ozar, 1985).

In a similar manner, Velasquez (1983, 1985) also criticised French's notion of corporate moral personhood. He adopted an understanding of moral obligation as "A kind of responsibility that is attributed to an agent only for those actions that originate in the agent, insofar as the action derived from the agent's intentions (the *mens rea* requirement) and from the same agent's bodily movements (the *actus reus* requirement)" (Velasquez, 1983:3). According to Velasquez, French is wrong because corporate acts do not originate within a corporation but in the minds or actions of its members. He argued that the moral obligation of an act can be attributed "only to that agent who originated the act in his own body, that is, in

movements of a body over which he has direct control” (1985:118). This means that when an organisation acts through its agents—who are autonomous individuals and not under the direct control of the organisation itself—it does not perform any bodily act itself. “Moral responsibility for a corporation’s acts lodges with the agents who bring about those acts and not with the corporate entity of which the act is predicted” (Velasquez, 1985:119); thus, according to Velasquez, the *actus reus* requirement is not met.

Velasquez went on critiquing French’s *mens rea* requirement based on the same line of argument. He agreed with French’s point that it is possible to infer intentions from an organisation’s policies and procedures and that these intentions can perhaps be attributed to the organisation and not to its members. Then he claimed that corporate acts cannot be intentional. This is because, first, whereas the intentions are attributed to one entity (the company), the related acts are carried out by another (its members); and second, an act becomes intentional only when it fulfils an intention formed within the mind of the agent whose bodily movements bring it about (Velasquez, 2003; 2017). Hence, Velasquez ended up with the notion that “corporate policies and procedures are themselves wholly the products of the intentional actions of other agents and are carried out only when other agents freely choose to adhere to them” (Velasquez, 1985:120).

In light of the discussion above, some scholars have posited that only moral agents can be held morally obligated for any corporate wrongdoings and that, consequently, these agents are the proper subject of business ethics (Velasquez, 1983, 1985, 2003). These scholars consider organisations as inherently social in nature and claim that moral disengagement is likely to take place within organisations through human actions and behaviour. The Enron scandal, the Ford Pinto fuel tank leak, and the NASA Space Shuttle Challenger disaster are among the most cited high-profile cases that researchers often cite to refer to agents associating with unethical decision-making as the underlying cause of organisational transgressions (see Bandura, 2016; McLean & Elkind, 2003; Vaughn, 1996). Others, conversely, suggest that moral obligation should be attributed to corporations as entities distinct from their agents; consequently, they hold that the former should be the primary subject of business ethics (Donaldson, 1982). Even though organisations sometimes are credited with human traits to explain a situation, human beings and organisations are by all means separate entities. Business enterprises have their own legal identity and remain independent of human actions and decisions (Kinley, 2009). Both sides of the debate are found to utilise the concepts of ‘personhood’, ‘obligation’, and ‘rights’ to establish their accounts on whether or not to attribute moral agency to corporations.

However, it should also be noted that an organisation's rules and policies are subject to interpretation by its agents, who may also resist them in many ways. Mistakes and errors of judgement may occur and there can be ambiguities in the interpretation of any established rule system (Evans, 2013; Morrison, 2015). Furthermore, organisations create an environment in which their agents make moral judgements, decisions, and undertake actions. As highlighted before, corporate culture affects the moral ethos of agents, and can thereby, predispose them to act amorally (Cherkowski et al., 2015; Knouse & Giacalone, 1992; Moore, 1999). Therefore, to understand managerial moral agency, it would be pivotal, rather than simply focussing on managers, to gain deeper insights by looking at the environment in which they work and live.

In this regard, drawing several examples from Bandura's research, Eriksson (2016) concluded that moral disengagement theory applies to human beings—and not to organisations—and has considerable merit in explaining how the moral agency of agents is affected in different organisational settings. He identified that all but one of Bandura's works had taken the moral agency and moral transgressions of individuals into account. In the one exception (see Bandura et al., 2000)—which had focussed on several instances of high-profile corporate malpractice and linked those with moral disengagement theory—Bandura had seemed to contradict himself and had unconvincingly used his moral disengagement theory to capture organisational malpractices. Table 3.3 contains several quotes that illustrate Bandura and his colleagues' attempts to use the theory to investigate how organisations selectively disengage themselves from moral self-sanctions and get involved in their transgressive conduct.

Table 3.3 may give the impression that, while applying moral disengagement theory to the study of organisational wrongdoings, Bandura and his colleagues had attempted to separate individual and organisational moral agency. The mention of Ford and Nestlé in the first two quotes and the attribution to companies of the human traits of self, goals, objectives, values, and standards in the third, fourth and fifth quotes show that the authors considered organisations to have the morality, ability, and power—separate from those of their human components—to choose to engage in misconduct (Bandura et al., 2000). In this regard, a criticism that is often directed to this theory is that, while studying corporate transgressions, Bandura overlooked this matter and did not explicitly clarify whether he attributed any corporate wrongdoings to the organisations themselves or to the people specifically associated with those wrongdoings.

Table 3.3 Example quotes from Bandura’s work regarding corporate moral agency

No.	Example Quotes
1	Ford used different moral disengagement strategies to defend its highly controversial decision (about Ford Pinto).
2	Nestle tried to defend and morally justify its questionable marketing practice by referring to the freedom of production and marketing (about Nestlé infant formula).
3	A corporation can be viewed both as a social construction and as an agentic system with the power to realise intentions.
4	Moreover, the practices of a corporation operate through self-regulatory mechanisms. These mechanisms regulate the allocation of resources in the pursuit of goals and objectives of the corporate in accordance with its values and standards.
5	When corporations engage in reprehensible conduct they are likely to do so through selective disengagement of moral self-sanctions.

Source: Bandura et al. (2000)

Eriksson’s argument, on one hand, establishes the point that moral disengagement theory was developed to study the moral agency of individuals. On the other hand, his view of the theory being “superfluous” (Eriksson, 2016:280) in studying corporate transgressions remains unconvincing. This is because it is not uncommon for researchers to ascribe human characteristics to organisations while engaging in business and organisational studies. By doing so, researchers attempt to study organisational transgressions that are actually the outcomes of the actions of those organisations’ agents. Nevertheless, as highlighted earlier, while investigating an individual’s moral agency, the important aspect that needs to be recognised is that agents do not behave in a vacuum and that their moral agency is shaped or affected by the organisational culture and wider institutional factors in which they are steeped. So, it is crucial to focus on the environments or to understand the contexts in which individuals operate.

While Bandura was never straightforward in clarifying his position on whether corporations can be held morally responsible, his works show that he conflated organisations with agents, and thereby preferred to take an anthropocentric view—i.e., attributed the agents’ moral responsibilities to their organisations. When attention is directed at Bandura’s earlier works in the development of his moral disengagement theory, the latter is found to rest on traits and characteristics that can only be used to describe and understand moral agents and their actions. Bandura theorised that the mechanisms of moral disengagement routinely operate in the mundane decisions made by individuals to further their personal and organisational gains (Bandura, 1990a). Furthermore, the idea of moral disengagement rests upon

Bandura's theory of reciprocal determinism—i.e., that an individual's behaviour influences and is influenced by both their social environment and personal characteristics (Bandura, 1986). Thus, Bandura consistently developed examples pertaining to individual moral disengagement in social environments and professional situations to represent organisational wrongdoings. From this point of view, Bandura—along with any other researchers studying organisational transgressions through moral disengagement theory at the agent level—can be considered convincing.

Another critique levelled at moral disengagement theory is that it is not established on a solid moral/ethical foundation—e.g., while investigating moral transgressions, the theory does not link itself to any moral/ethical framework or stem from any normative ethical theory. For any theoretical construct based on morality/ethics, most scholars have highlighted the importance of following some particular philosophical school of thought (see Anscombe, 1958; Korsgaard, 1986; Papouli, 2018). However, Bandura refrained from doing so—i.e., he neither discussed any philosophical views on morality/ethics nor defined these ideas in developing his theory. This critique allows this study to place moral disengagement theory on the moral relativism framework since almost all the moral disengagement mechanisms that Bandura suggested fall into the characteristics of moral relativism. Descriptive moral relativism holds that people fundamentally disagree about what is moral or immoral—i.e., moral judgements are not absolute but relative to the moral standards of people living in a community or acting within organisational settings (Gowans, 2021). Similarly, the normative position of moral relativism shows that since nobody is right or wrong, individuals ought to tolerate others' behaviour even though they have fundamental disagreements among themselves about morality/ethics (Westacott, 2021). In this regard, Bandura postulates that moral standards do not function as absolute internal regulators of human actions (Bandura, 2002). So, the argument that can be drawn from here is, since individuals do not operate as autonomous moral agents and are enmeshed in social and organisation settings, moral disengagement mechanisms operate on moral relativism where agentic behaviours centre on subjective interpretations of morality/ethics which redefine or reconstruct transgressive acts as justified.

A review of the literature shows that a wealth of scholarly works on moral agency tend to rely on ethical theoretical frameworks (see Bevan & Corvellec, 2007; Jensen, 2010; Johnson & Buckley, 2015; Moore et al., 2012). However, while using Bandura's theory this premise must be taken into consideration that moral disengagement mechanisms are best suited for the subjective interpretation of morality/ethics. However, relying only on this premise may limit the scope of the theory in two ways. First, if, in similar situations, individuals do not share the same views of right/wrong or good/bad, as stipulated in ethical

guidelines, they may not need to morally disengage to behave unethically. As Eriksson (2016) pointed out, people could behave morally according to their own perceptions and discretion while, at the same time, being unethical according to an ethical guideline. Second, without acknowledging an objectively established (e.g., Kant's categorical imperative) universalisability principles on morality/ethics, people's comprehension of morality/ethics may fall short or vary immensely because of the dissimilarities in the cultures and contexts in which they reside or in the religions they follow, which may affect the theory's capacity to delineate what triggers moral disengagement in a given scenario. This means that, depending on the differing characteristics of cultures and societies in relation to their views on morality/ethics, people may have very different ideas about what constitutes morality/ethics or moral obligation and, subsequently, may hold varied opinions about an incident or evidence.

3.2.2 Application of Moral Disengagement Theory

In recent years, increasing numbers of social science researchers have started considering moral disengagement theory in their investigations of the moral agency of individuals in various organisational and non-organisational settings. Many of these researchers have focussed on people in order to investigate the agent-centric immoral behaviours and actions that take place within corporate environments. A number of studies have investigated the causal link between organisational transgressions and the moral disengagement of agents and have provided evidence of ways in which the latter can perpetuate, facilitate, and initiate organisational corruption (Moore, 2008), unethical workplace behaviours (Baron et al., 2015; Detert et al., 2008; Johnson & Connelly, 2016; Moore et al., 2012), counterproductive work behaviours (Fida et al., 2015), and workplace harassment (Page & Pina, 2015). Barsky (2011) investigated why people engage in deceptive and fraudulent activities in organisations and use moral disengagement tactics to justify any nefarious actions committed at work. Murphy & Dacin (2011) developed a framework that identified pathways to the instances of fraud that people commit in organisational settings through the rationalisation of unethical actions. Others have similarly indicated that moral disengagement is a significant predictor of corporate unethical behaviours (Claybourn, 2011), and similarly theorised that it might be “the root cause of sanctioned corporate corruption” (Brief et al., 2001:473).

In their work on moral disengagement, Newman et al. (2020) provided a list of studies in which researchers had investigated 26 corporate scandals using the moral disengagement theory. These researchers had used three levels of analysis—i.e., individual, group, and organisation—to investigate moral transgressions. While many of these researchers had referred to agents' association with unethical decision-making or wrongdoings as the underlying cause of organisational transgressions, a non-

negligible number of their studies show that organisational or institutional mechanisms can also significantly influence moral agency, and can thus persuade agents to engage in immoral acts and behaviours (see Newman et al., 2020, for an overview of moral disengagement studies). Interestingly, these researchers had not engaged in the debate about whether or not corporations have separate moral agency, as they considered this argument unnecessary to investigate the moral disengagement that takes place at work.

Newman et al.'s (2020) review provides a detailed list of quantitative studies that used the theory to develop and validate a scale suited to measure moral disengagement. From their review, it can be observed that quantitative researchers lack consistency over how moral disengagement and its associated mechanisms are to be measured on a scale. Some of the most commonly used scales are the 32-item one developed by Bandura et al. (1996), the 24-item one established by Detert et al. (2008), the 15-item one advocated by McFerran et al. (2010), and the 8-item one propounded by Moore et al. (2012). Drawing on these different scales, the findings of numerous quantitative studies remain highly inconsistent, thereby, making it difficult to generalise findings across studies, as the aspects being measured vary (Newman et al., 2020). In contrast, only a handful of qualitative studies used moral disengagement theory in their analysis (see Egels-Zandén, 2017; Eriksson & Svensson, 2016; Heikkataipale & Lämsä, 2019; Kempster & Gregory, 2017; Loyens, 2014; White et al., 2009). These studies used Bandura's eight mechanisms of moral disengagement as the basis upon which to code their data and then discuss the generated themes to evidence moral disengagement.

Moral disengagement theory has also been drawn upon in conceptual studies aimed at explaining immoral behaviour in various social contexts—e.g., violent video, shooter games, and moral degradation (Hopp et al., 2018; Teng et al., 2017); children's propensity to tell coached lies (Doyle & Bussey, 2017); human rights issues in sporting mega-events (Schofield et al., 2017); online antisocial behaviours (Faulkner & Bliuc, 2016); bullying in schools (Thornberg & Jungert, 2014); traditional and cyber-bullying (Lazuras et al., 2013; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012); animal abuse (Vollum, 2004); and various levels of domestic and societal violence and terrorism (Bandura, 1990*b*, 2016; Bandura et al., 1996). Examples are also available in political contexts—e.g., 'war-fever' (McAlister & Wilczak, 2015), support for military deployment (Jackson & Gaertner, 2010; McAlister et al., 2006), and human reactions to war (Aquino et al., 2007).

Despite the adequate interest, moral disengagement theory has not been given enough exposure in workplace safety research, particularly in the context of global apparel supply chains. Although a few researchers (see Eriksson, 2016; Eriksson & Svensson, 2016; Johnson & Buckley, 2015; Petitta et al., 2017) recently used this theory to capture immoral behaviours in supply chains, they did not include apparel supply chains in their studies. Although conceptually insightful, these studies did not engage in any empirical investigation to confirm any real-life relevance or application of the theory. Furthermore, while extending our knowledge immeasurably, the extant research on workplace safety stops short of shedding light on an important issue—it does not address the wider institutional factors which are especially relevant in apparel supply chains and also are crucial to influencing managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices. This research, therefore, aims to combine moral disengagement theory with the concept of moral agency because it appears that theory holds great potential to capture managerial moral agency in the aforementioned industry.

3.2.3 The Philosophical Positioning of Moral Disengagement Theory

As the idea of moral disengagement necessarily derives from fundamental questions—such as why one should be moral, what moral obligation is, and whether there is a moral obligation for factory managers to comply with workplace safety governance mechanisms—a close connection can be established between this theory and philosophical ideas discussed earlier in this chapter. The following sections made an attempt to establish this connection.

Many scholars support that moral agency in relation to organisational transgressions can be studied through Aristotelean virtue ethics (see Anscombe, 1958; Foot, 2002; MacIntyre, 2007; Solomon, 1992; Taylor, 1985). However, this study finds some limitations in such attempts. For example, it is possible to think of an agentic virtuous life in an organisational context since according to Aristotelean virtue ethics, the agent's virtues such as traits and characters are the core elements to define the moral agency of an agent (Papouli, 2018; Banks, 2012). Oakley (1996) suggested a framework of utilising Aristotelian virtue to evaluate agent character within organisational contexts that according to him convincingly forwards the idea of evaluating agents to investigate corporate good deeds and wrongdoings. He said, (1996:129) “An action is right if and only if it is what an agent with a virtuous character would do in the circumstances”. However, this study finds that this notion contradicts Kant's idea of categorical imperatives—the absence of these within virtue ethics, gives all agents the freedom of creating their own versions of ‘virtue’, thus self-determination of right/wrong and moral/immoral acts and behaviours, contributing to a perennial conflict in agentic moral obligations and behaviours.

Interestingly, if there is an attempt to understand the theory from Al-Ghazzali's notion of virtue and Kant's deontology, it becomes more convincing to study the moral agency of agents in any organisational setting. This is because Al-Ghazzali's interpretation of virtue (i.e., nobility of character of agents) emphasises a theological constitution that formulates a universal moral/ethical guideline for humankind. This is also very similar to Kant's idea of categorical imperatives—e.g., commands or moral laws which everyone must follow regardless of their desires or extenuating circumstances (Muscente, 2020). Furthermore, as discussed earlier, Al-Ghazzali's teaching connects virtue with the agents' moral agency underpinning an action to make it right, except for those actions which have explicitly been declared as sinful/forbidden by the omnipotent creator (Shaker, 2014; Winter, 2016). This gives the moral agents leeway to use their prudence and judgements in engaging in activities that may appear unethical/illegal in certain instances (the example of running a red light in a quiet street to take a victim to the hospital) but due to the good intention, the act should be treated as a good deed. This also goes in line with the Kantian deontology that emphasises agentic motive/intention—i.e., moral agents cannot always control or predict the outcomes of their actions, but they are in complete control of their motives/intentions Kant (1968). In this regard, this study understands the importance of an empirical investigation to explore how the moral disengagement mechanisms are linked with factory managers' motives/intentions behind their complying or circumventing attitudes towards safety governance mechanisms. Hence, the theory can be linked with Al-Ghazzali's notion of virtue and Kant's deontology to investigate managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices.

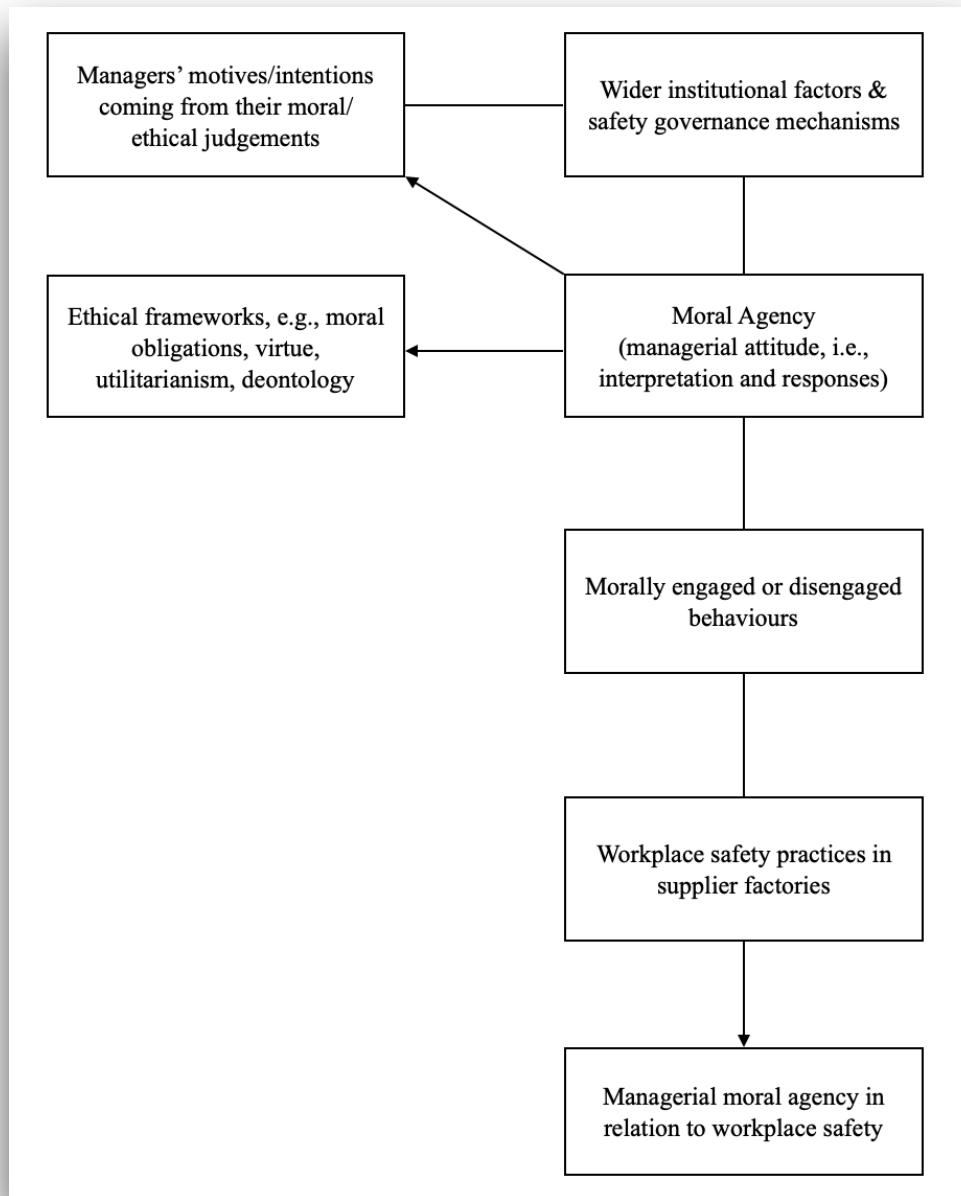
Moral disengagement theory can also be studied by utilitarianism since several mechanisms of the theory are congruent with utilitarian tenets. For example, Bandura (2002) mentioned that people utilise 'moral justification', 'euphemistic labelling' and 'advantageous comparison to justify any military pursuit or extremist attack and killing of human beings where these conducts appear destructive to one group and benevolent to another. War can also be justified under utilitarianism to ensure the greatest good for the nation to fight against ruthless oppressors, to protect the nation's sovereignty, or to preserve world peace (Brink, 1984, 1986). Similar examples can be drawn for the other mechanisms of moral disengagement which in turn are activities conducted under a complex process of utilitarian reasoning. Since the main tenet of utilitarianism considers actions as good or bad depending upon their level and degree of consequences, utilitarian agents would weigh the benefits against the risks to determine whether or not an action is good or bad (Bibus, 2013; Goller & Billett, 2014). This brings the argument back to the earlier discussion where literature showed that the supplier factory managers are involved in doing a utilitarian cost-benefit analysis, emphasising more on producing results rather than following rules. In this regard,

the moral disengagement theory has the potential to investigate the moral agency of managers to find what institutional factors are influencing their moral agency to be involved, in such cost-benefit analysis, and whether the workers are being treated as means or mere instruments of production.

3.3 The Theoretical Framework

This chapter has discussed the relevant literature on moral agency and showed that the root of moral agency is manifested deeply within the ancient philosophical approaches and moral disengagement theory can be linked to some dominant ethical theories in the study of moral agency at work. The scope of this study is not to conflate individual and corporate moral agency; rather, from the literature highlighted previously, it appears that organisational transgressions can be understood by investigating the moral agency of its agents which can take place both at individual and organisational levels. In light of the reviewed literature, this study posits that factory managers beings are moral agents who (a) hold in their minds motives/intentions that come from their moral/ethical judgement of right/wrong, good/bad; (b) execute their motives/intentions through varying levels of attitudes (e.g., interpretations, behaviours and actions) over which they have direct control; and thus (c) control the workplace safety practices at their factories. In this regard, moral disengagement theory can be positioned within the dominant ethical approaches which do not reject the idea of attributing moral agency to human beings and thus endorse the study of organisational transgressions through that of moral agents. In conjunction with the literature and subsequent conceptual model presented in Chapter 2, figure 3.1 shows the theoretical framework that has been derived at this point of the discussion.

Figure 3.1 Theoretical framework derived from Chapters 2 and 3



Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a concise account of morality/ethics and moral agency in societal and organisational settings. Referring to various philosophical traditions related to the investigation of moral agency, this chapter addressed a key concern—i.e., the managers' moral agency in relation to workplace safety and their moral obligation to comply with institutional safety governance mechanisms.

A critical review of the literature on morality/ethics and moral agency finds the academic community to be divided in two in relation to these concerns. On one side there are those scholars who assumed that moral agency applies only to human beings—who can also properly be held morally responsible—and

consequently, viewed the members of organisations or the moral agents as the proper subject of business ethics (Papouli, 2018; Moore et al., 2012; Velasquez, 1985, 2017). On the other side, there are those scholars who argued that moral agency should be attributed to business organisations as corporate entities separate from their members or agents, and consequently held that organisations should be the primary subject of business ethics (Johnson & Buckley, 2015; French, 1995).

Drawing upon some of the prominent philosophical traditions of ancient and modern times and upon the extant literature on moral agency, this study argued that moral agents are invested in moral responsibility and that their actions originate in and are performed based upon their motives/intentions. According to Velasquez (1983), those scholars who argue that business organisations are moral agents—and therefore morally responsible for their wrongdoings—are drifting towards ‘organisational totalitarianism’, which endows business entities with the ability to “act and intend like a large-scale personality...larger-than-human person whose ends and well-being are more important than those of its members” (Velasquez, 1983:15). This ideology does not flow well from the philosophical roots of ethics and morality highlighted in this chapter and also limits the scope of moral disengagement theory in studying the moral agency and actions of human agents.

This chapter then highlighted moral disengagement among agents—a salient concern for this study—and accordingly evaluated the appropriateness of Bandura’s moral disengagement theory to investigate managerial moral agency and transgressions. In this regard, this study identifies that, in order to investigate workplace safety practices, it is not always necessary to assign moral agency to business organisations; rather, the transgressions committed by organisations can be studied by investigating the moral agency of their agents. Considering the potentiality of and the critiques levelled at the theory addressed earlier, it is now a matter of great interest to explore the theory’s capacity in exploring managerial moral agency in the context of this research. Hence, drawing upon the literature presented earlier (in Chapters 2 and 3) on workplace safety practices in the Global South (McCarthy et al., 2020; Soundararajan et al., 2018; Soundararajan, et al. 2021), institutional safety governance mechanisms enacted in the supplier factories in Bangladesh (Alamgir & Alakavuklar, 2020; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019), and moral agency (Bandura, 1999, 2002, 2016; Eriksson, 2016; Newman et al., 2020; Petitta et al., 2017), this study attempts to contribute to the scholarship on a theoretical and empirical understanding of managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices and on the institutional factors that influence such agency.

4. Research Approach

*Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted*²⁴

Albert Einstein

Chapter Overview

The previous chapters presented the research context, its objectives, a conceptual model, and a theoretical framework based on a detailed review of the literature. This chapter outlines and discusses the research methods appropriate to the research questions, and thereafter details the specific procedures adopted. The chapter starts by positioning the study's ontology, epistemology, and axiology standpoints. It then describes the reasons underpinning the choice of a qualitative approach and provides the details of the fieldwork activities, including the selection of the participants, the data collection methods, and the data analysis tool used. The discussion then ends by highlighting the ethical issues that were considered while conducting the fieldwork.

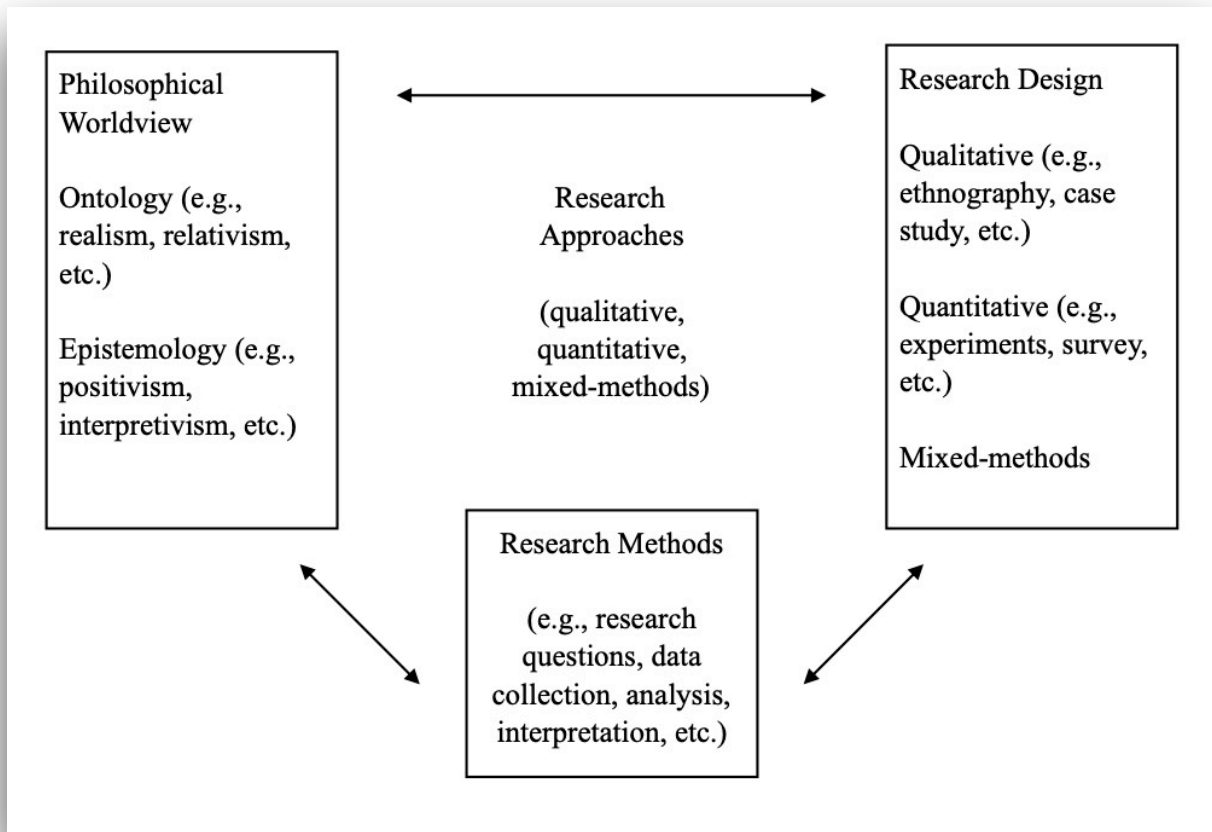
4.1 The Research Approach

The consideration of the research approach to be taken to carry out the fieldwork, data collection, analysis, and interpretation involved a range of decisions. A good research approach is not a pre-defined template; rather, it is a “skilled activity requiring critical and creative thinking” (Mason, 2017:46). According to Creswell & Creswell (2018:5), “researchers need to think through the philosophical worldview assumptions that they bring to the study, the research design that is related to this worldview, and the specific methods or procedures of research that translate the approach into practice”.

To execute the research, fieldwork, and its associated activities, this study followed Creswell & Creswell's (2018) framework. Figure 4.1 shows its three components. The first is the ‘philosophical worldview’, also called the ‘philosophical debate’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015), ‘research paradigm’ (Lincoln et al. 2011; Saunders et al., 2016), ‘ontology and epistemology’ (Crotty, 1998), or ‘broadly conceived research methodologies’ (Neuman, 2014). The second component is the ‘research design’, also termed ‘strategy of enquiry’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The third component is the ‘research method’.

²⁴ The quote is taken from researcher Faruck Morcos, available at:
https://personal.utdallas.edu/~faruckm/Evolutionary_Information_Lab/Links_files/PhDQuotes.pdf

Figure 4.1: Creswell & Creswell's (2018) framework for conducting research



The following sections present a discussion of how this framework was implemented in this study.

4.2 Philosophical Worldview

Positioning a study within a philosophical worldview is central to the conception of a research approach. Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) highlighted three significant reasons for this. First, philosophical considerations help researchers to understand what kind of evidence is required and how it is to be gathered and interpreted to provide valid answers to the research questions. Second, an understanding of the philosophical traditions can assist researchers in recognising and adopting the appropriate research designs by indicating the strengths and limitations of each. Third, philosophical consideration can help researchers to identify and, at times, create a research design in accordance with the limitations imposed by different subjects or knowledge structures. The following sections discuss this study's philosophical worldview—i.e., its ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions.

4.2.1 The Ontological Position

Ontology refers to the study of the theories of being (Smith, 1998), the nature of social entities (Bryman & Bell, 2015), the nature of reality (Saunders et al., 2016), or the philosophical assumptions about the

nature of reality and existence (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). It is concerned with questions pertaining to what can really exist or what is out there (Hofweber, 2018). With respect to ontology, the core debate among philosophers deals with the questions of how the world is viewed and of whether social entities should be perceived objectively or subjectively.

In response to these philosophical queries, many social science researchers believe in objectivism—an assumption that advocates that reality is objective, univocal, and exists independently of social actors (Saunders et al., 2016). Hence, such researchers strive to discover the laws and theories that explain this external reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). In contrast, researchers who favour subjectivism argue that social reality is multifaceted and created by the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors (Saunders et al., 2016). So, to describe social phenomena, these researchers aim at gathering multiple perspectives from the views and experiences of social actors (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

Scholars place a range of ontological positions between the assumptions of subjectivism and objectivism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). In these continua, realism is a dominant objectivist stance that differentiates between the real world and the observable one, where social entities are like their physical counterparts in the observable world—i.e., they exist independently of how people think of them (Miller, 2021). Whereas relativism, a dominant subjectivist stance, considers the social world as not underpinned by any reality beyond that attributed to it by social actors, and the order and structures of social phenomena to be therefore created by researchers and social actors through their use of language, perceptions, interpretations, and consequent actions (Burrell & Morgan, 2016).

In order to set out this study's ontological position, it is important to reiterate its primary focus—i.e., investigating managerial moral agency in relation to the workplace safety practices enacted in the apparel factories of global supply chains. In doing so, it is pivotal to explore what attitude managers hold towards workplace safety, especially towards the safety governance mechanisms enacted in their factories, and how managerial moral agency is influenced by wider institutional factors. The literature reviewed earlier clearly shows that factory managers, as moral agents, are embedded in a broader institutional environment in which on the one hand, they may have their own interpretations of safety and institutional safety governance mechanisms, and, on the other hand, their moral obligations and attitudes towards those safety governance mechanisms can perhaps be influenced by elements which exist independently of how they think of them. This forwards the notion that managers are born into an evolving institutional environment that influences, enables, and controls their attitudes, behaviours, and actions, thus

influencing the consciousness of their moral obligations towards safety practices. Therefore, simply taking a realist or a relativist stance would have somewhat limited the ontological process of this study because, at its extreme a (naively) realist position only considers the ‘realities’ to exist independently of what managers think of them or how they experience and interpret them, ignoring the fact that their attitudes and interpretations can be socially constructed and influenced by the institutional environment. Similarly, the exclusive consideration of a relativist stance would also have restricted this study’s ontological process because it cannot be denied that there are objective realities—which exist independently of managers’ experiences and interpretations—that may affect their moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices.

A more stratified ontology—critical realism—is thus adopted. Critical realism holds that an objective world exists independently of people’s experiences and imaginations and also recognises that part of the world consists of their subjective interpretations, which influence the ways in which the world itself is perceived and experienced (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Such stance differentiates ontology into three levels: first, the empirical domain, which comprises people’s experiences and perceptions; second, the actual domain, which comprises the actions and events that take place; and third, the real domain, which comprises the causal powers and mechanisms that, despite not being directly observable, have real consequences for people and society (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2000; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Considering the context of this study, to explain managers’ attitudes towards safety, moral agency and moral disengagement are considered key mechanisms. The way these mechanisms affect managers’ safety practice decisions can be framed within moral philosophy. So, this ontological approach appeared to be best suitable because it occupies a middle ground between the naively realist and the relativist stances and refocuses on explaining what is seen and experienced in terms of the underlying structures of reality that shape any observable events (Outhwaite, 1998; Saunders et al., 2016). In this regard, the following section describes how critical realism embraces the epistemological position of this study.

4.2.2 The Epistemological Position

Epistemological positions tend to be the logical consequence of ontological assumptions. Epistemology refers to “the study of the nature of knowledge and ways of enquiring into the physical and social worlds” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Burrell & Morgan (2016) referred to it as human assumptions about knowledge—what constitutes acceptable, valid, and legitimate knowledge and how it is communicated. A range of epistemologies underpinned by ontological traditions gives researchers a choice of appropriate research paradigms. In this regard, Burrell & Morgan (2016) highlighted several distinct research

paradigms—such as positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, social constructionism, postmodernism, etc.—each with its own ontological and epistemological assumptions about reality and the interpretation of social world phenomena. Along this spectrum, positivism and interpretivism are considered to be the two most dominant positions, the former supporting the realist and the latter embracing the relativist ontological assumptions (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997).

Positivists are inclined to take (naively) realist (objectivist) ontological positions and to limit their investigations to observable empirical facts that can be quantified and correlated in order to generate universal statements or ‘laws’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Turner, 2001). Here, human behaviours are viewed as outcomes of a social order generated by external reality. This means that the social world is not constructed by social actors; rather, it is uncovered by them (Blumberg et al., 2014; Miller & Brewer, 2003). In contrast, extreme versions of interpretivism advocate a relativist (subjectivist) ontology in which realities are viewed as being multiple and socially constructed and are given meaning by subjective interpretations made by people in their social interactions (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Interpretivists view themselves as being a part of what is observed; thus, research is driven by interest (Blumberg et al., 2014). Sociologists argue that certain social realities are not reducible to empirical data and are often taken for granted when theories are constructed (Archer, 1998). This means that there are social phenomena that are not empirically verifiable or quantifiable and may oppose being articulated into numbers, models, theories, or empirical scrutiny. In such cases, these phenomena can be reconstructed through abductive inferences, i.e., arguments that move from a social phenomenon to a theory that is able to account for that phenomenon (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014; Archer et al., 2016).

Given the context of this study, the choice of either a positivist or an interpretivist epistemology was unsuitable. For example, a positivist stance involves claiming that there is a single ‘knowable’ external reality that exists independently of researchers, who thus need to formulate laws and theories suited to explain that reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Similarly, a strong interpretivist stance argues that the attainment of true knowledge of an external reality is impossible because, first, there is no objective reality (strong social constructionism) and, second, should there be any such reality, we could not know anything about it (weak social constructionism) (Burr, 2015). In this regard, critical realism offers great insight by bridging the gap between these two epistemologies. Ontologically, critical realism embraces positivism and distinguishes between the ‘real’ and the ‘observable’ worlds. It argues that the ‘real’ world consists of casual structures (mechanisms) that cannot be observed and exist independently from peoples’ understanding and interpretations (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). The world known to people is thus

deemed to be constructed from people's experiences through what is observable—which is caused by unobservable structures—and the social world can be understood only if people understand the structures and mechanisms that generate events (Bal, 2020; Saunders et al., 2016). For example, a positivist notion might assert that observed workplace safety practices are correlated to better worker satisfaction, but that would often fail to recognise the existence of mechanisms that may or may not explain how these two phenomena relate. An interpretivist take on this would rely only on the way workers view and experience workplace safety, and altogether reject the possibility that there can be external realities that may or may not influence worker satisfaction. In this regard, a critical realist view would argue that workplace safety is correlated with better worker satisfaction in factories due to a number of potential 'knowable' reasons that have little (or perhaps nothing) to do with satisfaction being ensured by safety. These might include better workplace democracy (e.g., involving workers in developing safety policies), job security for low-earning workers, regulated working hours, etc. Alternatively, workplace safety and worker satisfaction may both be triggered by a third causal factor (e.g., an amiable management-worker relationship) while actually not being at all directly related.

Furthermore, critical realists would argue that an explanation of how safety practices and worker satisfaction are related (if at all) cannot be reached through positivist and deductive approaches because the social world is not a closed or controlled environment, but, rather, an open system that includes a complex array of factors capable of influencing both the phenomena (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). So, even if safety practices were to be found to have the ability to lead to worker satisfaction, it would be important to specify under what conditions this is the case, as a number of contextual elements, such as supply chain issues, cultural norms, labour market, worker demography, etc. may influence this relationship (See O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). In the context of this study, such conditions can be institutional, cultural, and supply chain relevant which influence the managerial attitudes towards safety practices.

Nonetheless, critical realism presents itself as an alternative paradigm to both positivism and interpretivism and is an appropriate ontological and epistemological position for the context of this study. Critical realism also offers social science researchers great axiological and methodological flexibility and thereby represents a generative schema capable of grounding a variety of empirical investigations in accordance with the best practices of sociology (Archer et al., 2016). Following the attributes of the critical realism paradigm, the following sections present the axiological assumptions of this study.

4.2.3 Axiological Position and Reflexivity

Axiology is the branch of philosophy that refers to the role played by values and ethics within the research process (Saunders et al., 2016). Axiological factors deal with the personal values of researchers and of their research participants (Heron, 1996). Thus, they involve defining, evaluating, and understanding the concepts of any acceptable and unacceptable behaviours related to the research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Axiological positions are of great importance in regard to obtaining credible research results because they clarify the role played by scholars in all stages of the research (Saunders et al., 2016). This is to say that it is important for researchers—as they interact with a study’s data source and thereby influence the generated data—to be reflexively aware of the degree to which they reflect their own positions, which include the theoretical views, values, and assumptions that they bring to their research (Garnham, 2008). Axiology can be: (i) value-free, when the researcher remains detached and independent of what is being researched; (ii) value-bound, where the researcher remains reflexive and becomes a part of what is being researched, or (iii) value-laden, when the researcher acknowledges any bias and tries to minimise it by remaining as objective as possible (Reed, 2005).

The axiological position of interpretivist research is well-founded within the domain of the subjectivist and relativist ontologies. Interpretivist researchers focus on the complexity, richness, and multiple interpretations of data, which implies that research is not value-free and is conducted within a broader framework based on people’s current knowledge and concept of reality (Woods et al., 2016; Blumberg et al., 2014). So, rather than quantitative criteria—like representative sampling and generalisability—interpretivist research basically emphasises four dimensions to generate knowledge: (i) the participants’ own understandings and beliefs; (ii) the researcher’s interpretations; (iii) the cultural meaning systems that inform both the participants’ and researchers’ understandings; and (iv) the acts by which scholars judge particular interpretations as valid (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). Conversely, positivist scholars argue that it is not desirable for the researcher to enter into the social world of the research participants and understand it from their points of view, advocating value-free research. They further question the extent to which qualitative methods can provide scientific generalisations (see Blaxter et al., 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Searle, 2015; Yin, 2018).

In this regard, the critical realist axiology stems from the recognition that people’s knowledge of reality is a result of social conditioning and cannot be independent of the social actors involved (Saunders et al., 2016). Following this attribute, for this study, the reality was seen as external and independent, but not always directly accessible through people’s knowledge and observation of it. Rather, what people observe

is ‘the empirical’, which includes some of the manifestations of things in the real world, rather than the actual themselves (see Marks & O’Mahoney, 2014). Therefore, following critical realist axiology, an ontological realist and epistemological relativist approach was adopted for this study. This entailed a focus on providing explanations for any observed organisational events in order to uncover the underlying causes and mechanisms through which social and organisational structures shape, influence, and control people’s lives; without assuming that everyone would experience and explain these events in a uniform manner. In doing so, this researcher also remained aware of his socio-cultural background and experiences, which may have influenced the study, and hence, sought to minimise any such biases in order to remain as objective as possible. In this regard, this researcher followed the framework of axiological judgements, shown in table 4.1, developed by Kivunja & Kuyini (2017) on the basis of Mill’s (1969) four criteria for ethical research.

Table 4.1: Axiological judgements of this study

Mill’s (1969) criteria of Ethical Research	Meanings given by Kivunja & Kuyini (2017)	Application in this study
Teleology	Based on the theory of morality—engaging in research that is intrinsically good or desirable is a moral obligation that should be pursued in every research endeavour.	Striving to ensure that the research approach is sensible, the research designs are meaningful, and the methods are pragmatic, this satisfying the broader research community, e.g., social science researchers and academics.
Utilitarian	The understanding that every action undertaken when conducting research will have its own consequences intended to benefit the public at large.	Aiming at benefiting a wide range of people (e.g., the researcher, its participants, the academic community, policy makers, and the people involved in the apparel industry) through impactful findings.
Morality	Upholding the intrinsic moral values of the researcher throughout the research process.	Striving to ensure researcher truthfulness in all the stages of the study, e.g., appropriately documenting and accurately interpreting and representing the data, etc.
Fairness	Paying attention to the need to be fair to all research participants and to ensure that their rights and values are upheld.	Striving to ensure that all participants were treated fairly and equally, with dignity and respect, upholding their rights and values. The fieldwork was guided by the University’s ethical guidelines.

While this study adhered to the above criteria for conducting ethical research, it is also worth mentioning that the researcher drew upon his social background, knowledge, and experience of Bangladeshi apparel factories in developing and shaping many elements of this study—such as identifying the concerns/problems, defining the study’s objectives and research questions, developing the interview questions for the data collection, and analysing and interpreting the data. For example, during the fieldwork of this study, access to the research participants, especially the shop-floor workers was challenging (see Sections 4.4.2 and 4.4.6 for details). Convincing a few factory owners and managers to ‘reveal the truth’ about potential unethical behaviours in relation to factory safety practices also appeared difficult given the sensitive nature of the study. So, it was crucial for the researcher to remain reflexive about his and his participants’ positions, e.g., the researcher’s prior experience in the apparel industry, assumptions, and beliefs which could influence the research process, as well as being aware of the possibility that the participants may not always tell the truth or react in a certain way because of their position, or being a part of the prevailing social system or practices, or by thinking of future consequences. In this regard, it was challenging for the researcher to remain totally objective or fully neutral, setting aside his own views and beliefs, and listening from the perspective of a value-free researcher. So, a more value-laden approach was adopted for this study.

While this reflexivity may be seen by some as a potential source of ‘researcher bias’, and thus as a threat to the trustworthiness of the study, this should not be the case by any means. This is because, in critical realist research, the assorted contexts of people’s lives and responses become relevant data and all accounts are taken to be infused with subjectivity (King et al., 2018). It is therefore naturally expected for researchers to be involved in the contexts of their studies, communicate the perspectives from which they approach them, and demonstrate a clear understanding of how their reflexivity may impact them. Gill (1995) called this ‘accountable reflexivity’—i.e., remaining as objective as possible by acknowledging any bias and minimising it. Qualitative researchers unreservedly validate this idea of reflexivity, adding that research cannot be completely value-free and that it is impossible to detach a phenomenon from its context (Finlay & Gough, 2003; King et al., 2018; Thorpe & Holt, 2007). Furthermore, this study argues that simply remaining value-free or pure value neutrality may be impossible for any social science researcher. Every bit of social science research and its ‘thinking’ is going to be value-laden to some extent. The axiological judgement that a researcher must demonstrate is not freeing himself from all his values, but rather making those values transparent to the readers, which the researcher in this research has done quite explicitly.

4.3 Research Design

Following Creswell & Creswell's (2018) framework of conducting research, the previous section (section 4.2) provided the broader philosophical underpinning of this study. This section discusses the second component of the framework—the research design. Research design pertains to “organising research activity, including the collection of data, in ways that are most likely to achieve the research aims” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015:67). Research design acts as a strategic framework aimed at connecting the research questions and executing the research (Soundararajan, 2014). It involves many decisions pertaining to what data should be considered to be relevant and how the data should be collected and analysed to answer the research questions (Blanche et al., 2007; Mason, 2017). Positivist and quantitative researchers consider research to be a sequential process—a fixed and planned sequence of events pre-defined by technical considerations (see Bickman & Rog, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). In contrast, interpretivists and qualitative researchers consider research to be an iterative process; thus, the research design should be open, flexible, adaptive, and not be defined by mere technical considerations (see Gialdino, 2009; Mason, 2017).

As mentioned in the previous section, this study adopted the critical realism stance which offered the researcher an eclectic approach to research methods. This, however, does not mean that the study did not begin with a relatively clear set of research questions and a research design; rather, it was often open to adopt a flexible research design and to modify the research questions when necessary, based on the events occurring during the data collection phase (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Reid & Gough, 2000). In this regard, Mason (2017) highlighted that social science researchers do not always have the luxury of not producing a research design; however, the ‘design’ is usually flexible; i.e., it can be affected by pragmatic situations. Blanche et al. (2007:36-37) similarly commented, “far from being an easy way out, fluid and pragmatic designs make for very demanding research, as the researcher must continually reflect on the research process and, by making difficult decisions, refine and develop the research design throughout the research process to ensure valid conclusions.”

The research process of this study was affected by pragmatic situations. There was a continuous reciprocation between practical situations and the research design. Thus, even though a pre-defined research design was adopted before carrying out the fieldwork, the design and sample also evolved during the process. What is presented in this chapter is therefore not a description of a pre-defined research approach; rather, it is a retrospective conceptualisation of the overall research process as it was carried out. The following sections provide a detailed narration of the research design adopted for this study.

4.3.1 Approach of Reasoning

Generally, there are three approaches to theory development: deductive, inductive, and abductive. In deduction, the conclusion is derived logically from a set of premises (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). Here, hypotheses are generated through an introspection process. where logic moves from a general to a particular stance (Smith, 1998). Deductive logic (theory to data) is based upon and guided by a theory and a conceptual framework, and is aimed at testing the theory itself (Saunders et al., 2016). Thus, a phenomenon on which a wealth of literature is available and from which a theoretical framework and a hypothesis can be defined falls under deduction (see Bausell, 1994; Field & Hole, 2011). In contrast, inductive logic (data to theory) starts by collecting data to explore a phenomenon and then using them to develop a theory or conceptual framework (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010; Saunders et al., 2016). Thus, a theory is suggested from the themes that emerged from the data when there is insufficient literature available on a topic under study (Babbie, 2016; Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

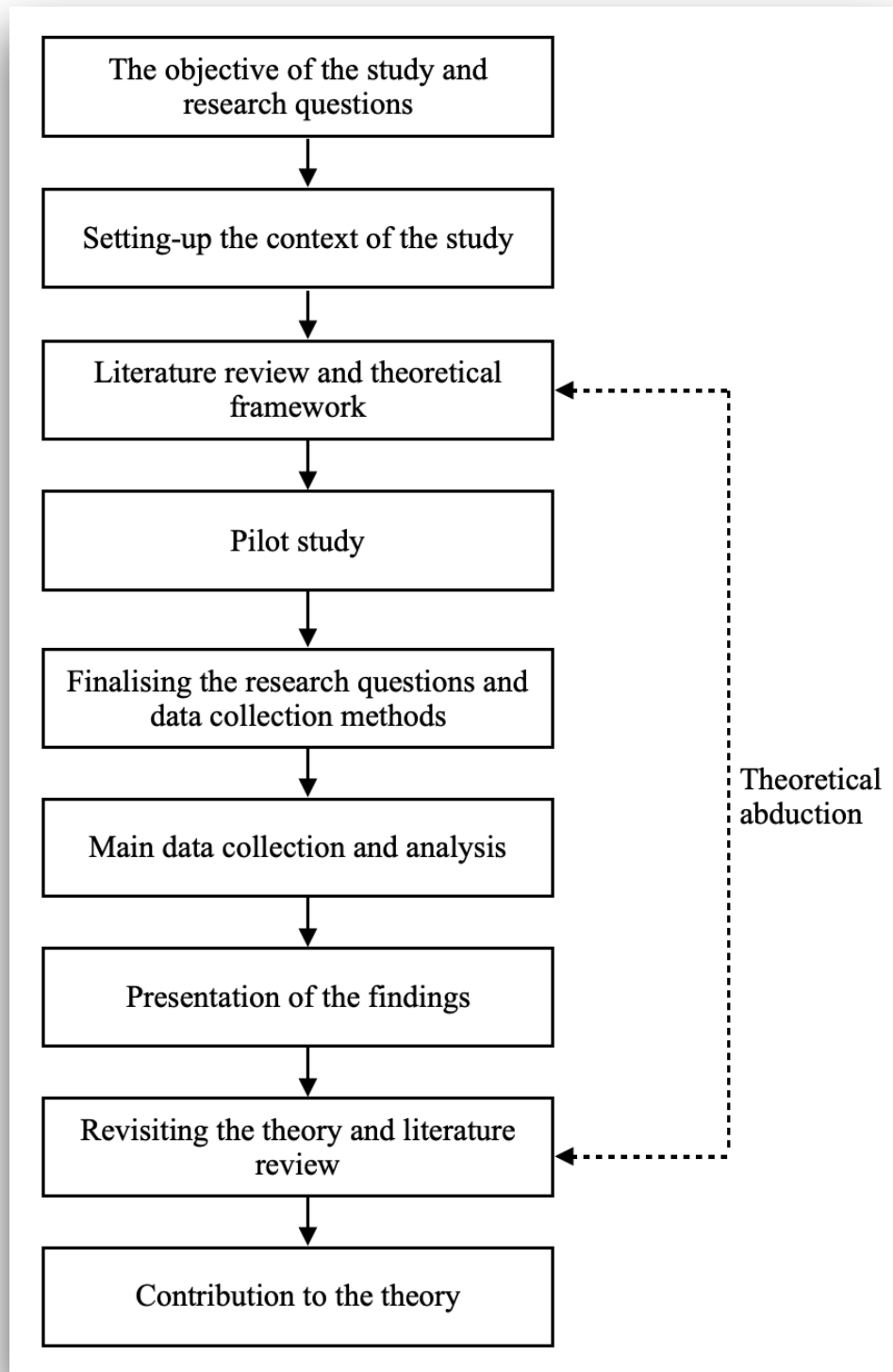
Generally, researchers tend to link quantitative studies to deductive reasoning and qualitative studies to inductive reasoning (see Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014; Bryman & Bell, 2015). This study, however, followed abductive reasoning that complements its critical realist philosophical stance. The goal of a critical realist researcher is to explore the sequences of causation or causal mechanisms within a context. With abduction, a study starts with a theoretical background and a skeleton theoretical framework. The data collected through fieldwork are then analysed to explore the phenomenon. Any themes that emerge from the data are then explained in order to modify the existing theory or generate a new one (see Buchanan et al., 2013; Hakim, 2000; Suddaby, 2006). As Ackroyd & Karlsson (2014:24) commented, “the aim here is to bring to light formative processes which cause particular outcomes, when they operate, and which are best conceived in their totality or as near to it as possible. The logic applied in reaching for this complete process is abduction.”

Figure 4.2 shows the overall research process of this study. The idea for this research began with a potentially interesting link—managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices. The research context—the apparel supplier factories in Bangladesh operated under global supply chains—was then determined based on empirical appropriateness and practical feasibility. In this regard, a detailed theoretical background was presented on workplace safety in apparel factories, wider institutional factors affecting safety practices, and moral agency operating in global apparel supply chains (see Chapters 2 and 3). With these initial understandings, a conceptual framework was developed and the research questions were drafted. A pilot study was conducted in the selected empirical context (see section 4.4.4). Detailed

research objectives and questions were crafted out of the pilot study. This was then followed by conducting the main fieldwork. The collected data were then analysed and interpreted (see Chapters 5 and 6). While communicating the findings of the study—and following the iterative process of abduction—the literature and conceptual framework were revisited in order to ensure that the research questions would be given clear, credible, and theoretically informed answers.

Following abductive reasoning, this study aimed at developing a theoretical perspective on moral agency richer than the existing one in the relevant context. As mentioned in Chapter 3, while moral disengagement theory is already the subject of a wealth of literature in the social, economic, and political contexts, scant literature exists in that on workplace safety. It is worth noting that some qualitative studies with a similar focus on developing theoretical explanations for social interactions have adopted an inductive logic and have followed a grounded theory approach. However, this study finds Popper's (1959) notion to be appropriately in line with its aforementioned research aim. Popper admitted that it is difficult to arrive at a theory—or to extend our understanding of an existing one—by following a strict induction logic purely from experiments or observation. Without an original conjecture, a researcher would not know where to start or which knowledge to seek in the first place (Popper, 1959). Furthermore, Gioia & Pitre (1990) discussed how—by linking both deductive and inductive—abductive reasoning can yield a more comprehensive view of organisational phenomena. Therefore, abductive logic was deemed to be the most suitable approach for this study.

Figure 4.2: Step-by-step research process of this study



4.3.2 Qualitative Research Design

It is fundamental to understand how a qualitative research design fits the overall research process and data collection methods of this study. Qualitative research “investigates the qualities of an experience” (Boffa et al., 2014:103) and “an articulation of the significance and meaning of one’s experiences” (Bochner, 2001:153). This means that—rather than the ‘generalisation’ sought by quantitative studies—qualitative

studies are concerned with uncovering the subjective meanings through which people understand, experience, and interpret the social world and the different ways in which reality is constructed in particular contexts (Mason, 2017; Jupp, 2006). Qualitative research has developed out of diverse, rich and complex philosophical traditions and theoretical paradigms (Boffa et al., 2014). As they make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed by actors about the phenomenon under study, qualitative research strategies are generally associated with the interpretivist, constructionist, and critical realist epistemological traditions (Grbich, 2004; Saunders et al., 2016). Furthermore, they seek to understand as many aspects as possible of a phenomenon through the rigorous in-depth study of people's accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015) and have “an unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about how things work in particular contexts” (Mason, 2017:1). They further attempt to develop a theoretical perspective richer than the ones that already exist in the literature by observing all the possible ranges of aspects—related to both similarities and dissimilarities—of the phenomenon under study (Miller & Brewer, 2003).

Considering the previous discussion on its objective, philosophical standpoint, and approach of reasoning, this study inevitably calls for a qualitative research design. It enables the researcher to use a mixed-methods approach and flexible data collection techniques as appropriate, depending on the research circumstances (see Hurrell, 2014). In this regard, the following section contains the third major element of Creswell and Creswell's (2018) research framework that this study has adopted, and essentially presents the discussion related to the research methods that were considered for the data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

4.4 Research Methods and Sampling

This section provides a detailed account of the research strategies that were considered to conduct the fieldwork carried out in Bangladesh and the data collection process. It describes the pilot study, the selection of participants, the way in which access was gained to the factories and—subsequently—to the participants, the data collection methods, the confidentiality and security applied to handling the data, and the data transcription and translation processes.

4.4.1 Data Collection Methods

The advantage of qualitative research is that the researcher can authenticate the findings by using multiple sources of evidence to provide a rich argument drawn from them—what is referred to as ‘data triangulation’ (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2018). Furthermore, the critical realist ontological and epistemological

stance extends this study's methodological choice, as Sayer (cited in Hurrell, 2014:343) in this regard commented that the methodological choice should "depend on the nature of the object of study and what one wants to learn about it." Hence, the primary data collection technique used in this research was semi-structured interviews. As a secondary data collection method, the interviews were complemented by non-participant observations. The following sections provide the details of these two methods.

4.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The choice of adopting face-to-face semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method for this study was shaped by the research questions and design. Silverman (2013:319) regarded this method as the "gold standard" for qualitative research because of its capacity to collect rich and detailed descriptions of the phenomena under investigation. The guideline for the semi-structured interviews was set out on the basis of two fundamental questions proposed by Snow et al. (1995): (i) "Just what is it about this phenomenon that is baffling me?" and (ii) "What do I need to know in order to answer each of the research questions I am interested in?" The interview guideline was thus prepared by structuring the main topics that needed to be covered to address the research questions (see appendix 1 for the interview guideline and questions).

As this study sought managerial interpretations of its subject matter, this guideline helped to formulate the interview questions in a fashion suited to drive the participants towards the research objective, as opposed to just holding open conversations on the topic—which would have been the case if conducting unstructured interviewing or administering a survey questionnaire, whereby the purpose is to generate answers to a set of questions prepared from the researcher's point of view (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2016). Although semi-structured interviews are flexible in the nature in which the questions are phrased and in the order in which they are asked, careful consideration was given to avoiding any bias and to ensuring that the questions would not influence the responses in an indicative way. Three sets of interview questions were prepared to address owners and managers, workers, and supply chain representatives. The questions were phrased so as not to be leading and to draw the participants' views in relation to the apparel industry as a whole, rather than to their own behaviours and experiences. Hence, the questions were purposefully crafted to tease out the theorised aspects and the underlying reality of managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices, without specifying any employer or factory name. This approach, which does not compromise any ethical aspect of research, is considered ideal for studies of a sensitive nature (Knapik, 2006).

The interviews schedule had three parts: the first contained questions to know the necessary information about the respondents (e.g., job title, number of years of experience, age group, etc.); the second part contained questions about the establishments (e.g., size of the factory, types of apparel products it produces, compliance certifications, etc.); and the third part contained the question about the topic under investigation (see appendix 1 for the sample questions). Most of the interviews with factory owners, managers and workers were conducted at the respective factories located in Gazipur and Savar districts; only a few factory owners were interviewed at the company head offices located in Dhaka city. Interestingly, to ensure confidentiality, none of the supply chain representatives agreed to be interviewed in their offices; therefore, these interviews were conducted in the ‘discussion zone’ in the library of a university in Dhaka with which the researcher is associated. Throughout the interview session, probing or follow-up questions were used containing the words ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’. For example: Why do you think that? What do you think about that? Why is that important to you? How does that relate to your situation? These questions were intended to develop a better understanding of their situation by encouraging the participants to further clarify their answers.

All the interviews were digitally recorded. As per the University of Glasgow’s ethical guideline, all participants were provided with a PLS (Plain Language Statement) outlining the necessary information about the research and the interview process, and their permission was obtained for the audio recording (see appendix 3). Experienced qualitative researchers claim that many participants speak freely once the recording is stopped (Bryman & Bell, 2015; King et al., 2018; Silverman, 2013); this did not happen in this study. Each participant was notified about the beginning and the end of the audio recording in order to remind them to be straightforward, open and thorough with their answers while they were being recorded. The duration of the recordings ranged from 13 to 86 minutes. The shortest was associated with workers, even though, while conducting the interviews, they were given sufficient time on their hands to sit, understand, and answer each question in detail. The workers were further assured that they would not be treated in isolation or unethically and that they would not be criticised by their employers for participating in the study. Despite these precautions, two interesting types of reactions were observed from the workers. First, a few workers were found to be diffident about their participation and were therefore wary of speaking out or did not have the information relevant to some of the questions they were asked. Second, other workers were overenthusiastic in their claims that their work environment is very pleasant where they have never seen any safety violation, and that how safe and secure they feel while at work. Nevertheless, alongside the recordings, relevant interview notes were taken in English

during the interviews using the iPad Notes app. After each interview, the researcher spent some reflecting on the information provided by the participants and adding further notes on their observed behaviour.

It is also important to restate that a pilot study had aided the development of the interview guideline in many ways (see table 4.2). Among other things, the pilot study had highlighted the ethical sensitivity inherent in some questions pertaining to the participants' behaviours in relation to workplace safety practices, which were considered too direct; accordingly, these questions were removed from the guide and replaced with more industry-specific questions to encourage broader views about safety practices. Furthermore, the pilot study had shown the need to adopt different tones and styles of interaction in relation to different kinds of participants; i.e., factory owners, senior and mid-level managers, workers, and supply chain representatives, and the guide was modified accordingly. Nonetheless, the interview guide was often revised and updated based on the pragmatic situations which emerged during the fieldwork. However, in order not to deviate from the research objective, a basic structure was maintained throughout the interview process.

For this study, the number of interviews was neither anticipated nor pre-defined. The interview process ended once it was felt that 'theoretical saturation' had been reached and the answers had started to become repetitive. The point of saturation and feasibility is often determined by the research context and participants' profiles (Francis et al., 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Robinson, 2013;). Qualitative researchers consider 12 to 30 in-depth interviews as a standard depending on the type and nature of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Saunders, 2012; Saunders et al., 2016).

4.4.3 Non-participant Observation

Although in-depth interviews enabled the researcher to observe the participants—their gestures and emotions—it did so only to a certain degree. So, in order to increase the validity of the findings, the interviews were supported and validated by data collected from non-participant observations. This is a data collection method whereby a researcher enters a social system to observe events, activities, and interactions with the aim of gaining a direct understanding of a phenomenon in its actual setting (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Liu & Maitlis, 2010). This method was deemed essential for this study to observe some important aspects of the factory work environment, for example, to see how do managers and workers practice safety at work, how do they interact with each other, whether the workers voluntarily comply with the safety protocols or not, how do safety records are kept by the managers, etc.

As a non-participant observer, the researcher neither engaged in the activities nor interacted with the people being observed, but kept a detailed record of all relevant events, situations, and behaviours as inconspicuously as possible. A few photographs were also taken on some of the factory floors to highlight the practice of workplace safety; however, no individuals were photographed. While the factory owners initially gave permission to take some photos of their premises, when they were asked if the photos can be included in the study, they requested not to use any due to their agreement with the global buyers which forbids publishing any photo of their production facilities. So, no photo has been included in this study. The observational data were taken into consideration alongside those collected through the interviews to develop a substantial case by enabling the researcher to compare the interview responses with actual safety practices enacted in the apparel factories. As highlighted by Waddington (2004:154) "...the idea being to allow the observer to study first-hand the day-to-day experience and behaviour of subjects in particular situations..."

To conduct these observations, a schedule was prepared by outlining the list of issues that require observation. This schedule was prepared by following the EFS standards prescribed in the Accord and the Alliance safety governance framework agreements and the HAZMAT and other welfare support aspects mentioned in the CoCs of four global brands. Permissions to visit the factories in this regard were thus sought beforehand from the factory owners. Following the University of Glasgow's ethical requirements, a PLS in written form outlining the purpose of research work and other necessary information (see appendix 3) was provided to the owners and factory managers upon request. Alongside the interview process, the four factories that agreed to be observed (see table 4.4) were visited repeatedly to explicitly conduct the observations. Each factory was visited for at least two full working days.

The data collected through observations were also stored in English using the password-protected iPad Notes app. These observational notes contained information about events and activities related to workplace safety practices, safety compliance requirements, the interaction between workers and managers, etc. (see appendix 3 for the full list of observed activities).

4.4.4 The Pilot Study

The term 'pilot' or 'feasibility' study refers to a "small study for helping to design a further confirmatory study" (Arian et al., 2010:1). It is a preliminary, exploratory, preparatory, small-sample effort intentionally undertaken at the beginning of research work and prior to researcher immersion in the fieldwork (Sampson, 2004). Regardless of the type of research, pilot studies are aimed at testing study

procedures and the validity of the data collection tools, estimating the recruitment rate and the parameters, etc. in order to provide researchers with prospects suited to make amendments and improvements to the main data collection process (Arian et al., 2010).

A pilot study should not be considered just a trivial test of the research methods. Researchers have established that conducting a pilot study is fundamental to any research as it not only helps detect any potential flaws in the data collection and measurement instruments but is also beneficial to the development and execution of the main study (Dikko, 2016; Kim, 2010). An African proverb recommends, “Never test the depth of a river with both feet”, in a sense, pilot studies, regardless of how small the sample is, are needed to assess feasibility, so as to avoid the potentially disastrous consequences of embarking on a large study that could potentially drown the whole research effort (Thabane et al., 2010).

The data collection process for this study thus began with a pilot study conducted between February 2018 and April 2018. The guideline (see Table 4.2) to develop the pilot study was originally taken from the framework used by Dikko (2016) and then further remodelled to suit the need of this study. The objectives of the pilot study were to provide an insight into what the main interviews would look like, to provide the researcher with an opportunity to make necessary amendments to the interview questions, and to contribute to the overall improvement of the data collection phase. Semi-structured interviews involving 11 questions were conducted with three participants who were top-level managers (i.e., factory owners/CEOs) at three apparel supplier factories in Bangladesh. The participants were approached through the researcher’s personal contacts and they were invited via email to participate in the interviews, which were conducted remotely via FaceTime and WhatsApp. VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) methods were used between the researcher located at the University of Glasgow, Scotland and the participants in Dhaka, Bangladesh because it would have been impractical for the researcher to travel to Bangladesh to conduct the pilot study. The interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed, translated, and analysed. The pilot study was partly hampered by the researcher being unable to take the participants’ observable behaviours into consideration. Observing the non-verbal cues and expressions of interviewees is considered to be important in assisting in the identification of any incongruence with their verbal ones (see Begley, 1996; Shader, 2015) However, this was enacted during the main data collection phase.

Table 4.2: Guideline followed to conduct the pilot study

Steps	Issues considered when developing the pilot study	Changes made in the main interview guide (see section 6.4.5 for details)
1	Highlighted ambiguous, difficult, unnecessary questions.	Questions discarded or modified.
2	Determined whether each question elicits an adequate response.	Questions changed or modified based on participants' observable behaviour.
3	Established whether the responses can be properly interpreted in relation to the information required (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).	Questions rephrased, probe questions added.
4	Determined whether the necessary questions were sufficient to address the topic under investigation (Berg, 2004).	Questions changed or new questions added.
5	Recorded the time taken to complete the interviews.	A reasonable interview time was determined.
6	Mastering interviewing techniques (Berg, 2004).	Practiced and reviewed to avoid 'guessworks' and 'risks'.

Framework taken from Dikko (2016) and further remodelled by the researcher.

The pilot study assisted and facilitated the main one in several ways. First, it provided an opportunity to understand the participant's views about the study and their willingness to provide detailed answers. Second, it verified the practicalities of qualitative interviews as a data-collecting method. Third, it provided valuable insights suited to assess the research protocol and the data collection approach, especially in relation to amending the interview questions and guidelines. Lastly, it provided the researcher with scope for self-evaluation and for improving the skills required for the interview techniques to be employed in the main study.

4.4.5 Selection of Participants (Sampling)

While the initial intention was to only select top-level managers (i.e., factory owners and CEOs) for the interviews, the pilot study later assisted in re-evaluating the purposes of the research questions and showed the necessity of including people from different organisational hierarchical levels and supply chain network. For example, during the pilot interviews with the factory owners, they kept highlighting their active roles in ensuring workplace safety and workers' rights and how the industry has turned around in recent years due to their sincere efforts towards safety practices, despite findings of empirical studies

showing otherwise. As a result, to further enrich the quality of data, the following four types of participants were ultimately considered: (i) top-level factory managers (factory owners/CEOs); (ii) mid-level factory managers (General Managers/Deputy General Managers/Assistant General Managers); (iii) shop-floor workers (i.e., their representatives); and (iv) social compliance auditors of the local liaison offices (supply chain representatives) of global apparel retailers. Hence, besides the three pilot interviews, a total of 28 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with five top-level managers (owners and CEOs), 11 mid-level managers, eight worker representatives (WPC²⁵ members) and four supply chain representatives (social compliance auditors employed in the local liaison offices of UK high street clothing brands). Table 4.3 presents the details of the interview participants.

These participants had purposefully been selected on the basis of their prospective capability and capacity to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon under study, and not on a random basis of convenience (Palinkas et al., 2015). However, the following criteria were considered in their selection: (i) their relevance to the research context (i.e., apparel manufacturing factories operating as part of global supply chain networks); (ii) their level of awareness of and involvement in workplace safety in their factories; (iii) their availability and willingness to take part in this research; and (iv) the researcher’s accessibility to both the participants and their factories. In this selection process, theorisation—rather than statistical sufficiency—was prioritised. The aim was to uncover some otherwise hidden information—considered indicative of an ‘underlying reality’ (Shotter, 2005:106)—carefully and sensitively, without compromising ethical considerations (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005).

Table 4.3: Participant and interview information

Participant Type & Gender	Job Location	Job Title	Age Group	Education	Total Industry Work Exp.	Experience in Current Company	Interview Duration (minutes)
O1 (male)	Factory 1	Owner / MD	36-45	Undergraduate	18 years	7 years	86
M1 (male)	Factory 1	Manager, HR	26-35	Postgraduate	12 years	3 years	32
M2 (male)	Factory 1	AGM, Safety	36-45	Postgraduate	18 years	6 years	44
W1 (female)	Factory 1	Machine Operator	18-25	Class 6	10 years	7 years	13

²⁵ Worker Participation Committees (WPCs) are worker representation requirements entities required by the 2013 amendments to the Bangladesh Labour Act, and are aimed at addressing any safety concerns (Ashraf & Prentice, 2019). Although the committee members are supposed to be elected by their peers, employers have been known to appoint pro-management representatives (Blair et al., 2017). In the absence of collective bargaining organisms (trade unions), the WPCs play a vital role in bridging the communication gap between workers and management and put their effort to resolve any labour disputes.

Table 4.3: Participant and interview information

W2 (female)	Factory 1	Machine Operator	36-45	None	19 years	15 years	14
W3 (female)	Factory 1	Machine Operator	26-35	Class 6	10 years	6 years	16
O2 (male)	Factory 2	Owner / CEO	26-35	Undergraduate	7 years	7 years	61
M3 (male)	Factory 2	AGM, HR & Compliance	36-45	Postgraduate	12 years	3 years	14
M4 (male)	Factory 2	Deputy Manager, HR	26-35	Postgraduate	9 years	4 years	16
W4 (female)	Factory 2	Quality Controller	18-25	Higher Secondary	4 years	4 years	13
W5 (male)	Factory 2	Lineman	36-45	Class 7	15 years	7 years	14
W6 (female)	Factory 2	Lineman	18-25	Class 8	4 years	4 years	15
M5 (male)	Factory 3	Head of Design	36-45	Undergraduate	17 years	3 years	24
M6 (male)	Factory 3	DGM, HR & Compliance	46-55	Postgraduate	21 years	5 years	39
O3 (male)	Factory 4	Owner/Director	56-65	Postgraduate	28 years	13 years	42
M7 (male)	Factory 4	GM, Safety & Production	46-55	Postgraduate	30 years	15 years	44
M8 (male)	Factory 4	Manager, Safety	36-45	Postgraduate	19 years	3 years	28
O4 (male)	Factory 5	Owner/Director	56-65	Postgraduate	32 years	26 years	33
M9 (male)	Factory 5	Deputy Man., Compliance	36-45	Postgraduate	16 years	7 years	24
M10 (male)	Factory 5	Manager, HR	36-45	Postgraduate	13 years	7 years	20
O5 (male)	Factory 6	Owner / CEO	36-45	Undergraduate	17 years	17 years	34
M11 (male)	Factory 6	GM, HR & Compliance	46-55	Postgraduate	23 years	4 years	38
W7 (female)	Factory 6	Machine Operator	18-25	None	4 years	3 years	14
W8 (female)	Factory 6	Machine Operator	26-35	Class 2	5 years	2 years	13
S1 (male)	Supply Chain	Auditor, Compliance	36-45	Postgraduate	6 years	6 years	44
S2 (male)	Supply Chain	Auditor, Compliance	26-35	Postgraduate	10 years	6 years	56
S3 (female)	Supply Chain	Manager, HR	36-45	Undergraduate	16 years	12 years	47

Table 4.3: Participant and interview information

S4 (male)	Supply Chain	Inspector, Compliance	36-45	Undergraduate	12 years	8 years	45
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O = Owners (top managers / CEO / MD / Director)
M = Managers (GM / DGM / AGM / Manager / Deputy Manager / Asst. Manager)
S = Supply chain representatives
W = Worker representative (WPC committee members)

The factories from which the participants were selected were categorised²⁶ based on the size of their workforces: (i) small (up to 1,000 employees), (ii) medium (from 1,000 to 2,500 employees), and (iii) large (more than 2,500 employees). Any extreme or deviant cases were avoided; e.g., any establishment in which an accident had recently occurred. These establishments were excluded due to sensitivity and practicality issues; i.e., the severity of the accidents may have left the workers and other associated people bereaved, shocked, and traumatised. The scope of this study does not cover the involvement of any respondent from such a vulnerable group (see section 4.6 for further details).

4.4.6 Gaining Access

In any qualitative research that involves individuals, groups or organisations, gaining access to research sites is the first step in the data collection process (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). This involves convincing those people the researcher has selected to participate to provide the information needed to conduct the research (Feldman et al., 2003). Qualitative researchers regularly highlight the challenges they face in order to gain access to their research fields (Blix & Wettergren, 2015; Grant, 2017). The empirical evidence further indicates that—from the initial plan of establishing a rapport with the gatekeepers to access the site to the repeated negotiations necessary to remain in the field to interview and observe the participants—gaining access is a constantly challenging process that heavily reflects local socially embedded conditions and practices (Bondy, 2013; Kamarunzaman & Selamat, 2015). It is therefore important that researchers are constantly aware of, and respond to, these local conditions and practices if they wish to remain in their particular settings, and develop a successful access-gaining strategy.

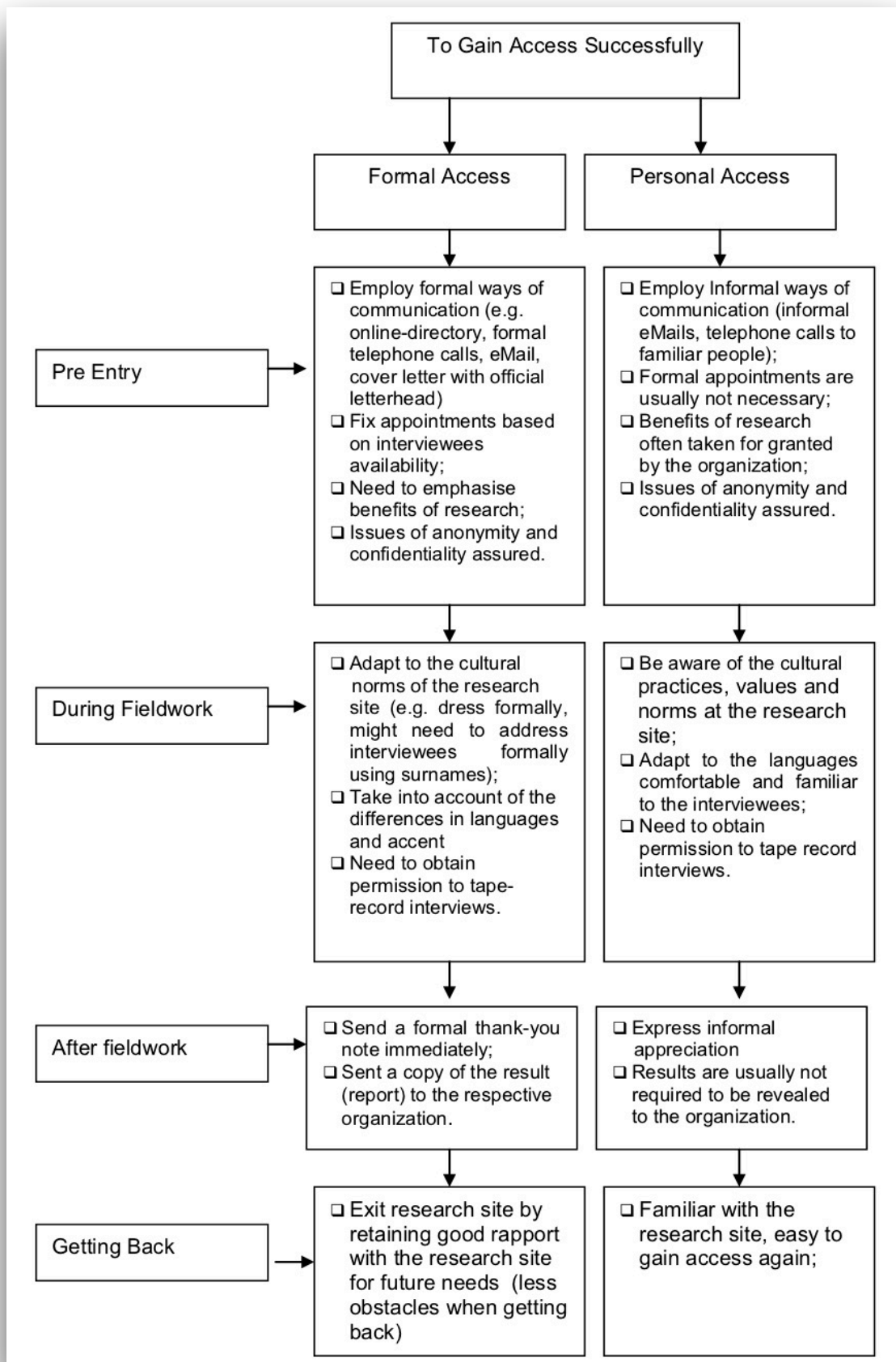
For its focus on workplace safety practices, this study is of a sensitive nature. In recent years, the Bangladeshi apparel sector has experienced a severe image crisis and has notoriously become the subject of great concern due to its workplace safety violations, with factory personnel often being criticised and scapegoated by the media, the general public, supply chain retailers, social compliance auditors, and

²⁶ Based on local categorisation done by BGMEA.

international trade union federations. Therefore, gaining access to these establishments to enquire about the role played by the managers in relation to workplace safety practices was not a straightforward process. In order to maximise the chances of successful access, long-term planning and preparation were made, whereby several models aimed at gaining access to research sites were looked into, including Buchanan et al.'s (2013) four-stage access model of getting in, getting on, getting out, and getting back, and Grant's (2017) model of macro, meso, and micro access. However, Johl & Renganathan's (2010) model was ultimately chosen because of its wider scope, which incorporates both formal and informal/personal approaches to gaining access to research settings. Furthermore, as this model was developed while bearing in mind the complexity of business and management research, it appeared to be appropriate for this study. Figure 4.3 shows the four stages of this model for gaining access formally and informally: (i) pre-entry, (ii) during fieldwork, (iii) after fieldwork, and (iv) getting back.

In the pre-entry stage, communication with potential apparel factory owners in Bangladesh was conducted both formally and informally. This was done from Glasgow, approximately four months prior to travelling to Bangladesh to carry out the main fieldwork. The use of the researcher's personal contacts, as mentioned previously, involved a considerable number of considerations of trust. In this regard, much effort was given to establish rapport in order to enable 'trust' which is considered the most essential factor in gaining acceptance among a study's participants (King et al., 2018; Bachmann & Inkpen, 2011). Without a high level of trust, the participants will not be sincere in their answers and thus the intention of the research will remain unfulfilled (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Wasserman & Clair, 2007). Thus, the establishment of 'trust' enabled the researcher to access—without much difficulty—the first level access points, which were five factory owners and one supply chain representative. Through them, further access points were identified. Figure 4.4 demonstrates how all 28 participants were accessed for data collection.

Figure 4.3: Johl & Renganathan's (2010:48) framework for gaining successful access to participants



Trust was further enhanced through the use of impression management (see Sanaria, 2016), such as PLSs (see appendix 3) to explain the nature and purpose of this study, an informed consent form (see appendix 4), the researcher's prior knowledge of the context from his work experience in the apparel industry, the absence of bias, and offers of feedback and personal guidance. Impression management techniques were mainly used to further inculcate the notion, among the participants, that they would not suffer any future repercussions due to their participation in this study (see section 4.6 for further details). As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:78) stated,

“Whether or not people have knowledge of social research, they are often more concerned with what kind of person the researcher is than with the research itself. They will try to gauge how far he or she can be trusted, what he or she might be able to offer as an acquaintance or a friend, and perhaps also how easily he or she could be manipulated or exploited.”

Impression management has been utilised commonly by other researchers investigating the working conditions found in textile factories in developing country contexts (see Soundararajan, 2014).

To access the participants, a total of eight factory owners were invited through personal communication (e.g., email), and permission was sought to visit their factories. Although such access permissions were obtained through the researcher's personal network, careful consideration was given to their suitability and credibility for inclusion in the study. In support of the use of personal contacts, Silverman (2013:215) stated that “trying to enter new fields is likely to involve time-consuming negotiations and may end in failure, particularly if you want to research an ethically sensitive area”. Furthermore, a flexible, convenient, and adaptable sampling process is considered crucial for qualitative research (King et al., 2018; Mason; 2017).

Nonetheless, five of the factory owners and one supply chain representative were already known to the researcher through personal contacts (e.g., friends and through friends' networks) and from previous employment in the apparel industry. The other three factory owners and supply chain representatives were introduced through snowballing (see figure 4.4). At this initial stage, all the factory owners showed interest in participating in this study, especially once they had been informed that the scope of the study not only included the workplace safety issues related to the owners and managers but also covered the institutional factors that may impact factory safety practices. However, once the actual fieldwork had

commenced in Bangladesh, the degree of their participation and cooperation varied to a considerable extent (see table 4.4).

Figure 4.4: Process of gaining access to data collection

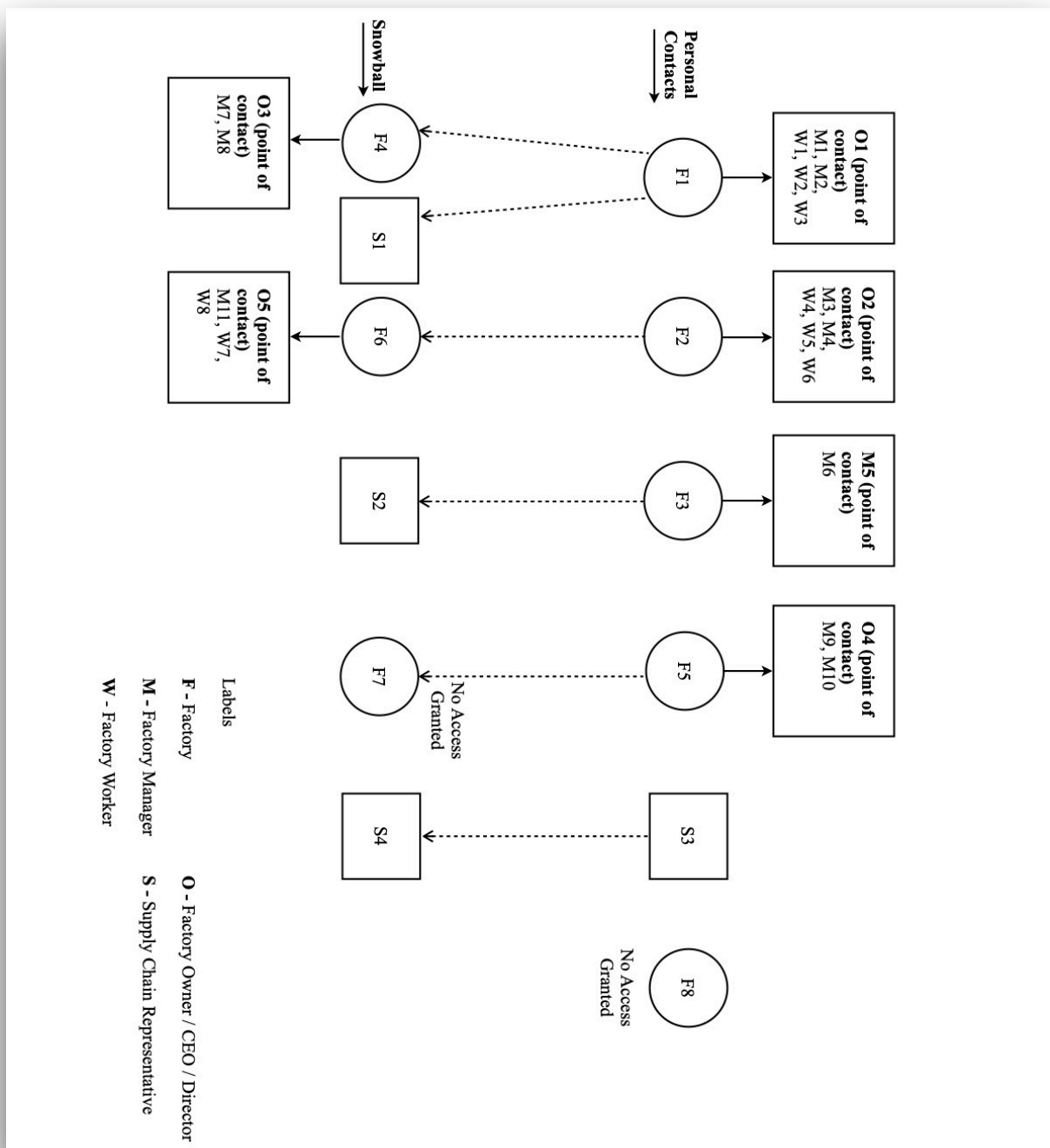


Table 4.4: Types of participation provided by the establishments

Factory No.	Size of the Workforce	Size in sq. ft. floor area	Nature of Contact	Interview (managers all levels)	Interview (worker reps.)	Non-participant Observation
F1 (medium)	1,600	120,000	Personal	Agreed	Agreed	Agreed
F2 (large)	3,900	700,000	Personal	Agreed	Agreed	Agreed
F3 (large)	7,000	350,000	Personal	Agreed	Denied	Denied
F4 (large)	9,000	Undisclosed	Snowball	Agreed	Denied	Denied
F5 (small)	800	80,000	Personal	Agreed	Denied	Agreed
F6 (large)	2,100	300,000	Snowball	Agreed	Agreed	Agreed
F7 (small)	750	60,000	Personal	Denied	Denied	Denied
F8 (medium)	1100	90,000	Snowball	Denied	Denied	Denied

Note: Floor size was irrespective of the size of the workforce. Some factories had unused floor spaces for future expansion and some had unused spaces for workforce downsizing.

While gaining access, including shop-floor workers in the data collection proved to be very difficult than accessing other participants such as top and mid-level managers. While the factory owners and managers were willing to participate in the interviews, they, in their roles of gatekeepers—i.e., persons with the authority to grant or deny access to potential participants and the ability to facilitate such access (King et al., 2018)—were reluctant to allow their workers to do the same. The following reasons for their reluctance were identified while interacting with them during the data collection process.

First, the managers were not confident in their workers in relation to their participation in research. According to the presumed social stratification of the country (see Mondal, 2014; Sadeque, 2018), apparel workers in Bangladesh are positioned close to the bottom of the scale—i.e., belonging to the lower or working class. Although these workers are skilled in their jobs, they are poor and have minimum levels of literacy. The managers tended to think that these workers would not understand the importance of research and may thus have withheld some information they considered to be irrelevant to the researcher or just generally unimportant, or that they may have simply forgotten. Second, the managers believed that workers did not generally possess the skills and knowledge (e.g., communication skills, understanding of safety issues) necessary to provide an accurate representation of the ‘recently improved’ workplace safety

situation. Thirdly, the managers feared that the workers would speak out or reveal something sensitive or unpleasant about their workplace, which may have initiated an unwanted dispute between the factory and the buyer or the social compliance audit firms, and subjected the factory to further scrutiny by the Accord and Alliance audits. Despite offering assurance of anonymity, the managers thought that this could result in the cancellation of work orders and loss of business.

Even after much discussion and explanation, only three factory owners were ultimately convinced and granted permission to interview their workers. This type of situation is not uncommon in Bangladesh, where researchers have to get involved in constant negotiations with gatekeepers—at the community and individual levels—to be able to access their participants (see Rashid, 2011, 2007; Sultana, 2011, 2007). Eventually, eight workers (WPC members) from those three factories were included in the data collection process. Since the WPC members were the representatives of the approximately 7,600 workers employed in those three factories, including them in the interviews—as opposed to their non-WPC member colleagues—appeared more desirable to ensure representativeness. Although the factory owners had acted as gatekeepers, each WPC member had been informed about the study in advance, and access to them was requested individually before their inclusion in the study.

4.5 Data Analysis

In relation to embarking on the analysis of qualitative data, scholars are found to be in agreement on two things. First, approaches to qualitative data are closely related to different research philosophies and research designs (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Second, there is no single best way to perform the analysis of qualitative data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). These considerations give qualitative researchers the choice of selecting the data analysis tool that they deem appropriate to provide a rich and deep explanation of the phenomena under study. In this regard, thematic is a kind of foundational method of qualitative data analysis that involves identifying any themes or patterns that occur across the dataset for further analysis in relation to the research questions (Saunders et al., 2016). Although there are various styles of thematic analysis, for this study, Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis tool has been chosen because it had been developed primarily for use within a qualitative paradigm. The next section presents the details of data translation and transcription followed by a description of the thematic analysis used for this study.

4.5.1 Data Translation and Transcription

After the completion of the interview recordings, the data transcription and translation process began. The participants of this study were Bengali-speaking Bangladeshis. Although a few participants (e.g., some

factory owners and managers) could speak good English, this was insufficient to enable them to share their thoughts in detail seamlessly. Therefore, to enable the participants to comfortably convey their answers, the interviews were conducted in Bengali. At first, the recorded interviews were transcribed into Bengali and then translated into English. Then, the English narratives were back-translated to Bengali and retranslated to English before the final transcribing was done. Although this process of repeated transcription and translation was extremely time-consuming—the whole process took about 50 days to complete—it was done to ensure the most authenticated version of Bengali to English translations of the interview responses.

It is also important to note that it would have been impractical to ensure that the translations were verbatim, as some Bengali words, phrases, and expressions do not have direct English correspondence. Therefore, in certain cases, a word-for-word Bengali to English translation was adopted. Otherwise, the translation was done using the closest corresponding words between the languages in order to ensure that the meaning of the responses remained. In this regard, the translation process focused on not only what the participant said but also how they had said it, in order to ensure that the appropriate corresponding English words were chosen to prevent any alteration of the subjective meanings of the narratives. While some qualitative scholars highlighted the importance of ensuring verbatim translation (see King et al., 2018), Zimmerman & Szenberg (2000) argued for the impracticality of translating word-for-word due to time-constraint and practicality issues.

Furthermore, for this study, the researcher undertook transcription and translation work for the following five reasons: (i) to familiarise himself with the data (see Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013); (ii) for his specific knowledge of the industry gained from past employment; (iii) he is a native Bengali speaker and his familiarity with the local culture and context helped him to understand the local dialects and tones, and thus, decipher the underlying meanings accordingly; and (iv) he is a certified interpreter and translator of Bengali and English languages, which made him more comfortable in translations and transcribing; and (v) to ensure consistency throughout the transcription and translation process. To ensure agreement on the translation of the source data, one's own involvement in the transcription and translation process is not uncommon among qualitative researchers (see Harrington & Turner, 2001; Phelan & Parkman, 1995). Researchers who act as translators for their own studies regard the discussion of the translation processes as a check to the validity of interpretations (Young & Ackerman, 2001). In this regard, Temple & Young (2004) commented that “researchers interested in translation and interpretation

issues from this perspective generally discuss validity in terms of ‘correct’ interpretations, register, ethics, matching of social characteristics and neutral stances.”

4.5.2 Thematic Analysis

For data analysis, this study administered Braun & Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis. They explained thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data.” Clarke & Brown (2017:297). Although some scholars do not define it as a ‘method’ for qualitative data analysis, it is widely used by qualitative researchers as an effective ‘tool’ for data analysis (King et al., 2018; Attride-Stirling, 2001). According to Clarke & Braun (2017:297) “Thematic analysis is unusual in the canon of qualitative analytic approaches because it offers a method—a tool or technique, unbounded by theoretical commitments—rather than a methodology.” The distinct features of Braun & Clarke’s thematic analysis are: firstly, its flexibility, which leads to a wide range of applications; and secondly, that it is not tied to a particular philosophical position (Saunders et al., 2016). Irrespective of ontological and epistemological positions, type of research questions, sample size and constitution, and data collection methods, Braun & Clarke’s thematic analysis can be used in any experiential research that seeks to understand what participants think, feel, and do, and thereby, helps identify patterns across data in relation to participants’ lived experiences, views, and perspectives, behaviours and practices (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Holmqvist & Frisén, 2012; McDonald & O’Callaghan, 2008).

The interview data were used as the main source of evidence in the study. However, as mentioned earlier, to compare the interview responses with actual safety practices enacted in the apparel factories, the observational data have also been taken into consideration to develop a substantial case. In this regard, the interview data were used to generate themes and the observational data were used to substantiate and reinforce those themes.

A systematic coding of the data corpus was done manually. However, during the first-cycle/open coding phase, NVivo 12 software was used to organise and manage the data to ensure a clear coding structure. In the next step, axial coding was done in order to draw connections among first-cycle open codes. This step was guided by the theoretical framework presented earlier (figure 3.1) which Braun and Clarke (2006) referred to as theoretical thematic analysis. This coding process involved organising the data into meaningful clusters which then have been interpreted and reorganised in such a way as to generate potential main themes and sub-themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In this regard, the coding process went

beyond the surface-level content of the data and attempted to identify the underlying realities of the situation.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations, in the context of conducting research, refer to the standards of behaviour that guide the researchers' conduct in relation to the rights of the participants in the research or of those who are affected by it (Saunders et al., 2016). Primary research that involves fieldwork activities is more challenging and susceptible to unsteady situations than research with secondary and archival materials or statistical tools. So, considering ethical considerations is obligatory for any social science research involving human participation. The ethical considerations of this study were guided by the guidelines provided by the University of Glasgow's research ethics committee. This study was also conducted with all possible attempts to adhere to Saunders et al.'s (2016) ten ethical principles²⁷ throughout the research process. Although some of these aspects were briefly discussed earlier, the following sections reconcile and expand upon them.

4.6.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is an ethical requirement for any research involving human participants. It is the process whereby a participant is informed about those aspects of the research that are relevant to his/her decision to confirm his/her willingness to participate (Nijhawan et al., 2013).

During the process by which permission was obtained from the factory owners to access their factories to conduct the interviews, relevant information about this research was clearly explained to them in the form of PLS so that they could unreservedly decide whether to participate in the study or not. The PLS was developed by following King et al.'s (2018) guidelines for qualitative interviews and the University of Glasgow's ethical guidelines and was translated into Bengali. Once the access to visit factories was granted, and before interviewing any owner or manager, the Bengali PLS was both explained and given to them to read. Likewise, the supply chain representatives were also provided with the Bengali PLS, which was explained to them before the interviews. In the case of the workers' participants, due to their potentially low literacy, the Bengali PLS was fully read out in front of each. The PLS contained information about the following: (i) the purpose of the research; (ii) the researcher; (iii) the reason for

²⁷ Ten ethical principles are: integrity and objectivity of the researcher, respect for others, avoidance of harm, the privacy of the participants, voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw, informed consent, the confidentiality of data and anonymity of the participants, responsibility in the data analysis and reporting of findings, compliance in the management of data, ensuring the safety of the researcher (Saunders et al., 2016).

choosing the participants; (iv) the voluntary nature of the participation and the right to withdraw; (v) the interview process; (vi) data protection, confidentiality and anonymity; (vii) the use and storage of data; (viii) the University's approval of the research and of the PLS; and (ix) the persons to contact for further information. Just before the beginning of the audio recordings, participants were reminded about: (i) their right to withdraw from the interview at any point without giving a reason; (ii) their right to refuse to answer any questions; (iii) their right to remain anonymous. (See appendix 3).

4.6.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

In relation to qualitative interviewing, confidentiality refers to ensuring the privacy of the answers provided by the participants (King et al., 2018). All the participants in this study were assured that confidentiality would be respected subject to legal constraints and that their responses would not be shared with anyone at their workplaces. It was also confirmed that no one other than the researcher would know who did or did not agree to actually participate in the research. However, it was also emphasised that, should any risks to the safety of the participants—or of others—be identified, it may be necessary to compromise anonymity in order to take remedial action. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that, for those participants who did not have an enclosed workspace (e.g., junior managers and workers), the factory owners and senior managers, upon request, provided a separate room for the purpose of conducting their interviews.

Anonymity, on the other hand, refers to protecting the identity of research participants by concealing it in all documents produced as a result of the research (King et al., 2018). The participants in this study were ensured that their names and the names of their work establishments would be kept confidential. All data and results would be anonymised and de-identified (i.e., meaning that no one would be able to match the participants' information with their responses). This was ensured in relation to the data presented in the empirical discussion, where both the participants' and their workplaces' identities have been referred to by generic labels (see table 4.3 and 4.4 and figure 4.4). This further ensured that the participants would be protected from facing any consequences for their participation in the study.

By communicating all these provisions of confidentiality and anonymity, this study attempted to ensure that the participants were provided with the scope to retain ownership of their responses, thus encouraging them to be honest with their answers.

4.6.3 Data Security

The careful consideration of intellectual property rights, data safety and security was vital to this research. In adherence to Simons's (1984) democratic principle, the Bengali version of the interview responses is considered the property of the participants; conversely, for practical reasons, the translated and back-translated English versions of the responses are considered to be under the ownership of the University of Glasgow where the researcher acts as the custodian of the data. The researcher, however, acknowledges that the data will never be used for non-academic purposes and that all data will securely be disposed of after ten years from the completion of this study. In this regard, all audio interview files and notes from the interviews and observations are stored in three separate password-protected and encrypted personal devices (i.e., the researcher's personal laptop, iPad, and an external digital hard disk) to ensure data security and safety.

4.6.4 Respect for Others

To ensure the utmost respect and dignity to the participants at all times, this study did not discriminate against any individual in relation to gender, culture, religion, or ethnicity. No procedure or activity that might create any sort of physical or psychological harm to the participants was used. Overall, in conducting the fieldwork activity, all possible efforts were made to avoid maleficence and to ensure beneficence through ethical considerations.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed account of this study's overall research approach and of the activities related to the fieldwork. This study recognises that understanding a philosophical worldview and deciding upon a methodological choice linked to it is crucial to produce trustworthy and meaningful answers to its research questions. In this regard, for this study, a critical realist ontology and epistemology were adopted following an overall subjectivist stance in viewing the social phenomenon. Axiologically, this study is value-laden, reflexive, and is engaged within its research context remaining as objective as possible, which further supports its theoretically abductive approach of reasoning. Accordingly, the choice fell on a qualitative research framework with semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation as its data collection methods. The data were thematically analysed to produce an effective discussion to answer the research questions. While constant efforts were made throughout the research process to reinforce every aspect of the ethical considerations, some ethical dilemmas and limitations still remain (see Section 8.4).

5. Findings: Safety Governance Mechanisms and Moral Agency

*I will not write about any place in the world unless I've been there to personally research it.*²⁸

Sidney Sheldon

Chapter Overview

The previous chapter presented a detailed description of the research design—the methodology implemented to carry out the fieldwork, data collection, and analysis. This chapter concentrates on addressing the first research question—i.e., What do managerial interpretations of, and responses to, workplace safety practices reveal about their moral agency? To address this question, this chapter starts by exploring the managerial attitude towards the idea of workplace safety. To explore the research question in further detail, the chapter then presents managerial interpretations of safety culture and responses towards workplace safety mechanisms enforced by various institutional actors. In this regard, this chapter provides a detailed narration of the data collected through interviews and observations. The discussion on managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices is then elaborated in Chapter 7.

5.1 Managerial Attitude Towards Workplace Safety

The literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3 highlighted that the biggest motivation to comply with any safety practice initiatives should first come from the managerial sense of moral obligation—e.g., the moral agency that enables managers to decide what is the right thing to do and to remain accountable for their actions. Hence, this discussion firstly attempts to explore managerial attitudes towards workplace safety in general. Then the discussion continues on explaining managerial interpretations and responses towards institutional safety governance mechanisms enacted in their factories. However, before moving on to present and analyse such interpretations and responses, it is important to clarify that those expressed by the participants—which are presented in sections 5.2 and 5.3—must not be considered as specific to a particular participant or situation—i.e., the interpretations and responses must not be fixated on any particular participant or situation. This is because those interpretations and responses may not always be consistent and unvarying; they may change over time and based on circumstances. Therefore, the moral agency of a participant should also not be determined based on a single comment, experience, or behaviour; rather, the whole context should be taken into account.

²⁸ Quote is taken from Brainyquote, available at: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/sidney_sheldon_361878

It is important to iterate that this study emphasised EFS safety categories because these categories were highlighted mostly in the safety governance mechanisms enacted by the supply chain actors, especially by the Accord and the Alliance (see section 2.3.1). From the interviews, it was also found that the participants of this study similarly stressed on EFS categories which they also considered crucial areas that require significant attention. The lack of EFS safety was highlighted by all four categories of participants (e.g., factory owners, managers, workers' representatives, and supply chain representatives) of this research:

Keep your electrical works safe and your factory is safe from all hazards. [O5-F6]

Most of the fire incidents in this industry are caused by electrical short-circuits. [M6-F3]

Accidents are caused by electrical failures most of the time, which also cause fires. [W1-F1]

Electrical and fire are the two major safety concerns for the apparel sector. [S2-Supply Chain]

Earlier discussion (Chapter 2) showed that multi-stakeholder safety governance initiatives played a crucial role in ensuring improved factory workplace safety situations through a deterrence-based regulatory regime. They were not, however, panaceas. This study found that inspecting several thousand factories scattered across the country was a long and arduous task, given the hugely varying nature of the remediation needs which involved EFS safety inspections. Therefore, while there was support in favour of these initiatives, there were also objections from the factory owners and managers, as the inspection outcomes often demanded a complete overhaul of the factories involved in the process. The following comments show both support and disapproval of the participants:

The government was always lenient in enforcing the laws and the factory owners were running after high-profit and quick growth for their businesses, and never focussed on these [safety] issues ... the government also did not pressure them [factory owners] to follow the building codes and safety standards ... the growth of the industry and foreign remittance earning were prioritised by the government ... the situation would not have changed had there been no pressure from the buyers, and the Accord-Alliance. [S4-Supply Chain]

There was never any pressure from the government. I very much doubt the honesty and professionalism of those government employees who work in the department of factory monitoring and inspection. The industry's health and safety conditions have improved only because of the pressure from the buyers. [M6-F3]

For Accord-Alliance, each factory, on average has spent 7 to 8 crore taka [approx. £600,000 to £700,000] to conform to their EFS standard. Out of approximately 2500 factories they inspected, I believe 1,500 have managed to do it so far. [O1-F1].

From the interviews, it also emerged that a number of factories had been subjected to repeat inspections both by the Accord, the Alliance, and later by other third-party compliance authorities, each with its own and different standards of audit, thus, the factories had been issued with multiple inconsistent, incongruent, and costly remediation plans. There had also been a lack of guidance on how those remediation plans should be implemented. The following statements highlight this issue:

The demand for third-party audits and certification always comes from our buyers. Even though all buyers have their own codes, not all buyers have their own social audit teams or facilities to conduct safety inspections. So, what they do is they get these international compliance companies to conduct safety audits on their behalf. [O2-F2]

Upon expiration, the Accord and the Alliance claimed that, over the period of five years, they have improved the safety condition of more than 80% of the non-compliant factories (Liu et al., 2018). However, as mentioned earlier (see Section 2.2), there are still thousands of subcontracting and unregistered factories that have not been addressed by any of the supply chain audit initiatives and, as such, most likely do not comply with any safety standards. Following two comments from a factory owner and a manager highlight this concern:

What happens to the subcontracting factories and their workers? Have not we always been in a better position [in terms of workplace safety practices] than those factories? But Accord-Alliance only inspected us and left those who never had any safety practices in their establishments. [O5-F6]

There are still many factories left that were not covered by the Accord and the Alliance because they [factories] do not work for their member buyers. These [factories] work on sub-contract and there are lapses in safety compliances in those factories. [M5-F3]

As a result, the supply chain representatives expressed their support towards private safety governance initiatives managers also limited state capacity for successful labour law enforcement has resulted in the dominance of private safety governance mechanisms.

5.2 Managerial Interpretations of Safety Governance Mechanisms

Table 5.1 shows the five themes generated from the 24 sub-themes that this study uncovered in relation to the managerial interpretations of the institutional safety governance mechanisms enacted in apparel factories.

Table 5.1: Managerial interpretations of safety governance mechanisms

Main Themes / Interpretations	Sub-themes	Descriptions
Bureaucratic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complex - Conflicting - Confusing - Lack of collaboration - Lack of participation - Opacity 	Managers believe that the industry's overall safety initiatives are bureaucratic. The safety standards are maintained through a top-down (from buyers to suppliers) approach and thus complicated. Being at the bottom of the supply chain, their voices are not heard, opinions are not heeded, and the ground realities are not understood by the buyers and international social audit companies. A lack of collaboration between the government and supply chain actors further results in confusing and conflicting outcomes. Complications can also lead to potential breach of trade secrets for the supplier factories.
Costly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fees - Inspection - Maintenance - Renewal 	Managers believe that the high number of safety compliance and audit requirements from different supply chain actors are costing them a fortune, which significantly lowers their profit margins, thereby, affecting the growth of their business.
Rigid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demotivating - Harsh - Lack of gratification and rewards - Penalty - Sanction 	Managers believe that despite all the challenges, their effort and sincerity in complying with workplace safety mechanisms go unrewarded. There is no incentive for compliance. Rigid safety policies are detached from reality, factories are being sanctioned by the supply chain actors for not complying with such policies.
Stressful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Control - Mistrust - Monitor - Pressure - Time-consuming 	Managers believe that they are under a lot of stress due to the institutional control and monitor since the buyers do not trust them in relation to safety practices and compliance. They are pressured to comply with workplace safety in certain ways under the assumption that, otherwise, they would conform or do so differently. Fulfilling the compliance requirement is stressful since a significant proportion of their working hours is spent dealing with the confusions caused by the safety governing bodies, repetitive activities related to maintaining compliance checklists, and other trivial matters.

Table 5.1: Managerial interpretations of safety governance mechanisms

Functional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compliance - Effort - Safety Practices - Sincerety 	<p>Managers believe that they play a functional role in ensuring and promoting workplace safety. The industry’s workplace safety situation has improved significantly in recent years due to their relentless pursuit towards a better work environment. Their effort has further been accelerated by the safety initiatives taken by the supply chain actors.</p>
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5.2.1 Bureaucratic

The participant managers stated that, sometimes, the involvement of a myriad of institutional actors in the process of governing workplace safety made the whole system complicated and erratic, causing a lot of confusion among them in regard to the adoption of the most appropriate set of safety protocols. Furthermore, many of the safety codes enacted by the global supply chain actors were not a good fit for the local business environment. An example of one such policy was shared by a factory owner:

‘P’ [an Irish brand] forbids us from operating any cooking facility or kitchen in the building. What would the workers eat then ... how can I provide them with lunch if cooking is not allowed? Does [P] expect our workers to work while fasting? They could tell us to keep the cooking facility 100 feet away from the production floors but, when they say that we must not keep any cooking facility in the entire establishment, it just doesn’t make any sense! [M1-F1]

Collaboration between the supply chain actors and the government could be an important tool for the industry’s sustainability, particularly for those workplace safety issues that are too challenging and complex for any one party to tackle alone. However, this study found that no such meaningful collaboration had ever existed between the supply chains and the government. The recent governmental initiatives were unable to effectively fill this vacuum either, as the gap had been there since the establishment of the industry. Instead of making a collaborative effort, the newly formed public authorities—such as the NTPA, RCC, and DIFE—made the whole safety and compliance process more bureaucratic and cumbersome. None of the government’s departments had any focus on the activities related to raw material sourcing, pricing and procurement, negotiation between manufacturers and buyers, logistical support for on-time product shipment, and other associated export-import activities in the supply chain network. A supply chain representative commented:

A lack of collaboration in the [buyers’] ordering process, the [business-owners’] manufacturing process, and the [government’s] monitoring process has put us in a complicated situation. [S2-Supply Chain]

Furthermore, growing numbers of buyers were opting to conduct factory safety inspections through third-party audit firms that mostly employed local personnel. While the addition of this extra layer to the audit process was turning out to be very beneficial for buyers in terms of time and money-saving, it could also represent a potential point of conflict and compromise in relation to the sensitivity and confidentiality of the factory owners. This study found examples of supply chain auditors being ‘poached’ by apparel factories, or in some cases, of the auditors themselves expressing an interest in getting better positions at large establishments—a situation that started when the auditors were employed as liaison officers and were introduced to the factories. This could lead to complications due to its potential for the leaking of sensitive information (a factory’s list of buyers, pricing strategy, safety status, etc.) to the competition.

While ensuring workplace safety is a prime responsibility of the factories’ managerial teams, overseeing it is the responsibility of the supply chain actors and the local government. Therefore, the decision-making process related to setting up and implementing safety standards should be a tripartite process in which managers should both seek and provide opinions and feedback. However, the participant managers commented that they had never played any such role in the decision-making process, even though they were the players most familiar with the ground realities and best understood the appropriate safety provisions their factories needed. Although the supply chain buyers regularly publicised the close partnerships they maintained with their supplier factories, in reality, they always played the most critical role in the development and implementation of any safety governance mechanisms—a process in which the local factory owners and managers felt that they were no more than underdogs. A manager commented:

They [the buyers] are here to do business ... they rule everything ... we just follow their orders ... if we don’t do what they say, they will take their business elsewhere ... they will lose nothing, but we will lose everything. [M4-F2]

Making supply chain information public builds trust among all the parties involved in the apparel business process. In many business areas, there is a growing trend whereby global brands publish the details of the partner factories in which their products are being manufactured. However, such a trend is still absent in the apparel business networks that involve Bangladeshi factories. Here, global supply chain buyers do not make their factory inspection reports public and also refuse to provide any information about their supplier factories, claiming it to be irrelevant and that it would represent a breach of their confidentiality agreements. Nonetheless, the participant managers stated that revealing their factory details to the public, especially to the consumers, could be a powerful tool in promoting supply chain

transparency and the identity of their factories on a global platform. In this regard, several participants referenced the case of Rana Plaza which had housed five subcontracted factories that were involved in making apparel for at least 28 European and American brands. Initially, all of those brands had denied their involvement with these factories. Until the tragedy had occurred, no public information had been available concerning the global apparel brands that were sourcing from the factories involved; the only way to identify them after the fact had been interviewing survivors and rummaging through the rubble to find brand labels (Stauffer, 2017) (see section 2.3 for details).

In many business sectors around the world, the buyers and their partner suppliers have come together to create shared codes of conduct, which the suppliers may or may not be required to adopt, and the buyers are working to engage their suppliers on the shared code through joint assessments and auditing. However, in the apparel industry of Bangladesh, no such joint effort was ever made, and the participant managers viewed the process of establishing safety standards as strictly a top-down one in which the need for supplier involvement is generally ignored. Being at the bottom of the supply chain, their voices are not heard, their opinions are not sought, and the ground realities are not understood by the buyers, who are seated at the top. Through their safety governance mechanisms, buyers enjoy much greater control over the supply chain networks, especially over their partner factories, which if something goes wrong, are scapegoated for violating the safety provisions. One mid-level manager commented:

We [the managers] take the blame for everything ... workers are never blamed for their mistakes because that can cause havoc for it ... any worker protest in a factory is a violation of our CoC agreements with the buyers. [M8-F4]

This study thereby confirms that global buyers and manufacturers have little understanding of each other. Nonetheless, it was found that, should a factory not comply with its safety responsibilities, its managers would be blamed for the negligence and the buyers would generally 'cut and run' instead of engaging in a remediation process.

Overall, the participants believed that all these complications could be addressed by streamlining the safety audit process through the establishment of a common platform for all the supply chain actors and local safety governing authorities to act upon. Thus, a higher level of collaboration could focus everyone's efforts towards the improvement of workplace safety by extending their reach, pooling resources, reducing the duplication in policies and factory inspections, and avoiding conflicting safety policies.

5.2.2 Costly

The management of and compliance with the high levels of safety requirements imposed by different supply chain actors appeared to be not only stressful and time-consuming, but also costly. During their establishment, the Accord and the Alliance had assured the factory owners that either the cost of remediation would be shared between the concerned member buyers and the factory owners or low-interest loans would be made available to enable the latter to carry out any of the recommended EFS changes. However, this commitment was not honoured, and, after they had expired in 2018, the Accord and the Alliance had stated that the factory owners were responsible for bearing the costs of remediation. Evidence from other studies indicates that the average cost of complying with the Accord and Alliance's requirements was £250,000 per factory. This is well beyond the financial capacity of many businesses (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019). A manager of one of the largest vertical-integrated apparel manufacturing groups commented:

In total, our owners have spent approximately £10-11 million in all the 32 factories owned by the group to comply with the Accord and the Alliance remediation plans. It was definitely not an easy task, but we somehow managed because we are the largest in the sector ... but most small and medium factory owners could not do it and had to close their factories. [M3-F2]

Some medium-sized factory owners who had somehow managed to bear the costs expressed their frustration over the huge cost of remediation. One such owner responded:

I had to retrofit the columns of my factory following the Alliance's guidance. Then, the Accord came again for re-inspection and objected to the ceiling extension that joins two buildings ... last year, during my trip to Australia, I saw that Sydney airport had used the same type of ceiling extension to join its terminals ... do I have to do better work than the Sydney airport terminal? I have already spent £800,000, all through bank loans: what more can I do? [O1-F1]

In this regard, this study finds that the high cost of remediation is related to the initial decision to establish factories in unsuitable premises without following any building and safety codes. The situation was echoed by a factory manager:

During the 90s and later periods, the practice of employing professional civil engineers and electricians to construct buildings and do electrical work were non-existent. Factory owners constructed buildings based on their own ideas and used poor-quality materials to keep the cost down. Within a decade or so, the buildings became weak and fell apart. [M6-F3]

Furthermore, meeting the buyers' demands for periodical inspections and for the yearly renewal of various certifications issued by third-party social-compliance companies was also costly. The owners were required to pay large fees for yearly certificate renewals in order to keep their factories compliant 'on paper', and thus worthy of getting work orders. The cost of these renewals depended on factory and workforce size; while large establishments could afford this cost, medium and small-sized ones struggled:

At present we have over 25 compliance certificates from various authorities most of which are subject to annual renewal ... each costs us a lot of money. [O2-F2]

The participants—especially the factory owners and managers—conveyed that they were not only concerned about the number of required certifications but also about the surfeit of regulatory demands, whereby all these regulatory codes came with varying levels of audit standards and protocols, with all of which they had to deal. The implementation of all those safety measures was expensive, and the participant managers questioned the push for greater compliance at a time when the prices being paid for their manufactured products kept falling. They also complained about 'audit fatigue', whereby their establishments regularly faced both scheduled and unscheduled inspections, with some factories being subjected to 80-100 safety audits each year where in those cases in which the owners were required to meet various code requirements imposed by different authorities. The viability of administering so many different types of governance and inspection mechanisms was therefore questioned:

The standard practice for a buyer is to conduct more or less four audits a year. At this moment, I am working for 10 buyers which means that 40 audit requirements come only from my buyers. Then, I have nine compliance certifications, for which I face at least 20 audits. My factory is currently under the Accord, and they have inspected my factory several times this year. The DIFE and BGMEA also send their inspection teams once every three months. [O1-F1]

However, during the interviews, the supply chain representatives were found to be unsympathetic to these plights. They claimed that the apparel manufacturers had always been generating huge profits by offering their workers low or minimum wages and evading the required safety practices, which should never have been ignored in the first place. A supply chain representative commented:

Apparel business owners have a clear mentality for doing business here, not charity. Their aim is clear—that they will do business for profit, no matter what. If they get involved in other issues [fare wage, safety compliance, etc.], they will not be able to do business ... they will incur losses, not profits. [S4-Supply Chain]

Interestingly, during the data collection phase, the researcher had the opportunity to observe a few such compliance audits and price-negotiation meetings: one of which was conducted by the largest American retailer. The American retailer's inspection appeared to be a mockery of the effort and dedication put in by the factory management in relation to workplace safety practices. For example, the retailer's representatives were supposed to arrive at 10 AM; so, the factory management had arranged breakfast for them. However, they were four hours late, and the management had to arrange lunch for them. Just a few days in advance, they had placed a demand for the refreshments to be brought in from their preferred list of five-star hotels in Dhaka and had informed the factory's general manager that, upon their arrival, all their vehicles were to be given security clearance at the entrance without carrying out any check. They had refused to wear any personal protective equipment (PPE) themselves, but, had looked for workers not wearing any during their inspection. They had smoked continuously while on the premises, even though they were reminded several times that the whole complex was a non-smoking zone. In the sampling studio room where the meeting was held, there were no ashtrays; however, to everyone's utter surprise, the senior-most representative (the regional country manager) had retorted, "We are [mentioned their company name] and I hope you know that ... bring me a coffee mug with water". Most surprising of all was the fact that, even though they had admitted that they were very satisfied with the overall safety situation of the factory, compared to the other one they had recently visited in Pakistan whose safety standard was not at par, they had ultimately decided to give the work order to that factory because it had quoted a price that was 2 cents lower per piece. The logic that workplace safety and worker maintenance come at a price that has to be paid by the buyers appeared to be rejected by the global buyers. The exploitation of workers and resources thereby appears to be justified by the fierce global competitive pricing strategy—a rationale that was frequently pointed out by the participants.

While the American retailer's example was an extreme one, the participants shared that it was very common for buyers to make odd and unprofessional demands during their inspections and even once such inspections had been completed with positive outcomes. The participant managers believed that the whole inspection and compliance process should have been undemanding and germane.

5.2.3 Rigid

The participating managers highlighted the rigid approach of the supply chain to address workplace safety. Although over the previous five years, the Bangladeshi apparel industry has seen significant workplace safety improvements, the participant managers expressed concerns that this progress has slowed recently due to rigidity. They commented that strict safety demands and enforcement of safety

governance mechanisms contributed to their lack of enthusiasm for continuing to apply standards set by the supply chain actors without any consideration for the local context and challenges. One major challenge was the uncertainty about the future of their businesses—as claimed by the managers that they are struggling to operate on very tight margins to meet the buyers' constant demands to keep costs down. This was reflected in the following comment made by a senior manager:

In terms of workplace safety, the apparel industry is the safest business sector in Bangladesh at this moment ... we have been doing everything necessary within our capacity ... now what? Our business isn't growing, neither is our profit ... rather, our liabilities have increased. What do we get out of all of this? [M5-F3]

In fact, the owner of a medium-sized factory was so frustrated in sharing his experience that, at one point, he commented:

For God's sake, please put my name and my company's name in your research and tell everyone that I said this. I have no other place to go ... I have no place to complain. People say that, behind the success of this £36 billion industry, there are a lot of sacrifices made and tears shed by workers. Now you will see our [factory owner's] tears. What is the future of my business? [O1-F1]

The participant managers believed that, despite all the supply chain buyers' demands and the financial and social challenges, their efforts and sincerity in complying with workplace safety mechanisms had never been given their due recognition. The supply chain actors had always turned their attention to the workers and their issues, whereas the managers and their challenges had never been taken into consideration. Therefore, the activities related to safety compliance had involved very thankless and dissatisfying efforts. The supply chain buyers had never offered them an incentive to adhere to the safety provisions. For example, buyers' initiatives had always been related to worker benefits and associated activities, but never to the managers and their efforts. Whereas the workers' hours and wage had been fixed with standard eight-hour shifts, for the managers only eight hours of office time were just not a realistic proposition, as they regularly had to put in additional hours; sometimes up to 15 to 20 a week, with no reward or incentive. Whereas the workers were entitled to overtime pay for each extra hour of work, no such thing was on offer for the managers. A senior manager commented:

We [HR] work 10-12 hours a day ... production managers work 12-14 hours a day ... our salaries are fixed to 8-hours employment contracts. We arrive hours before the workers and we leave hours after them. [M5-F3]

In our factory, the shipments usually start at 10:00 pm at night. So, after finishing my work around at 6:00 PM every day, I again return to the factory around 9:30 PM for the shipments and stay till 12:30 to 1:00 AM. I again come to the office at 9:00 in the morning. [M8-F4]

The participant managers also believed that instead of enforcing deterrents—such as penalties for safety violations, cancellations of work orders, and removal from supply chain networks—an industry-wide safety compliance culture could be better promoted and implemented through the recognition of the efforts they were making towards safety.

One of the most relevant perceptions expressed by the participants in regard to the safety compliance codes enforced by the supply chain actors pertained to their rigidity. They complained that they were being forced to comply with both buyer safety codes alongside Accord and Alliance remediation plans:

The buyers tell us that we are bound to follow all these safety provisions if we want to continue business with them. [M7-F4]

An example of a crucial code enforced by some large global buyers was a ban on the use of shared production premises by their manufacturing partners. In other words, those buyers required their suppliers to carry out their production on exclusive premises.

Factory owners were found to belong to two main categories. The first was made up of those who owned the land, the buildings, and the machinery—thus having complete ownership of everything they needed to establish a production facility. The second category operated on leased premises; some having set up their factories by importing (and thereby owning) and installing their machinery on the leased property, and others renting fully machine-furnished premises. To make matters more complicated, this study also found examples of complex ownership statuses encompassing the whole process facility. For instance, there were cases in which a landowner had leased some unused land to a single entrepreneur or a consortium who had constructed a factory complex on it and had then rented each of its floors, either fully furnished or unfurnished, to a different apparel business. In such a situation, entrepreneurs who operate their business on rented land or buildings are always less invested in the industry, and therefore less likely to engage in seeking to enhance safety.

In this regard, the participant managers expressed contradictory opinions. On the one hand, those who belonged to the first category—i.e., who held complete ownership of their establishments—showed their support of this provision by commenting:

‘N’ and ‘M’ are two of our buyers. At any given point, we can use all the floors of our factory only for ‘N’ or ‘M’, not for both. We cannot use a single factory floor for two different buyers at any given time, as they don’t allow that. We are fine with this because we get a large volume of orders from them. Our owner has another building in Gazipur which he rented to ‘C Apparels’ ... they cannot work for these brands because they use their floors/production lines for multiple buyers at the same time. [M1-F1]

These participants further expressed their concerns about the future of the industry in relation to the unregulated and rapid establishment of large numbers of small-sized factories. According to them, the industry was saturated and was soon going to become unsustainable if nothing was done. They claimed that this surge of surplus factories was paving the way for the overall safety deterioration of the industry. An owner commented:

An unhealthy trend exists among people to represent themselves as industrialists ... anyone can start a factory anywhere and at any time ... people are securing huge bank loans in the name of garments business and buying personal properties (e.g., flats and cars) and only using the left-overs to set up factories. We cannot blame our buyers for everything. Genuine industrialists like us are paying the price for this ... the government must intervene and make it very difficult for any newcomer to enter this sector. [O1-F1]

On the other hand, the second category of participant manufacturers—i.e., those who owned small factories or operated their businesses on rented premises—felt that they had been cornered by the monopolistic/egotistical attitude of the large and wealthy factory owners and big companies, and by the buyers’ stringent ‘exclusive premises’ provision. For them, buying a plot of land and then establishing a factory represented a massive investment; one that they would be unable to make. Similarly, renting all the floors of a premise just to satisfy a single buyer’s demand was not a viable option either. The manager of a factory operating on leased property commented:

We invested a lot in this floor for compliance certifications. We must work for multiple buyers at a time; otherwise, we will go out of business ... some brands ask for dedicated premises for their production, which I think is unjustified. [M10-F5]

This study has further identified the complexities that arise when shared premises require safety inspections and compliance certifications. For example, the doubts raised by questions such as “Who will be responsible for the remediation?”, “How would the cost of remediation be borne or shared among the parties involved in this multi-layered renting process?” And “Who will be held responsible if there is any incident?” have resulted in many lawsuits, partnership breakups, personal conflicts, and cancellations of work orders.

Nonetheless, despite the contradicting managerial notions presented above, the rigid nature of the safety governance mechanisms and the punitive approach taken by buyers appear to be critical issue that hinders the further growth of the industry. The apparel industry appears to have started to take on a pyramid shape in which the business is getting concentrated at the top—i.e., it is secured by a handful of large corporate groups—forcing medium and small factories to shut down. These findings also contribute to the argument that it is more likely for medium and small factories to consider safety shortcuts as means of increasing revenue to survive in the competition.

5.2.4 Stressful

The participant managers generally interpreted the practice of safety governance mechanisms enacted in their factories as a very stressful task. They consider that the governance of safety mechanisms is a form of pressure being applied to them. Starting from a buyer’s stated intention to submit the factory to safety audits and all the way to the completion of the shipment of the finished product, at every stage of the inspection-order-manufacture-shipment process, the participant managers felt that their activities were being monitored and controlled by the buyers or their local liaison offices. While they admitted that the industry’s safety record had improved significantly over the few previous years because of the governance mechanisms, they said that the overall inspection and remediation process made them feel as if they were not in control of their own factories and businesses. They also complained about the fact that they had no other choice than to participate in the Accord/Alliance inspection programmes. This was expressed by the following two comments, respectively made by a factory owner and a manager:

The pressure that came from the Accord and the Alliance was very stressful and unbearable for most of the businesspeople ... we are the largest in the sector, and, we somehow managed to cope with their demands. But not everyone was that fortunate ... over the last five years, the industry’s fate has been set by these safety audits and remediation plans. [O2-F2]

Apparel business owners had no other choice than to participate in the Accord and Alliance inspection programmes; otherwise, the industry would have collapsed. [M7-F4]

The participant managers also claimed to have a very good understanding of the importance of workplace safety practices and of the adverse impact of safety violations both on the workers and the businesses. Almost all of them frankly shared their awareness of the disastrous impact that the Rana Plaza collapse and the Tazreen Fashion fire had on the industry. They wholeheartedly believed that ensuring workplace safety was their responsibility; however, at the same time, they emphasised the point that they understood their workers' needs better than the buyers, who were mostly unaware of the country's socio-economic situation. The participant managers did not view the buyer-imposed compliance requirements as being crucially beneficial to the environment within which their factories operated; thereby, they explained that, in the absence of specific demands from their buyers, they would not apply many of these compliance codes. This is in line with the empirical evidence presented in the literature, which highlights the dominance of global buyers in the business processes enacted within their supply chain networks (see Section 2.1).

Interestingly, although it was not explicitly mentioned by any of the participants, in-depth observations of the situation revealed that they perceived a degree of 'mistrust' permeating their relationships with their buyers. During the interviews, it emerged that the participant managers felt that their buyers might not trust them in relation to their understanding of workplace safety practices. Therefore, they appeared to be stifled by the situation:

I can assure you that we have a pretty solid knowledge of workplace safety. We are forced to comply with all the legal safety requirements and the agreements that we have signed ... which we do ... yet, they [the buyers] repeatedly demand frequent factory inspections and certifications. [O3-F4]

In this regard, this study was able to identify some underlying questions posed by the managers in this context—e.g., “Why do we have to follow everything the buyers say?” and “What authority do the Accord and Alliance have to shut down our factories?” These questions validate the participant managers' concerns about the role played by the institutions in governing the workplace safety practices enacted in their factories. Thus, this finding further confirms the participants' belief that they were being pressurised, controlled, and mistrusted by institutional actors in relation to compliance with safety standards—which, otherwise, they would not have followed or would have enacted differently.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the myriad actors within the supply chain networks have come up with their own ways of monitoring, inspecting, and certifying the apparel factories for safety-related matters. In this regard, this study found that, on several EFS safety issues, the Accord and the Alliance adopted different types of—sometimes contradictory—inspection and remediation plans, thus resulting in the confusing and chaotic state of the rectification routines required from the managers. Similarly, different auditors from the Accord and the Alliance inspected the factories at different times and provided different sets of recommendations. Therefore, once a safety issue had been corrected as per a particular auditor’s remediation plan, the participant managers had repeatedly been told to start all over again, sometimes from scratch, in order to comply with different remediation plans provided by different auditors. A manager commented:

A simple example is that we still cannot decide about the positive or negative suction heads of our fire hydrants, as we were told different standards by different auditors. [M7-F4]

Furthermore, every time safety-related works had been carried out in a factory, the participant managers had to halt production for safety concerns. This had not only resulted in factories missing production deadlines, with the owners having to pay buyers the related penalties but had also caused high levels of stress. In fact, the participant managers were found to be spending a great amount of their energy and time on a daily basis just to complete the repetitive routine safety checks and inspections. The following two comments adequately describe this situation:

The Accord and the Alliance did a great job but, when they started, they were not experts in managing workplace safety ... their auditors were people like us ... They also learned many things from us. As a result, we had to do the same task several times because they could not decide upon one set of safety standards. [M9-F5].

The inspection criteria of the Accord and the Alliance are different, so their remediation plans are also different. Our Japanese buyers are not members of either the Accord or the Alliance, and their CoC standards are also different in many aspects. On top of that, our labour laws and legal safety provisions prescribe different things ... all these different compliance standards are too stressful to handle. [M7-F4]

During the interviews, the participant managers were also found to be stressed out by the volume of the workload with which they were dealing; even though they were very focused on participating in the interviews, they were continuously interrupted by their subordinates and workers on various safety and

compliance-related matters, which were sometimes as trivial as moving an appliance from one place to another or granting sick leave to a worker. Interestingly, it was observed that some staff and junior managers tended not to get involved in any activity that required them to make a decision without the involvement of a senior manager. An informal conversation held with a couple of junior managers later revealed that they just wanted to avoid any repercussions stemming from any decision they might make so that they could not be blamed for any safety violations in the process.

5.2.5 Functional

The above themes showed that the participant managers considered safety practices as bureaucratic, costly, rigid, and stressful. Despite all this negativity towards institutional safety governance mechanisms and evidence of avoidance and circumvention, they were found to believe that they play a functional role in practising and promoting workplace safety. A factory owner commented,

I think the whole conundrum was a lack of commitment by the brands, not by us, to implement the guidelines themselves. We are doing fine [in terms of safety practices] but they [buyers] are not. ‘H’ and ‘I’ [brands] are my large customers ... they have been guiding us without Accord and Alliance since the 1990s, without any extra over-the-top investments and ultimatums given by Accords and Alliance ... it should never be ‘you invest millions of dollars now or we leave’ type threat that we receive now ... It should be ‘we will continue to support you with the business but these are the bare minimum standards you have to follow now and this is the target for next years to come.’ [O2-F2]

Blaming the Accord and the Alliance, most managers commented that they were better before when their safety standards were given and monitored mostly by the buyers and a few third-party social compliance authorities. However, from 2013 onwards, this has changed completely (due to Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions incident), and now, Accord-Alliance plays a policing role instead of offering a cooperative attitude. Managers thus questioned the authority of such multi-stakeholder initiatives and thus commented:

Accord and Alliance have no stake in the entire supply chain. If a business goes kaput [failing in Accord-Alliance audit/inspection], there go thousands of workers who had jobs before but poor safety standards and now no jobs and no safety standards. They need food first, then safety. It is better to let those [with poor safety standards] factories continue and support them to improve, instead of just shutting them down. [M3-F2]

Managers also complained about the rigorous and bureaucratic process for compliance as set by these global safety initiatives. A few managers said that it is not needed for all the factories to follow the same standards. Some smaller establishments can continue business by maintaining moderate or basic level safety arrangements, depending on their floor size, number of machines, workforce size, products, and location. The manager of a small factory commented:

How can you put one factory with 8,000 workers and another with 800 following the same standard? Do you think it is justified in any way? We have neither the facility [resources] nor the manpower to follow what they [Accord-Alliance] told us to do. [M10-F5]

This shows that managers of small factories are more reluctant to comply with institutional safety governance mechanisms because they find it overwhelming and unnecessary in relation to their factory size and capacity.

However, there were managers who were found to be very compliant and welcoming towards institutional safety governance mechanisms. This is because these factories have the financial capacity as well as adequate manpower to carry out the remediation plans offered by the Accord and the Alliance or by any other third-party social audit companies. This is reflected in the following comment of a manager of a large group:

We followed all the guidelines [given by Accord, Alliance, and NTPA] to improve our factories [EFS issues]. We did it for our own sake ... we did it because the Rana Plaza incident showed us what might happen [if we ignore safety]. We want to continue our business and don't want to suffer for our own stupidity. We can confidently say that we are 100% compliant people. [M11-F6]

5.3 Managerial Responses to Institutional Demands for Safety Practices

The previous section showed that managers take cues from any equivocal institutional safety governance mechanisms, developing their own interpretations of them. This section shows the various ways in which managers behave in relation to or respond to the institutional demands for these safety governance mechanisms. Table 5.2 shows the five themes generated from the 17 sub-themes that this research identified in this regard.

Table 5.2: Managerial responses to institutional demands for workplace safety practices

Main Themes / Interpretations	Sub-themes	Descriptions
Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Control - Decision making - Freedom 	Managers behave authoritatively in exercising total control on their factories, staff members, and workers. The factory owners/CEOs are found to have control and influence over factory safety practices.
Blame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government - Supply chains - Workers - Responsibility avoidance 	Managers tend to avoid their responsibility by primarily blaming the government and the supply chains for creating an unfavourable business environment that incites safety violations in the industry. They also blame their workers for safety violations.
Conformity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obedience - Care - Favour 	Managers show conforming attitude through their obedience to institutional demands for workplace safety and participation in CSR activities, and by offering jobs to women.
Dishonesty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bribery - Deception - Concealment - Negligence 	Managers get involved in various dishonest behaviours in order to get things done.
Ignorance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unawareness - Lack of education - Impunity 	Managers show ignorance of or resistance to the practice of workplace safety because of their lack of education, unawareness, and the existence of a culture of impunity.

5.3.1 Authority

Interestingly, even though the factory managers interpreted that they feel like they are being controlled by the buyers, they were found to wield their authority in exercising a good level of dominance and control over their factories in terms of safety compliance, HR practices, and over the employees, staff, and workers²⁹. This behaviour was more noticeable among the factory owners, who considered their authority to derive from their ownership of the business. Even though managers showed both positive and negative reactions to institutional safety governance mechanisms, they would always prefer to have the freedom of making their own decisions in relation to workplace safety:

Had I been given the freedom of ensuring my factory’s safety, I would have done it in a different way ... in my factory, it should be me who decides how things are done. [O5-F5].

²⁹ The local classification of the members of a manufacturing workforce is: (i) Employees: management people from Assistant Officer to Senior General Manager; (ii) Staff: non-management people such as peons, security guards, tea boys, cooks, etc. and (iii) Workers: people who work in the shop floor, usually those who operate machines.

Furthermore, from observations, the participant managers were found to take a utilitarian and authoritarian approach towards their workers, who were considered to be a valuable but easily replaceable resource—a passive factor of production—thereby, their wages were viewed as an expense/cost of production, rather than as an investment. So, the emphasis was placed on reducing the expenses of the factory. This practice was observed during the factory visits, where managers were found to do their monthly manpower planning by including a high worker turnover ratio. As the preservation of workers' jobs was highly dependent on the volume of work orders received for a specific time period, the managers did not want to employ extra workers at any given time in order to minimise their expenses. Termination or redundancy was considered as natural wastage. The AGM of HR of a large factory commented:

We are violating one condition of the labour law—i.e., we are keeping our workers as contractual even though the law says a worker must be full-time when his/her salary/wage goes over BDT 16,000 (approx. £139) per month. We do it because when they are contractual, we do not have to give them service benefits and other incentives and can terminate them anytime. I know I need to change this because in the recent audit by 'K' [a Swedish buyer] we showed them that they are all full-time and showed them the alternative software we maintain in this regard. But, I am guessing they realised that we are doing something dubious. [M3-F2].

Furthermore, the managers were also found to terminate the employment of those workers whom they perceived as a potential threat to the success of the safety/social auditing processes. Interviewing workers was a mandatory attribute of these auditing. During such interviews, the auditors would randomly select workers and ask them about the ways they were being treated and about the overall conditions of their employment and workplace safety. A strong emphasis was placed on the workers' experiences of their working conditions. Therefore, managers were found to be coaching their workers about what and what not to say during their audit interviews. While most workers would submit and chose not to speak out against their employers, there were always a few exceptions. In this regard, the reasons why managers allowed nominated workers (WPC representatives) to be interviewed and stopped the researcher from randomly selecting the workers from shop floors were discussed in section 4.4.3. This behaviour clearly shows managerial concern for workers being truthful and opening up or revealing something sensitive or unpleasant about their workplace, which might initiate unwanted disputes between the factory and the buyer or the auditing companies. A top-level manager who had denied access to his workers commented:

Considering their [the workers'] lower socio-economic backgrounds, it is very unlikely that they will be able to provide you [the researcher] with any meaningful answers. That is why we

[the managers] have decided to participate in your interviews and excluded the workers. [O3-F4]

5.3.2 Blame

All the participant managers confirmed that their factories were fully compliant with the institutionally imposed workplace safety mechanisms. However, they also admitted that many of these requirements are incongruous with reality and so many clauses of these guidelines are regularly being flouted in many factories. In this regard, in an attempt to justify this behaviour, the participant managers mostly blamed the myopic attitude of institutional actors.

Firstly, the participant managers blamed the government for several reasons: leniency in monitoring the factories, inefficiency in controlling the unregulated growth of the industry, inadequacy in drawing up timely and appropriate safety mechanisms, and a lack of understanding of the contemporary changes in apparel manufacturing and supply chain activities. Secondly, they blamed the supply chain actors for failing to learn about the ground realities of the Bangladeshi apparel business, and thereby not understanding the real needs of the factory owners and workers. Furthermore, they blamed the buyers for their insincerity and deceitful attitude. They argued that the buyers presented themselves to their consumers as socially responsible and ethical clothing companies while, at the same time, constantly haggling with their producers for low-cost manufacturing, paying unfair prices, and demanding product delivery within the shortest possible lead time. Therefore, the participant managers deemed it unrealistic to align their workplace safety practices with supply chain expectations. Two managers commented:

There is negligence among the owners and managers in the industry, but you must understand why this happens ... no owners want accidents to happen and to lose their investment, so they look for options to cut costs by evading safety issues. [M11-F6]

Factories can offer products at low cost, but, without a fair price, we cannot ensure compliance. Compliance comes with a price, it is expensive to maintain ... now that the lead time has reduced significantly, buyers must understand that if they continue to look for the cheapest options, we cannot survive and ultimately workers will suffer. [M9-F5]

Secondly, sometimes, managers blamed their workers for workplace safety violations that caused accidents. They argued that their workers came from such a low social background that making them understand the importance of safety at work was a challenge (see section 6.3 for details). A few managers

added that getting their workers to comply with factory safety practices was the biggest challenge they faced. A top-level manager thus commented:

They [the workers] constantly show their reluctance in using PPE ... they just don't care. Whenever the line supervisors move their attention to another side, they [the workers] take their masks and earplugs off and start talking to others. [O3-F4]

Lastly, and very interestingly, a few managers considered some accidents to be acts of God, and thus unpreventable. They mentioned the Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions fire incidents as examples of events caused by human error or negligence. However, they also stated that some accidents may happen without anyone's fault or negligence—unfortunate events that are both unexpected and unintentional. A factory owner commented:

'M' [a factory], which was an Accord-Alliance certified factory, was engulfed in a fire just a few months ago. Was it an act of God or an accident caused by human error? If it wasn't an act of God, then what had the Accord and the Alliance done there? If we agree that the Accord and the Alliance had done their job perfectly, then the fire should not have started in the first place, but it happened without anyone's knowledge. So, it was an act of God, wasn't it? [O1-F1]

5.3.3 Conformity

Whether because of fear of institutional penalties or motivated by self-interest, the participant managers manifested their adherence to the workplace safety mechanisms enacted by institutional actors. Despite the hurdles to be overcome to abide by some of the impractical safety codes provided by the buyers, the managers viewed their efforts towards safety as a strong attestation of their will to ensure safety at their factories, which they further interpreted as their 'conformity' to institutional demands for workplace safety. For example, a manager mentioned:

One safety code requires us to keep the toilet floors dry and clean at all times. We have 4,000 workers working on these premises ... 800 on each floor ... see the queues in front of all the toilets, you do the math. We run pedestal fans all the time to keep the floors dry ... we do safety practices in our own style which is sufficient, but the safety policies they [buyers] provide us are not always practical. [M4-F2]

The managers also talked about their participation in various CSR activities, which they viewed as further confirmation of their enthusiasm and care for people and society. A subtle sense of care for workers was

also observed among some of the managers. This view has been shared widely by the participant managers. This was reflected in the following comment:

I am regularly present in my factory. I care for my life; I equally care for my workers' lives. I never want any accident to happen in my factory ... never ever I want my workers to suffer ... no one can pay the price of human life. [O1-F1]

Furthermore, there was no doubt that the country's apparel industry had played a crucial role in economically benefitting a large section of the poorest and most vulnerable female population. The managerial response to this was a strong affirmation that they were doing a big favour to the nation by providing millions of underprivileged women with the best working opportunity, with their factory jobs serving as a remedy against domestic abuse, forced underage marriage, prostitution, and poverty. A large factory owner responded:

My factory has 8,000 workers and we have changed the face of this area, which was underdeveloped before. All these poor people especially women are now self-sufficient to take care of a family. Even if their husbands leave them, they can survive well and raise their kids ... we offer education, childcare, and medical care ... we are contributing to the economy and we are doing a big favour to the country. [O2-F2]

5.3.4 Dishonesty

Dishonesty is a very common trait that is routinely found in every thread of life in Bangladesh, and the apparel business sector is no exception. Several managers admitted that they regularly had to commit various dishonest acts in order to get things done. Interestingly, these acts were not always considered to be dishonest; rather, they were viewed as 'efficient ways' to manage and influence various authorities in order to speed up their business activities and procedures (see 'noble cause corruption', Halderen & Kolthoff, 2016). In this regard, this study identified bribery, concealment, and deception as the three most common dishonest behaviours in which the participant managers regularly engaged.

The managers were found to use bribery as a normal business act as means of 'managing' and 'influencing' various public authorities. In order to benefit from various public services and utilities, they frequently had to pay bribes as facilitation payments to public officials. Managers commented that bribery remains widespread because, like other forms of corruption, it is concealed and tolerated, sometimes by the very people who have made it illegal. A factory owner commented:

All kinds of public functions—for example, government permissions, utility services, registration and licences, and information—everything can be managed by bribing. It is no longer a question of someone not taking bribes; rather, it is a question of how much I have to offer to make an official accept the bribe. [O1-F1]

A mid-level manager of a factory shared his recent experience with the Department of Labour, the country's regulatory agency under the Ministry of Labour and Employment. Apparently, workers of his factory submitted their application to form a labour union. Upon receiving the application, the Assistant Director of the ministry reached out to him and asked for BDT 5,00,000 (approx. £4,380) bribe for making the application invalid for insufficient grounds. The manager was told by the Assistant Director that after visiting his factory and talking to the workers, he will submit his report mentioning that the conditions of forming a labour union have not been fulfilled by the applicant workers. The manager commented:

The rate [bribe amount for this union registration purpose] was BDT 25,000 just a few years ago. Yesterday, he [the Assistant Director] called and asked for BDT 5,00,000 ... an abnormally high amount! I called my colleagues in other factories to confirm this and found that some of the factories have already paid the amount and others are thinking about what to do ... this is also possible that the application is fake and the labour office has prepared it just to get some money out of the factories ... Eid is coming ... this has happened before. You know, workers never put their real names on the application so that they remain untraceable. [M4-F2]

This study found evidence of unfair practices being carried out by both managers and supply chain auditors. In fact, this situation was found to be so common that the managers openly talked about it. For instance, some factory inspections—conducted by either the supply chain actors or the government—were supposed to be unannounced, in order to reveal the real workplace safety conditions. However, participant managers admitted that corrupt officials would tip them off about the inspection schedule several days in advance. This gave them adequate time to prepare for the inspections, or sometimes, by paying ‘fees’, they can avoid rigorous safety inspections conducted by the supply chain actors and the local government. Furthermore, it had also become a common practice to offer various gifts and inducements to buyers whenever they came to visit the factories, not necessarily for safety inspections, but for price negotiation, sample development and approval, etc. Various unprofessional demands—such

as meals at top restaurants, free accommodation at five-star hotels, free samples from factories, paid leisure trips within the country, etc.—had to be taken care of by the factory owners.

The managers were also found to maintain influence over the law enforcement agencies in order to ensure their assistance in effectively controlling any worker-related and other disputes. The literature presented earlier (see section 2.4.3) showed that factory owners maintain effective control over the police force through bribery and by bestowing political patronage on it. Depending on the size of the factory, an agreed amount of informal payment and a carton full of apparel were sent to the local police stations on a monthly basis. However, in this regard, the managers claimed that it was the highly corrupt nature of the police force that forced them to do so. Therefore, it is very likely that the factories and police stations observe an unethical informal pact for mutual gains.

Bribery is also firmly established in apparel shipment/transportation and logistical activities. This study found evidence whereby a cargo truck, travelling from a factory in Gazipur to Chittagong port (approximately 270 kilometres), needed to pay bribes or suffer extortion—labelled as ‘development fees’—at 30 to 35 illegal check-points set up by traffic police and various road transport workers’ union leagues (patronised by the ruling party) and union federations (patronised by the opposition party). The amount of these fees varied from 15 to 100 taka (£0.10 to £0.95).

Concealing documents and incidents is another approach that this study uncovered in relation to workplace safety managerial practices. During the series of observations, it was found that some managers did not keep records of many daily incidents such as the quarrels or small fights that occasionally took place between workers, the line supervisors’ occasional inappropriate behaviour or offensive remarks towards workers, the conflictual (love-hate) relationships between the workers and their line-supervisors in regard to sexual advances, financial issues and the disruptions caused by these at the workplace, chemical and equipment mishandling, and the careless use of PPEs by workers. A worker commented:

Many of our girls [female co-workers] and boys [male co-workers] fall in love with each other ... they spend 8 to 10 hours working together, so it is not uncommon ... sometimes it is one-sided and sometimes it is a triangle, and problems arises from that ... we go to our sirs [managers] for a solution. [W7-F6]

Other managers were found to be keeping records of every incident brought to their attention, but then concealing them from the supply chain auditors during their inspections to avoid any potential penalty. Some attempted to address or solve these issues nonchalantly by considering them as related to the workers' personal lives, isolated events, or insignificant. Furthermore, the managers admitted to keeping dual records, either using software (e.g., Kormee, Sohoj, ERP, are some of the HR software commonly used in the apparel factories) or manually—i.e., fabricated ones for the auditors and genuine ones for their own purposes—on those matters and on issues related to worker termination and dismissal, overtime hours, provident fund, nepotism, etc. alongside safety violations. In the context of this study, any third-party factory inspections on these issues were conducted based upon the documentation produced by the factory management. Such a situation provided managers with the scope to conceal issues that might hinder the safety inspection and result in a penalty being imposed.

Deception is another behaviour that was found to be persistent among factory owners, none of the participating owners admitted to engaging in it; however, they claimed that this was very common practice among many of their colleagues. Deception involved a factory owner operating multiple production facilities in different locations and under different names. Among these multiple establishments, one will be the primary establishment—the showcase factory—which will be flawlessly maintained, regularly audited, and certified by multiple authorities, and thereby, shown to the buyers as the factory dedicated to carrying out production. In reality, production will simultaneously take place at the owner's non-certified secondary establishments, where workplace safety conditions are not properly maintained. This situation is linked to the issue of subcontracting (see section 2.2), in which non-compliant factories are used by not only their owners but also others who take on work orders that exceed the intended capacity of their showcase factories. In this regard, a supply chain representative commented:

A large number of such secondary and subcontracting factories exist and they [the buyers] know it. But, honestly, nobody cared about it, as both the buyers and the suppliers wanted the job to be done. However, after the Rana Plaza incident, buyers are more careful in placing their orders and prefer large apparel groups, which have several factories under their ownership. [S2-Supply Chain]

5.3.5 Ignorance

At times, the participant managers admitted that there was evidence of ignorance towards workplace safety practices in the industry. However, they denied their involvement in such behaviour. In this regard,

the managers and supply chain representatives discussed several issues that they believed to be contributing factors to managerial ignorance towards workplace safety practices. For example, the managers highlighted that the lack of education found among the first-generation apparel business owners/entrepreneurs was one of the primary reasons for their ignorance and circumventing attitude towards safety practices. As mentioned earlier in the literature, due to lenient governmental policies aimed at fostering the rapid growth of the sector, it had always been easy for apparel business owners to secure bank loans on easy terms (see section 2.3). As a result, large numbers of uneducated but capital-rich people had become factory owners who were mostly driven by an insatiable desire to make quick money. While workplace safety had come a long way over the last couple of decades, the traditional mentality of these first-generation entrepreneurs remained unchanged; they still considered workplace safety-related activities unnecessary and time-consuming, and they therefore largely ignored or resisted them.

Another aspect that perhaps had contributed to the lack of awareness of workplace safety among the factory owners was the unavailability of safety experts with technical know-how. A safe workplace is created by fostering a constant awareness of safety and by teaching people how to avoid or minimise personal exposure (Jones & Jones, 2020). However, in this context, until recently, the importance of safety-related education and training was not recognised; thus, universities and technical colleges had traditionally never offered any relevant degree programmes or professional courses in this field. As a result, the country still suffers from a huge shortage of experts in the field of workplace safety. To meet supply chain demands for a dedicated HR-Safety-Compliance department in each factory, employers rely heavily on foreign experts, mostly hired from India, Sri Lanka, and China. It is estimated that about a million foreigners from these countries are working in Bangladesh, only 10% of whom have work permits (Jibon, 2020; Sadeque, 2014). The illegal and temporary nature of this form of employment has two consequences: first, these experts are never loyal to any one factory/employer due to their tendency to continuously job-hop to stay under the radar, and second, they frequently have to return to their home countries, either to renew their tourist visa or to apply for a new one, thereby, often remaining absent from their workplaces. This not only increasingly hinders any native factory managers' attempts to establish and implement robust safety plans devised by these foreign experts but also contributes to the long-term unawareness of workplace safety issues found among factory owners and managers. One senior manager commented:

A lot of factories are owned by uneducated but wealthy people. They don't have any knowledge of the apparel business and completely rely on their foreign and local staff

members to run their factories. I do not like the fact that foreigners just come and take our jobs illegally, while the local graduates remain unemployed for years ... I also do not like the fact that, after almost 40 years, we still have a lack of experts in this field. [M7-F4]

Lastly, the managers also stated that some apparel factory owners acted negligently because they knew that there would be no repercussions for their actions. As mentioned earlier (see section 2.4.2), the government's support of apparel business owners, especially the favour shown towards the large apparel business groups owned by MPs and politicians facing various corruption allegations, has led to perceived impunity, which encourages other business owners in the sector to avoid workplace safety practices. The mechanisms aimed at taking punitive action against workplace safety evaders or repeat offenders have never been deployed effectively in the country's history (GAN, 2019). In fact, some of the participant managers explicitly shared examples of unethical business practices associated with workplace safety. A senior manager commented:

Some accidents are purely accidents ... but we know there were incidents that were actually the result of sabotage for political gain, insurance claims, family or partnership feuds, or even for jealousy or rivalry ... these are the actions of powerful men who can get away with it easily. [M5-F3]

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented two important issues: (i) the managerial interpretation of the safety governance mechanisms enacted on their factories by the supply chain actors and, (ii) their responses towards these governance mechanisms. The findings show that the private safety governance mechanisms have served to improve factory safety in recent times; they have done so through a deterrence-based regulatory and inspection regime that includes agreement on legally binding safety standards and extensive inspection schemes, including remediation follow-ups. The great variety of these private mechanisms notwithstanding, this type of governing approach, as a stand-alone alternative to public safety governance, is clearly marred by corruption, various limitations and setbacks. Conversely, the almost non-existing public safety governance system of the country has also turned out not to have provided any support to the supply chain actors in their attempts to ensure workplace safety. In this regard, the participants interpreted and responded in various ways to show their complying and discontented attitudes about the safety governance mechanisms enacted in the industry.

Alongside the identification of managerial attitudes towards workplace safety governance mechanisms, it is similarly important to investigate how institutional factors influence moral agency. In this regard, the next chapter (Chapter 6) will focus on the institutional factors, such as supply chains, local government, community, and religion and their influence on managerial moral agency.

6. Findings: Wider Institutional Factors Influencing Moral Agency

*Research means that you don't know, but are willing to find out*³⁰

Charles F. Kettering

Chapter Overview

In investigating managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices, the previous chapter presented an exploration of two important dimensions of managerial attitudes towards safety: first, the managerial interpretations of safety governance mechanisms; and, second, the various ways in which managers respond to those safety rules. However, a focus restricted to managers' interpretations of and responses towards workplace safety only provides a partial picture of their moral agency towards safety, as various wider institutional and local contextual factors can also significantly influence managerial attitudes towards safety.

Therefore, for further insights, this chapter addresses the second research question—i.e., how are different institutional factors likely to influence managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices? To this end, it explores more findings of supply chain issues—such as cost competitiveness, price negotiations, high-pressure factory work environments, complex work processes, and managers' confidence in and satisfaction with their own styles of safety practices. Then, it uncovers the local contextual elements—such as the unplanned growth of the apparel industry, corruption, competitive rivalry within the industry, factory size and performance, and social and cultural impediments towards a responsible and complying attitude. In order to substantiate the argument, the discussion also teases out various socio-economic characteristics of workers' livelihoods—such as the minimum wage and high cost of living, domestic violence, risky commuting, very limited rights (e.g., extended working hours, few holidays and statutory leaves, etc.)—and then highlights how these factors influence their attitudes towards workplace safety. The discussion is then continued to the next chapter to present the argument that managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices is constructed by a complex interplay between global supply chain factors and local contextual elements, and introduces the in-depth discussion of various types of moral agency and their associated attitudes.

³⁰ The quote is taken from Forbes Quotes, available at: <https://www.forbes.com/quotes/1589/>

6.1 Apparel Supply Chain Factors

During the interviews, the factory owners and managers shared their personal insights about several supply chain-related factors that appeared crucial in influencing their attitudes towards workplace safety practices. These factors are presented below.

6.1.1 Cost Competitiveness and Price Negotiations

The investigation conducted for this study revealed that the purchasing practices of global buyers have been putting supplier factories in a position in which the fierce price competition pushes factory owners to pay only the minimum and sometimes illegally low wages³¹ to their workers let alone investing in achieving internationally accepted workplace safety standards. As noted in section 2.1, price is a sensitive element in defining the global retailers' competitive position in the market and competition in the fashion industry has increased significantly in recent decades since it has been experiencing price deflation and mass discount offers by global brands (Fratto et al., 2006; Khurana & Muthu; 2021). This has resulted in apparel suppliers facing an intensely aggressive and highly saturated market environment in which growth of production is low and cost competition is high (Taplin, 2014b).

This study involved an exploration of the cost competition and price negotiations faced by apparel suppliers in Bangladesh. As mentioned in the previous chapter, two compliance audit and price negotiation meetings between buyers and suppliers were observed by the researcher during the fieldwork; one involving the largest American multinational retail brand and the other a large European one. It was observed that, in the price negotiation process, these buyers played their suppliers off against each other to drive down the cost of the product. The buyers collected product samples and price quotations from all their existing suppliers—and, sometimes, from new ones—and then visited each supplier with all those samples and price quotations. They started negotiating prices with each supplier by showing that they already had received a cheaper quotation from another. A factory owner said:

It is like our Qurbani Eid [the Islamic holiday called Eid-al-Adha, during which livestock is ritually sacrificed for the poor] cattle market, they show us the samples and the prices offered by other factories and ask us how much lower we can go. [O2-F2]

During those buyer-supplier negotiation meetings, it was also observed that the American buyer had preferred to finalise its work orders with another factory in Pakistan that had offered a quote only a few

³¹ The statutory monthly minimum wage for an apparel factory worker is BDT 8,000 (approx £69) and a textile factory worker is BDT 5,710 (approx. £49).

cents lower (per piece) than that of the factory at which the negotiation had been witnessed. During both the attended meetings, it was surprising to see that factory safety, workers' wages, product quality, etc. had been little emphasised, with the negotiation mainly pivoting around the cost of production. Finally, and as mentioned above, after two unsuccessful hours of negotiation in the presence of the researcher, the American buyer had decided to place its work order with another supplier in Pakistan, even though the chosen supplier had a much lower safety rating (as published in the social compliance audit report). In the case of the European buyer, after much negotiating, the local supplier had agreed to lower his price to match the quotation that the buyer had received from a competitor, thus ultimately accepting the generation of very little or perhaps no profit. Yet, the local supplier had decided to accept the terms only because he did not want to risk losing the buyer and possible future work orders. Interestingly, when the researcher had visited the factory again at a later date, the supplier had even admitted that he had no other choice than to subcontract a portion of the work to another factory—perhaps a non-registered one in which the workplace safety conditions were even poorer or non-existent—to contain production costs.

It is understandable that to compete in the discount-dominated retail environment, these global buyers are seriously concerned about reducing their costs and increasing their economies of scale. However, their constant roving in search of cheaper production facilities forces the supplier factories to seek alternative ways to offer a cheaper price—i.e., primarily cutting costs by ignoring safety protocols, offering minimum wages to workers, and subcontracting their work orders—and thereby to gain an advantage against their rivals. Ideally, the buyer-supplier relationship in the apparel supply chains should be characterised by collaborative behaviours—i.e., to reduce cost, both parties should be governed by codes of conduct, trust, correct perceptions of the business environment, and mutual respect. However, this research found that both parties often use confrontational or unscrupulous tactics to gain advantages over each other and mislead each other during price negotiations in order to gain more favourable contract terms, with the buyers constantly demanding cost reductions and the suppliers gripping morally disengaged decisions—e.g., unethical ways—to meet those demands. This adversarial attitude between the parties has the potential to yield detrimental outcomes in the overall success and growth of a safe working environment. This view was further reflected in the following comment made by a supply chain representative:

They [the buyers and suppliers] are businesspeople. Their only concern is to maximise profit ... everyone looks for opportunities to make money ... unless there is a change of mentality among these people, the workplace safety issues cannot be fully addressed. [S1-Supply Chain]

6.1.2 High-Pressure Work Environments and Complex Work Processes

Apparel manufacturing is a linear but complex process. In the supplier factory, the actual production process starts once the sample developed as per the buyer's product specifications has been approved by the latter. Sometimes, a buyer may choose or approve a pre-designed sample developed by the supplier factory's product design team or may ask for some minor changes to the sample's design. For a CMT (cutting-making-trimming) factory (see section 2.2 for details), once the product design has been finalised and the work order has been received, the factory merchandisers source the necessary fabric from the buyer-nominated local textile mills or textile importers and send it to the factory's quality control (QC) department, which conducts a number of inspections on it to check the quality of the yarn, weaving, and colour, as per the buyers' quality control checklist. Based on the buyer's specification, the fabric then goes to the cutting section. The different pieces are subsequently sent to the sewing section where they are stitched together to produce a complete garment. Then, the finished goods are sent to the washing plant and, upon returning, they are subjected to final quality inspection. The goods are finally packaged and the shipment process starts. Packaging materials are mostly sourced from buyer-nominated apparel accessories manufacturing factories. QC is maintained at every stage of this production and shipment process. This production process is more complex for a vertically-integrated establishment, where the other factories operated under the parent company (locally termed as Group of Industries) own everything needed for the production: starting from the spinning mills (to produce yarn/thread from the imported raw materials; e.g., cotton), textile mills (to make fabrics by weaving the yarn), dyeing factories (to add colours according to the specifications and control shrinkage), stitching factories (for making the apparels), washing plants (for washing the produced goods) and accessorise factories (for packaging and labelling materials). As the whole process is sequential, even a minor lag in any of the stages or a lack of coordination between processes ultimately starts off a chain reaction that affects the rest of the production line and leads to delays in delivery.

During the fieldwork, the participants talked about the immense pressure to which they were subjected on a daily basis to assimilate everything in the production process. The global buyers' 'lean retailing' business model—enacted in response to the 'fast-fashion' movement—causes them to tend to defer their work orders until the last possible moment in order to better understand what their competitors might be doing and to more accurately reflect the latest fashion trends and consumer demands (see section 2.4.6 for details). This results in suppliers being subjected to year-round high pressure to meet strict delivery deadlines, and to strong cost mandates. The sample managers highlighted that the unfair pricing, the demand for the quickest lead times, the delayed payments, the penalties, and even the payment

cancellations made on many occasions for delayed shipments caused by various internal and external conditions result in substantial reductions in their revenues. The following two comments attest to this reality:

We were delayed for a few days in shipping our products to buyer ‘X’, and so the buyer charged us a penalty of USD 75,000. On several occasions, we had to resort to air shipments, which were significantly more expensive than the sea shipments which we were supposed to use, just to avoid huge fines ... we can barely make a profit in such a situation. [M2-F2]

The lead time went from 90 days to 60 days, then to 45 days; now for some buyers, it is 28 days! We operate three eight-hour shifts, our factory is open 24 hours a day ... safety lapses are inevitable in such a situation and this is normal. [M11-F6]

6.1.3 Managerial Confidence and Satisfaction

All the participating managers showed confidence in and satisfaction towards their own style of practising safety in their factories. While they admitted that the supply chain safety governance mechanisms—such as the Accord, the Alliance, and the NTPA—have endeavoured to ensure workplace safety, they also said that such governance mechanisms are not perfect by any means. The managers commented that their involvement (including that of their workers) in the development and governance of these mechanisms was very limited and tokenistic and that those initiatives were more like a ‘CSR whitewashing’ suited to provide legitimacy to global buyers but doing little to address the challenges they faced in relation to the fierce pricing negotiations and relentless procurement practices enacted by the buyers.

In this regard, the participating managers expressed their confidence in regard to their own style of safety protocols and safety practices. They said that they work at the ground level and understand the reality of the factory work environment and labour issues, and thus can determine what should be done and how it should be done. The supply chain actors or buyers neither have an adequate understanding of the ground realities nor do they involve the owners and managers in the design and development of safety governance mechanisms. As a result, the buyer-imposed safety protocols often appear costly, overambitious, unrealistic, and incongruent.

...buyers force us to follow their policy [safety protocols] without knowing our situation ... if we do not have any knowledge about safety ... in fact, we understand what is needed better than them and we can ensure safety for all with much less cost. We have our own way of

ensuring safety which is sufficient ... We do not want them [the buyers and the social compliance authorities] to tell us what to do. [M7-F4].

The participant factory owners and managers also showed confidence in their employment practices and said that the apparel industry had played a crucial role in economically emancipating a large section of the poorest and most vulnerable female population. In relation to safety at work, they responded by strongly affirming that they were doing the nation a big favour and practising the best CSR by providing millions of underprivileged women with the best working opportunity, with their factory jobs serving as a remedy against domestic abuse, forced underage marriage, prostitution, and poverty. A large factory owner responded:

Our factory provides jobs to thousands of people ... without a job, most would have been scavenging on the streets ... These poor people now have a better and more secure life ... we are not only providing support to our workers but also extending our responsibility towards the locality and environment. We have planted trees on our premises, installed rainwater harvesting, and solar panels on the roof. I think we are doing the maximum for our country. [M3-F2]

Furthermore, it also appeared from the interviews that the participating managers found it challenging to weigh the effectiveness of safety governance mechanisms in deterring workplace accidents. While these mechanisms do seem to have achieved some positive results in the last few years, they cannot help but wonder: is it the right approach for ensuring safety and accountability in the industry? Can these initiatives really have the potential to change the safety situation? For example, a few owners and managers commented that their buyers are not the ones who employ workers, it is them. So, how/where do the actual employers of said workers figure into the safety and compliance picture? One factory owner said that the factory owners (and the owners' association, e.g., BGMEA) should decide the employment standards of their workers, not the brands, and thereby commented:

I am wary of safety and sustainability dialogues that place brands as workers' protectors and pit workers and factory managers against one another ... obscuring the fact that the piece of the cake afforded to workers and factory owners by the brands continues to shrink. [O4-F5]

This scepticism has also been reflected among the participant supply chain representatives. They commented that as long as brands continue to cope with uncertain consumer demands by pushing financial risks onto their suppliers, factory managers are likely to push that risk down to their workers by

safety violations. This shows that the absence of shared risk means that brands and suppliers alike have an extremely strong incentive to behave in ways that prioritise their self-interest over collective goals. Any framework or model to hold brands accountable for more effectively monitoring their supply chains and redistributing financial risks is absent.

6.2 Local Contextual Factors

The participant managers shared their personal insights into several social and cultural factors that were not only embedded in the context of the apparel business in Bangladesh but could also influence their moral agency towards workplace safety practices. These factors are presented below.

6.2.1 The Unplanned Growth of the Industry

During the interviews, all the participating factory owners, managers, and supply chain representatives shared their views on the unplanned growth of the industry. It was discussed in chapter 2 that the apparel industry in Bangladesh started from scratch four decades ago and experienced exponential growth over the last two decades. Gradually, the industry has become the largest business sector in the country and the highest contributor to GDP. During its development, the key element in the country's industrial policy was to develop the private manufacturing sector and achieve economic growth based on exports (Farhana et al., 2015; Muhammad, 2006). The participants commented that in order to rapidly boost the economy, the government had allowed the apparel industry to grow in an unplanned way by undermining and ignoring the required safety regulations and building construction codes. As a result, thousands of small-scale factories mushroomed in residential buildings across the major cities of the country, with no proper safety protocol in place and no owner-awareness or knowledge of any workplace safety issues. Two managers and a supply chain representative thus commented:

In the beginning, factories were located in residential areas in Dhaka City, occupying residential buildings ... there were residential flats, commercial offices, kindergarten schools, diagnostic centres, as well as garment factories housed on different floors of the same building ... how can you maintain safety in such places? [M6-F3]

The apparel industry started in residential areas occupying residential buildings ... without the factory owners having any basic knowledge of safety issues. The vibrations caused by the machines were not commensurate with the capacity and load strengths of the residential buildings. During the 80s and 90s, the factory owners and even the government were unaware of these basic safety calculations and did not think about these much later. [S1-Supply Chain]

Referring to accidents like the collapse of Rana Plaza, Spectrum Garment Factory, the fire at Tazreen Fashions, Ha-Meem Apparels, Garib & Garib Garments, the participating managers and supply chain representatives remarked that all these had happened due to the EFS safety negligence. Had the relevant government authorities been more careful and stringent in monitoring the establishments, these accidents could have been avoided.

6.2.2 Corruption

Earlier in Chapter 2, it was discussed how corruption remains endemic in Bangladesh. Most of the participant managers and all the supply chain representatives admitted that the high-profile apparel factory owners are reportedly embroiled in various corruption and embezzlement activities. Referring to some media coverage on corruption and global information leak incidents such as the 2016 Panama Papers, the participants highlighted that the country's anti-corruption efforts have always been plagued by politicisation and there is a crackdown on actors speaking against corruption. This was a case of 'the fox guarding the henhouse'—as was highlighted by a supply chain representative, who further added:

This is a two-way trend. When their businesses grow, they [the factory owners] enter into politics or, when someone becomes a politician, he goes into the garment business ... the past commerce minister 'T', was the President of BGMEA and owns the 'P Group' ... the current commerce minister, 'M', owns the 'K Group' ... 'A' the former Mayor of Dhaka, was a past BGMEA President and owns the 'D Group' ... the Advisors of our Prime Minister are garment business-owners ... obviously, it is very tough for the government to exercise legislative control over the sector. [S1-Supply Chain]

Interestingly, from the interviews, it further emerged that, because of the apparent nexus between the apparel industry and the ruling political party, the state had never intervened in the industry's regulatory process, rather offering the apparel business owners numerous privileges—like favourable tax regimes, low-interest bank loans, exemptions for large amounts in defaulted loans, and bonded warehouse facilities³²—and offering them CIP (commercially important person) status, with various perks, altogether creating a group of oligarchies. This preferential treatment was validated by the following comments made by two factory owners:

³² Export-oriented apparel factories are given the facility to import raw materials and packaging materials without paying any duty or taxes under the bond licence. The National Board of Revenue (NBR) in Bangladesh provides Bonded Warehousing benefits to a wide range of industries to encourage export-oriented industrialisation and facilitate exports (Bangladesh Customs, 2022). However, factories misuse this benefit by selling the imported raw materials in the local market instead of using them to manufacture apparel products for export (Suman, 2019).

Mr 'I', the owner of the 'S Group', is the brother of Mr 'B', the past BGMEA president and the owner of the 'H Group'. Mr 'I' is already a loan defaulter in several banks. He needed a further loan of 300 crore taka [£28.4 million] to establish 60 new production lines, without having any new work orders to use those lines for ... that's what he said to me. Mr 'B' bought the directorship of three banks by paying 60 crore taka [£5.5 million] in each and sanctioned the loan to his brother from those banks ... they have now made their children directors of several banks. The government has recently leased Mr 'B' a 50-acres plot for free to set up his new apparel washing plant. It is located right next to my plot in Gazipur. [O1-F1]

Our friend 'Z' of the 'L' Group took a 25 crore taka [£2.3 million] bank loan under his factory's name. Now, he has shut down his factory for continuous losses, but he has nothing to fear, as he will never have to repay. The bank has cancelled his debt because his friend's father is an influential industrialist and a board member of that bank, as well as an MP. [O2-F5]

A senior manager [M4-F2] also shared that factory owners sell their bonded goods locally, misusing their bonded warehouse facility which is completely illegal. It is a common practice among factory owners to bribe the Customs Inspectors to keep a blind eye during their periodical inspection and audit of the bonded warehouses of factories. The participating supply chain representatives also commented that while constructing factories, EFS safety codes aiming to eliminate accidents and hazards are frequently violated to save construction and operational costs. Safety inspections by government agencies rarely take place and the inspectors pass all the code violations by accepting bribery. A supply chain representative commented:

EFS issues are rarely inspected by government agencies ... use of low-quality materials coupled with poor construction quality compromises structural integrity ... you treat them [inspectors] with biriyani [local mixed-rice dish considered a delicacy] when they come and give them an envelop [bribe], you are good to go with your establishments ... Every factory owner considers these unethical practices as normal business dealings. [S4-Supply Chain]

Furthermore, in exercising its regulatory authority over the country's apparel industry, the government lacks the leverage wielded by the Accord and Alliance—the authority to deny factory access to its global member buyers. The government's baton in this regard is represented by the threat to revoke a factory's export license or shut it down altogether—an empty threat that is widely viewed as highly unlikely to ever

materialise due to the government’s apparent nexus with the industry. A supply chain representative commented:

The government would never cancel hundreds of export licenses or shut down these factories, denying the country hundreds of millions of foreign exchange revenue. I have more chance of seeing a tree talking to me than seeing this happen. [S3-Supply Chain]

These findings show that the participants have little confidence in the government and questioned the government’s ability and capacity in ensuring the implementation of the safety conditions under its purview. It appears that the government’s role in regulating and monitoring the apparel industry, apparent harmony with the industrialists, and aim of increasing exports in any way as a means to development, imply utilitarian instrumentalism. These indicate that the apparel industry as a whole is a means to an end. Safety standards are therefore viewed as an inconvenience—a constraint to profit maximisation—thus reconfirming the notion that the government has a potentially significant influence on managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices.

6.2.3 Competitive Rivalry within the Industry

A very interesting characteristic of the apparel industry—i.e., the competitive rivalry among apparel suppliers—surfaced during the fieldwork. This characteristic warrants emphasise because of its very strong influence on workplace safety practices and on the sustainability of small and medium-sized factories. It emerged that these factories were constantly faced with unpredictability in terms of work orders. Even though the participating managers reported that they were receiving an acceptable volume of work orders just a few years before, most of them were getting very few orders and some were getting none in recent years. In this regard, the participating owner of a medium-sized factory provided a detailed account of why their existing buyers were leaving him and how the business was gradually slipping through his fingers.

Table 6.1: A typical manufacturing cost break-down of a five-pocket denim jeans trouser

Serial	Cost Break-down	In BDT	In GBP £
1	Raw material, accessories, washing	380	3.26
2	Staff salary and labour wage	80	0.69
3	Machine operation, depreciation	10	0.086
4	Factory overhead and others	10	0.086

Table 6.1: A typical manufacturing cost break-down of a five-pocket denim jeans trouser

5	Shipment cost / FoB	10	0.086
6	Manufacturer's Profit	10	0.086
Total Cost		500	4.29

Source: Data collected from a participating factory owner of a medium sized factory during interview.

Table 6.1 shows a typical manufacturing cost breakdown of a five-pocket denim jeans trouser for a British high-street fashion brand. In this example, the participating factory owner received from the buyer £4.29 per piece for this item, whereas the buyer sold for £19.99 in its UK retail stores. The factory owner claimed that this was the absolute minimum price that he could offer the buyer. Had he been given just a few cents/pence more per item, he would not have needed to worry about spending money to practice better workplace safety.

We do not even get a feasible price for the products let alone a fair price ... you know how buyers bargain for a cent/penny ... had they been given us just a few cents/pence extra it would have been much easier to practice safety, as per their requirement. [O1-F1]

Very interestingly, this factory owner blamed not only the buyers but also the other large factory owners who owned and operated vertically-integrated factories within the domestic supply chains. He said that the apparel industry had become saturated with an overwhelming number of factories. The government had never monitored the rapid growth of this sector and had allowed anyone to start a factory anywhere. As a result, the industry was constantly faced with the serious challenge brought by the threat of new entrants, which was causing the industry to have ever more suppliers and fewer buyers. Large-scale corruption, political influence, cronyism, favouritism, and a culture of impunity had enabled large business groups—mostly owned by MPs and politicians—to gain easy access to huge bank loans without any concern about repaying them (as discussed earlier in section 2.4). These dominant large business groups had created a very imbalanced situation in the industry, whereby small and medium-sized factories were struggling to survive, whereas the large business groups were continuously expanding their businesses by grabbing huge funds, offering cheaper prices, and thereby, taking all work orders from the buyers through their cutthroat business practices. During the interviews, the participating small and medium-sized factory owners mentioned the name of a few such large apparel business groups who were offering the same five-pocket denim jeans trouser at £3.90 per piece—sometimes even at a lower price. In this regard, the above-mentioned factory owner commented:

‘S’ and ‘H’ [names of such large dominant business groups] are currently offering the same trouser 10 to 20 pence cheaper than me. I cannot do it ... I would have to shut down my factory if I offer that price. It is just a matter of time before the buyers stop giving me work and move to them ... Thousands of small-sized factories have shut down in the last five years because of this unhealthy competition. [O1-F1]

When asked why the small and medium factory owners did not take out bank loans to compete, the answer was as follows:

They [the large business groups] are grabbing bank loans wrongfully without any intention to repay. I cannot do it ... I have already spent £800,000 [a bank loan taken to meet the Accord and Alliance safety requirements] ... Every month I am struggling to repay the bank instalment and I need six more years to repay it, provided I have continuous work orders until then ... Look at ‘I’ [a medium-sized factory]; it took out loans for £36.5 million to expand and now the owner has fled the country without repaying anything. Thousands of such factory owners have absolutely no intention of repaying their bank loans ... But I cannot do such a thing ... I have ethics, I inherited this factory from my father who was respected among his peers for his ethics ... I must carry his legacy [O1-F1]

A similar opinion was also shared by the owner of another small factory, who further added that large business groups were ready to do anything just to get work orders, which was ultimately pushing small factory owners like him out of business. The buyers were also taking advantage of this and aggressively negotiated the price, ultimately placing the work orders with the cheapest offerers, which, at the time of the interviews, were the big groups.

I used to shake hands with buyers before [as in doing business with dignity] and now I have to beg them to give me work. We are the passengers on a sinking ship. We try to grab whatever we get in order to remain afloat. [O4-F5]

From these responses, it appears that in such a competitive situation, most of the small and medium-sized factory owners were obviously looking for options to reduce production costs and increase revenues. It seems that the most common ways to achieve this were to offer minimum wages to workers and to continuously look for safety shortcuts. The manager of a small factory thereby commented:

Do not demand more [safety improvements], rather, thank and appreciate us for whatever [our own style of safety practices] we are implementing. [M10-F5]

6.2.4 Factory Size and Performance

As mentioned earlier, a significant portion of the apparel industry in Bangladesh consists of small and medium-sized factories which are primarily involved in CMT operations. These factories are basically a part of the overall apparel production process that includes spinning, weaving/knitting, dyeing, and finishing (see section 2.2 for details). In comparison with the large vertically-integrated apparel business groups, the CMT factories have different forms of trade arrangements with the buyers, whereby they take orders only for CMT and are frequently involved in subcontracting. As a result, these factories accrue varying levels of profit and their investments and commitments towards workplace safety vary significantly in relation to those of large apparel groups. Some small factories often accept work orders at a loss with the expectation of future work orders. The absence of profit for prolonged periods of time is likely to negatively affect workplace safety practices. In the context of this research, it appeared that faced with fierce competition, small factories could just generate enough revenue and could not always comply with institutional demands for workplace safety. Hence, in order to increase their survival potential, they were opting for safety shortcuts. On the other hand, due to the huge financial capacity ensured by easy access to bank loans, political influences, and various ‘special favours’ (see section 2.4 for details), the large business groups had the capacity to invest in complying with such institutional demands for safety.

In this regard, the participating managers from small factories advocated for safety protocols to be determined based on the size and capacity of the establishments, rather than institutions striving to enforce standardised safety governance mechanisms for the whole industry. The manager of a small factory commented:

We simply do not have the money and the infrastructure to implement the factory safety standards as demanded by our buyers ... we must ensure our survival in the business first ... survival comes before safety. [M9-F5]

On the other hand, the manager of a large factory (part of a vertically-integrated apparel group) commented:

We operate 33 factories in our group ... we have the financial capacity to spend millions to comply with the buyers’ safety requirements despite many of our factories not making a profit for the last few years. [M3-F2]

6.2.5 Social and Cultural Impediments Towards a Responsible and Complying Attitude

Bangladesh portrays the image of a developmental welfare state and contends with a serious problem of governance dysfunction, and so, it is rated very poorly in most global indicators of political, economic, and social welfare governance (Mahmud, 2014). The economic plight of the general population—i.e., the narrow economic or financial needs to survive undermines commitments to workplace safety. The majority of the participant managers of this study shared their views about the low value placed on commitments, social responsibilities, compliance, and civic sense by the society as a whole and linked these attitudinal attributes with the social degradation of values and norms. Furthermore, the extant literature presented earlier (see section 2.2) showed that a culture of widespread corruption and impunity has been instilled in an environment in which political patronage and special ‘favours’ have contributed to the growth of the industry and the calling out of factories for non-compliance is actively discouraged.

In this regard, all the supply chain representatives and most of the participating managers (except the owners and CEOs) were found to be concerned about ethical and transparent business practices conducted by their employers. They showed their concerns (both openly and discreetly) about the factory owners not being honest about their companies’ business decision-making process. They concurred that they had limited or in most cases, no knowledge of their factories’ performance, business and finance-related information, as these were kept confidential and undisclosed by their employers (the factory owners). A supply chain representative commented:

No factory shares its information with the public ... what’s new about all owners paying bribes to audit firms to show that their factories are in the red? [S3-Supply Chain]

The interviews revealed that most safety-related decisions flowed from the top down—i.e., in most cases, the factory owners were singlehandedly determining the safety protocols to be practised in their factories. This was also substantiated through observations that the middle and lower-level managers had little or no authority to become involved in the decision-making process let alone workers. This is evidenced in the following comment made by a middle-level manager of a large factory:

I can just propose [safety measures] but the final decision on whether or not to implement them comes from him [the owner]. Sir [the owner] can just say that the company did not make enough money to spend on this safety issue. [M5-F3].

This is a potential source of distributive injustice that disempowers the workforce, violates worker rights, and contravenes any framework agreements reached in the global apparel supply chain networks. When

private and public safety governance mechanisms such as the Accord, the Alliance, and the NTPA share their success stories of achieving massive improvements in establishing workplace democracy, it needs to be noted that coercion and the extortion of labour no longer need to involve the use of physical force. What surfaced during the fieldwork was that, when the workers feel economically vulnerable due to extreme financial hardship, fear the loss of their livelihoods, and lack any social welfare support, the employers merely need to insist that they meet targets by certain deadlines, and keep up with their workload.

Nonetheless, all the participant managers agreed that clear progress had been made in the workplace safety situation in the apparel industry over the past few years. They reported that they provided workers with regular EFS safety-related training sessions. This was also confirmed by the participant workers, who believed their factories to be safe and asserted that they would not enter the premises if they found it to be unsafe. However, as noted, despite possessing a fair level of understanding of safety, the workers, in general, showed a nonchalant and carefree attitude towards safety. In this regard, the study teased out another interesting issue that had not been predicted. The participant managers emphasised that the country's poor education system and ineffective social learning mechanisms were contributing to a lack of development of moral responsibility and civic sense and to decreased social awareness, and were closing the avenues to becoming well-rounded citizens. The sample managers pointed out that, when a whole society lacks social values, pays little attention to obedience to authority, and becomes accustomed to ignoring rules and policies, the struggle to manage employees and workers and get them to follow company policies and safety instructions becomes a daily challenge. In this regard, they pointed out numerous non-complying social attitudes that people demonstrate in their everyday lives. Some key examples of this are as follows:

Starting from kindergarten and until university, show me where students are taught about morality and ethics, to be good citizens, and develop good manners ... haven't we destroyed our education system by giving the task to all uneducated and corrupted politicians? Our schools do not have playgrounds for kids, we never went out on a field trip while at school and college, our schools are established in rented apartment buildings where bedrooms have been turned into classrooms ... what do you expect from these pupils? [O1-F1]

After 49 years of independence, we have not yet learnt to stand in a queue in any public place. [M5-F3]

No one follows any sign! See, everyone ignores the sign that we have put in front of a lift mentioning that the maximum carrying capacity is six or eight ... employees laugh ... every time there are 10 to 12 people squeezing in. [M5-F3]

There are no traffic rules, no one follows any traffic lights/signals ... there is no punishment for rule violation [M6-F3]

We all throw rubbish in the streets, the whole street is our dustbin ... everyone throws everything in the street ... parents literally tell their children to throw rubbish in the streets because this is what we have been used to. [M6-F3]

My eight-year-old son asked me about a zebra/pedestrian crossing he had seen in a YouTube video, I felt bad telling him that they don't exist in our country. [M6-F3]

We do not follow signs ... no one reads or follows any instruction ... the problem lies with our mentality and attitude towards compliance, no one understands its purpose and importance. [S1-Supply Chain]

The participant managers added that, in a society in which nothing is right, it is already difficult to change the attitudes of people who come from a middle-class or upper-middle-class background; changing those of workers, who come from the poorest class of society, is nearly impossible task. In this regard, the managers expressed frustration and said that, despite training programmes, they were seeing little change in the attitudes of their employees and workers in relation to compliance. One manager commented:

We provide them [the workers] with PPE but, if you just go to the production floor now, you will see that many of them are not using it ... we do not know what more we can do. [M4-F2]

The managers even asked the researcher to find out what they were doing wrong and to provide them with guidance in regard to what they should be doing in order to change the workers' attitudes towards safety compliance. In this regard, it can be highlighted that no systematic evaluation of training outcomes was observed in any of the participating factories. The managers simply did not know that any training session should be followed-up by some sort of process and outcome evaluation. Managers simply arrange monthly or periodical training programs just to tick the checklist for compliance requirements—a vague practice that defies the purpose of training.

Another interesting issue teased out by this research is the influence of religion on managerial attitudes towards the compliance of safety. Religion plays an important role in the daily lives of many Bangladeshis and in the broader social dynamics. A faith-inspired managerial approach can make important contributions to factory safety governance, as managers often utilise a ‘value-based’ approach in making safety-related decisions. Although the scope of this research does not cover the broader role played by religious values, institutions, and leaders in relation to workplace safety practices, it was insightful to find that managerial motivation for safety compliance does not always come from supply chain behaviours and social factors; rather, it is sometimes rooted in the managers’ religious beliefs. A handful of the participant top-level managers and CEOs referred to their personal morality as the driving force behind their motivation to ‘do the right thing’; they referred to their Islamic religious teachings by quoting the Hadith³³ “Pay the labourer his wages before his sweat dries.”³⁴ and “There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm.”³⁵.

From the interviews, it transpired that a faith-inspired ‘value-based’ managerial approach had the potential of impacting workplace safety practices. Religious values served as an inspiration and also shaped managerial activities in distinctive ways; for example, owners going beyond company policy to help workers in need by offering them personal loans to help with weddings, their children’s admission to school, hospital costs, and funerals, and making donations to nearby religious institutions, primary schools, etc. Furthermore, some moral values were also drawn from religious teachings—e.g., the moral self-censure in regard to not getting involved in unethical business practices—which happened to be highly influential within the business community in which they operated. The following two comments can be cited in this regard:

Another reason for me to care for my workers is my religion ... I try to help them personally ... I could have taken huge bank loans like other large companies for my personal gain [with the intention of not repaying], but that would have been unethical and I would be asked about my actions on Judgement Day. [O1-F1]

³³ A collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) which, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunnah), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Qur’an (Oxford Dictionary, 2019).

³⁴ Sunan Ibn Majah, Vol 3, Book 16, Hadith 2443.

³⁵ Sunan Ibn Majah, Vol. 3, Book 13, Hadith 2340.

Call it charity or CSR; as Muslims, our intention of doing good for our people and society should originate within ourselves ... We are not loan defaulters and we have been paying our instalments on time for decades. [O2-F2]

Nonetheless, considering all these social and cultural factors and impediments and the challenges of doing business in Bangladesh, the managers overall thought that they should be given the sole authority and freedom to decide upon the safety protocols needed to keep their workplaces safe, instead of being guided or controlled by various third-party social compliance authorities.

6.3 The Socio-economic Characteristics of Workers' Livelihoods

From the fieldwork, a number of significantly important issues pertaining to the poor socio-economic situations of the workers emerged which influenced their attitude towards workplace safety. During the interviews, all the participating factory owners and managers shared their views about the realities of the life situations of their workers—e.g., economic hardship, risky commuting, domestic violence, substandard accommodation, lack of housing, lack of access to healthcare, and no social security— issues for which the workers' attitudes towards risk and safety appeared as 'lax' in managerial views. This information was then substantiated when interviewing the workers themselves and conducting the non-participant observations. These issues are highlighted in the following sections.

6.3.1 Minimum Wages and High Cost of Living

When interviewing the workers, it was found that they were facing extreme hardship in making ends meet because of the minimum wages and the relatively high cost of living in cities, with more than 80% of factory workers sliding below the poverty level (Chowdhury & Ullah, 2018). In 2018, the Bangladeshi government moved to raise the monthly minimum wage for apparel workers—for the first time in five years—up from the previous BDT 5,300 (approx. £45) to BDT 8,000 (approx. £68) (BHRRC, 2018). However, this amount was hardly sufficient to even cover the basic need for food, let alone to maintain a decent life. The factory owners also said that they could not afford to pay a living wage³⁶. Therefore, it was found that workers frequently looked for jobs at other factories where the wage was higher even by just as little as £5 a month.

³⁶ Supply chain actors had been calling for the living wage to be raised to at least BDT 16,000 (approx. £137 per month) (BHRRC, 2018).

Empirical studies show that the rent of their substandard accommodation consumed around 60% of the monthly wage of the workers (Chowdhury & Ullah, 2010). While interviewing, the participating workers testified that they came from very poor families, sometimes being the only earning family members. A large number of them had migrated to the major cities from rural areas with the hope of employment, earning, and taking care of their families. One of the biggest challenges these workers faced was the high living cost in the cities and the unavailability of decent accommodation. In this regard, the researcher was involved in informal talks with a few workers on their way home after work and found that due to a large portion of the workers being unmarried women, due to social stigma, it was difficult to find landlords willing to let to single women. In most cases, these women had ended up living in slums or in unimaginably unhygienic shanties where one small room was shared by a number of them. Other studies in this regard revealed that whether a place in a slum or a room in a shanty, these lodgings were not cheap, as they were operated and controlled by local politicians, racketeers, and trade union leaders, and were breeding grounds for extortion, violence, prostitution, and drug dealings (Begum et al, 2010; Riaduzzaman, 2017). There was always the risk that to establish dominance and gain control over these slums and shanties, rival street gangs would resort to forced eviction, arson attacks, violence, etc., which would make dwellers' lives unimaginably hard. Examples of this state of affairs are the two arson attacks that took place over a period of five months apart in 2020 in one such large slum in the Mirpur area of Dhaka, leaving hundreds of workers homeless (Rabbi, 2020). Hundreds of shanties had been gutted in the Mohakhali slum fires, which had repeatedly occurred in 2012, 2015, 2016, 2020, and 2021, leaving thousands of workers and low-earning people homeless (Manabzamin, 2021; The Daily Star, 2021).

6.3.2 Domestic Violence

The literature focusing on developing countries shows that employment increases women's bargaining power in their domestic relationships, enhances their status, improves their household finances, and protects them against domestic violence (Naved et al., 2018). However, this research found that domestic violence persisted among female factory workers because they were seen as challenging gender norms and threatening their husbands' status or exercise of power. In particular, should a woman worker start to earn as much or more than her husband, it could undermine her husband's role as the breadwinner and challenge the dominant aspect of his gender identity.

In the context of this study, married female workers who lived in the slums/ghettos frequently faced domestic violence from their husbands. Being dependent on their wives' incomes, many unemployed husbands would take their wages to fuel their drug and gambling addictions. Should the wives try to

resist, they would be subjected to violence and domestic abuse and sometimes even be forced into prostitution. This was evidenced in the following comments:

We feel safe when we are in the factory ... My husband does not take care of me and my children ... he comes home drunk and beats me and our children ... My [factory] owner is a very good man like his father. He listens to my problems when I meet him and he helps me financially. This is why I have been working here for the last 17 years. [W2-F1]

I heard that he [the husband] has another wife somewhere ... he takes money from me for his drug and gambling addiction ... That is why I am happy to spend as much time as possible in the factory. [W8-F6]

These males were uneducated and came from poor backgrounds, which had caused them to believe that they were in control of women and their sexuality, expecting their wives to be subservient. Empirical studies show that the traditional patriarchal social norms, religious fanaticism, and lack of education enforced this control by confining women to their homes, placing restrictions on their education, and limiting the scope of their employment (Mamun et al., 2018). These norms constrained women's social and financial independence while positioning men in a 'superior' role. Hence, the husbands of the female factory workers strongly adhered to beliefs of masculinity, which they practised by imposing their dominance and control over them.

6.3.3 Risky Commuting

Risky commuting is another important issue that surfaced during the fieldwork. It was found that the workers' daily commutes were highly risky ventures. Bangladesh is notorious for its lack of road and pedestrian safety. The country's 2020 annual road accident monitoring report shows that as many as 6,686 people had lost their lives and 8,600 had been injured in a total of 4,891 reported road accidents (Antara, 2021). The actual numbers are understood to be much higher, as these data refer only to the major accidents that had taken place on the main motorways and had been recorded by the local police stations. In such dangerous circumstances, the workers were regularly putting themselves at risk twice a day while walking to their workplaces in the morning and returning to their homes late in the day. The workers could not afford any travel expenses and were thus compelled to commute on foot. Furthermore, the number of bus operators is insufficient to accommodate such a huge number of workers and the locations of the majority of factories are also not covered by the bus routes.

During the observations, the factory workers were found to be vulnerable to the dangers caused by the broken or uneven narrow sidewalks and footpaths, uncovered roadside drains and manholes, electric pylons, signposts, accumulated garbage, stacks of construction materials and of roadside shops/vendor merchandise, etc. In the absence of functional sidewalks, the workers were forced to walk on busy roads. The lack of pedestrian bridges further impelled the workers to cross such roads amid the heavy traffic, thereby increasing the number of casualties. In general, motorists were found to show little care towards or patience with pedestrians, hardly providing any easy crossing opportunity voluntarily. The workers would therefore cross over by forming groups in order to exert some form of pressure on the approaching traffic stream and not paying any attention to the oncoming vehicles, literally forcing the motorists to slow down by exhibiting a hostile attitude.

6.3.4 Extended Working Hours, Few Holidays and Statutory Leaves

According to sections 100 and 102 of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, no factory worker can ordinarily be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than eight hours a day and more than 48 hours a week (based on 6 days a week). Also, a worker may do a maximum of two hours of overtime a day; thereby, the total number of weekly working hours, including overtime, should not exceed 60 hours.

The working hour situation observed in this study's context, however, was somewhat different. The daily working hours and overtime were frequently found to exceed those legally prescribed, with no uniformity among the factories in terms of the number of daily or weekly hours worked. The working hours were found to usually range between nine and 14 per day (including overtime) and the factories frequently ran night shifts depending on their workloads. On average, three hours of overtime per day were reported by the participating managers when the work pressure was high, although how often this occurred was unclear. This exceeded the legal limit of two hours of overtime per day. During the fieldwork, all the participant factories were found to have installed modern technology—such as fingerprint or face scanners—to keep track of the workers' attendance records in computerised systems. Interestingly, two participating managers admitted that they did not use these scanners to record any night shifts and overtime hours. The overtime calculations were done manually, varied among the factories, and did not comply with the prescribed regulations. More interestingly, when the participant workers from those two factories were asked about their overtime hours, they initially completely denied doing any. However, they were repeatedly reassured that their responses would be kept confidential and that they would not face any repercussions for telling the truth, the workers admitted that they frequently did overtime; not always because they were forced by their managers, but mostly because of the extra income they would

get for working more. The possibility to do some overtime was viewed as a concession and the extra earnings made a big difference on the workers' total incomes. From the interviews conducted with the workers, it also emerged that the managers had trained them to not reveal their overtime information to the social compliance auditors in order to avoid any future consequences. For example, a participating worker first said:

We do not do overtime here. Our owner is good and never forces us to work overtime. [W7-F6]

Then, after reassurance that responses would be kept confidential, the same worker stated:

We do overtime in the evening or sometimes at night ... not everyone does overtime, but who would not want to earn more? We are poor people and any extra money is a big help to us.

Furthermore, with respect to national holidays and observances, the workers were generally not given their legal leave entitlements. National holidays were not given much importance by most of the factory managers, and even International Workers' Day (1 May) and some other important national events—like the country's independence day, victory day, etc., which are considered to be the most traditional and important holidays—were viewed as being of little relevance in most factories. For example, as the workers had never been given the day off on International Workers' Day, this year, there was mass labour unrest across the industry on 1 May 2021, which further lingered on for Eid al-Fitr³⁷ on 13 May 2021, as the factory owners had decided to allow only three days Eid holidays, instead of the regular seven to ten (Chua, 2021; Kaiwar, 2021).

Two factory owners clearly admitted that they do not offer maternity and paternity leave even though it is a statutory leave provision. While the labour law prescribes that every female worker is entitled to get 3 months paid and 3 months unpaid (totalling 6 months) maternity leave and 15 days paternity leave, these employers justified their decisions by saying that this is a kind of a control mechanism they implement to keep the workers' demands under control. One factory owner said,

I know I am violating a labour law condition, but trust me, if I start giving workers everything that is mentioned in the labour law, they will start asking for more and more ... they will come up with newer and unjustified demands that I will not be able to fulfil. I faced this in 2009 and one of my factories was closed for four years ... their demands were endless and

³⁷ A significant religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide that marks the end of the month-long sunrise-to-sunset fasting of Ramadan (Britannica, 2021).

when I denied listening to them, they started protesting and vandalising my factory building and machinery, and one person got killed in a fight ... do you remember? No one [referring to the Government and the BGMEA] came forward to help me deal with that situation. After reopening in 2013, I decided to have strict control over this and it's still operating fine ... they [workers] deserve this. [O1-F1]

On a similar note, the other factory owner [O2-F2] also said that in order to keep the workers and employees in control, he does not pay any retirement benefit, provident fund, gratuity, paid leave, earned leave, and compensation related to lay-off, retrenchment, discharge, injuries and deaths.

6.4 Other Factors Influencing Workers' Attitudes Towards Safety

A few other factors influencing worker attitudes towards workplace safety practices were identified from the fieldwork. During their interviews, the participating workers were asked to share their understanding of workplace safety. They admitted to having to attend safety-related training sessions periodically offered by their employers and international social audit companies. From their interview responses, it appeared that they have a basic level of understanding of EFS related safety issues. They were also aware that they could be injured, experience long-term health effects, and loss their lives while at work, however, they were not found to be concerned about accidents and injuries and were quite comfortable working in the factories. However, it was insightful to find that the workers' perceptions of the safety associated with their attitudes towards risk were low and that they could not convincingly relate human errors or behavioural negligence with accidents. They were found to be uncertain and unobservant when asked questions related to their opinions about the improvements needed in relation to safety provisions in their factories and about the causes of accidents in the industry. All the participating workers stated that they had never had any complaints about workplace safety as practised in their factories and showed little concern in regard to the past accidents that had occurred in the industry. Most workers thought that no one was to blame for the accidents and incidents that had happened, ascribing them to bad luck or ill fate. This fatalistic mentality is reflected in the following statements:

I do not know much about why accidents happen in other factories ... I think electrical problems cause them ... it is bad luck. No one can tell when something will fail or won't work. [W3-F1]

When an accident happens, it just happens ... No one can control it. If God saves us, we will survive. If God does not save us, then no one can. [W5-F2]

Further observations conducted on the factory floors revealed that many workers continued to perform their work unsafely by ignoring basic safety practices such as not (presumably?) using PPE while working in noisy and dusty environments, handling chemicals and hazardous materials, or operating machinery. Despite their training and adequate supply of PPE, some workers showed a tendency to not wear masks, finger-guards, earplugs, etc. Whenever the line supervisors were out of sight, they would just take off their PPE and put them back on again whenever the supervisors returned. It was like a game of cat and mouse and many workers were found to enjoy engaging in it. The line supervisors were observed having to continuously keep reminding the workers to use their PPE for their own safety and were sometimes frustrated by their non-compliant attitudes.

A major reason for this negligence could be the high-pressure work environment. Forgoing safe working practices was considered 'convenient', in that it enabled the workers to perform their tasks much more quickly and efficiently in a high-demand environment where they are while being constantly mindful of the need to meet the hourly/daily production targets. During the observation, it was noticed that, when the workers were busy and pressured to meet their production targets, they just ignored the basic safety steps to focus more on productivity. Furthermore, their indifferent attitudes towards accidents could also be related to their poor socio-economic backgrounds and everyday unavoidable exposure to life-threatening situations. Any workplace safety concerns raised, and safety governance mechanisms prescribed or demanded by various public and private institutions appeared to be nothing more than a luxury to them. When workers regularly struggle to make ends meet and lead lives in which their basic human rights are ignored on a daily basis and safety at home is non-existent, safety at work becomes a lesser concern. From the workers' responses, it transpired that any safety measures—even if minimal—taken by the factory managers were considered adequate by the workers, who were just happy to be in employment. This heightened their perceptions of safety at work, regardless of the actual safety conditions found at their factories.

Another interesting aspect that sheds light on the workers' attitude towards workplace safety practices is the link to their personalities. This behavioural aspect was observed mostly in male workers, who considered showing a carefree personality as a sign of masculinity and toughness in front of their female co-workers. They viewed not wearing any safety equipment or showing a carefree attitude towards the safety protocols as conveying the idea that they were tough and that nothing would happen to them. In contrast, other workers (both male and female) chose not to use PPE in order to avoid being teased or made fun of by their co-workers for being naive.

Chapter Summary

The main theme of this chapter was to explore how different institutional and social factors influence managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices. In this regard, it presented a major notion, i.e., the supply chain and various social factors that influence managerial attitudes towards workplace safety.

Overall, the interviews revealed that the participating managers, at all levels, held both complying and discontented attitudes towards workplace safety practices and they were keen to do what they perceived as necessary to protect their factories and workforces. However, challenges were found to arise when complying attitudes collided with economic interest as a result of the various supply chain and social factors presented above. The managers tended to interpret these factors as ‘problems’ and in the absence of good governance and institutional incapacity in the country, many of them were able to disregard any institutional demands for workplace safety. In fact, the participant managers and supply chain representatives explicitly reported incidents of ethically questionable activities associated with the managerial practice of workplace safety. They knew that, in most situations, there would be few or no repercussions for their non-complying attitudes towards safety, as they were aware of the loopholes they could exploit to counter the supremacy of the private and public institutional actors enacting safety governance mechanisms. They also believed that, given the strong ties between the ruling political party and domestic business elites, it would be highly unlikely that any marginal increase in the state’s capacity over the previous years, or any more substantial increase that may occur in the future, would result in meaningful changes to workplace safety situations in the face of corruption and impunity.

The above findings further show varying managerial attitudes towards workplace safety practices. It may also be inferred that factory owners, being the key decision-makers within their factories, play a major role in making safety practice decisions which are then carried out by the managers. However, managers do not and cannot act in a vacuum and are part of a wider institutional context that plays a crucial role in how they interpret and respond to institutional safety demands. Hence, it can be argued that managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices is constructed by a complex interplay between global supply chain factors and local contextual elements. In this regard, the next chapter places these varying managerial attitudes towards workplace safety along a spectrum of four salient agency types—i.e., committed, compliant, discontented, and evasive—and provides a detailed discussion of how these salient factors are relevant to the investigation of managerial moral agency in relation to Bandura’s moral disengagement framework.

7. Discussion

*Research is creating new knowledge.*³⁸

Neil Armstrong

Chapter Overview

The previous chapter addressed the second research question and subsequently presented the wider institutional factors influencing managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety. This chapter brings together the overall inferences drawn from the empirical findings presented in the previous two chapters, reflects back on the literature, and highlights this study's contributions with the framework of a coherent body of knowledge. The chapter starts by presenting the inferences from the empirical findings and attempts to construct the concept of moral agency in the context of this study. The discussion then presents the study's theoretical contribution in relation to Bandura's moral disengagement theory and offers an extension of such theory by developing a spectrum of managerial moral agency. The discussion on moral agency is then further extended by revisiting the ethical theories found in the literature to bridge the concept of moral agency with workplace safety. A theoretical framework is then derived from the overall discussion to highlight the theoretical and methodological contribution of this study.

7.1 Inferences of the Empirical Findings and the Construction of the Concept of Moral Agency

The empirical findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 answered the first and second research questions (see section 1.4) and portrayed (i) the attitudes held by managers towards safety and safety governance mechanisms—i.e., their interpretations of such mechanisms and responses to the institutional demands for compliance, and (ii) the wider institutional factors that influence managers' moral agency in relation to workplace safety. These aspects are not distinct; rather, they are intertwined and collectively impact managerial moral agency in regard to workplace safety. The following discussion seeks to extract inferences from these key findings and to relate them to a coherent body of knowledge, contributing to that knowledge in the process.

The empirical findings of this study highlight several of institutional safety governance mechanisms aimed at regulating and promoting a standard industry-wide workplace safety culture. In this regard, the contemporary workplace safety literature has attempted to make a comparison between the supply-chain

³⁸ The quote is taken from Qualtrics, available at: <https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/research-quotes/>

initiatives and the local governmental ones implemented over the last few years (i.e., in the post-Rana Plaza period) and has strongly emphasised supply chain initiatives over the local government ones (Ahlquist & Mosley, 2021; James et al., 2018; Schübler, et al., 2019). One established notion stemming from such comparison is the favourable view of supply chain initiatives such as the Accord and the Alliance, which presents their implementation as highly successful and promising in relation to addressing factory safety, establishing worker rights, and gaining considerable support from the relevant stakeholders, including factory managers and workers (Croucher et al., 2019; Donaghey & Reinecke, 2017). In this regard, the literature presented earlier (in Chapter 2) acknowledges the accomplishments of the supply chain initiatives and calls them ‘ground-breaking beacons of hope’ (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2020), ‘game changers’ (Conradt, 2013), and a ‘major breakthrough’ (Hensler & Blasi, 2013). In contrast, most studies lambast the governmental initiatives, questioning their efficiency, capacity, and commitment (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2019; European Commission, 2018; Frenkel et al., 2017; Kang, 2021; Wiersma, 2018).

However, the findings of this study challenge this partial view on two grounds. First, accidents have continued to occur even after the implementation of the multi-stakeholder safety governance mechanisms (e.g., the Accord, Alliance, NTPA, etc.), which not only questions the institutionalisation of the concept of privity between buyers and suppliers but also the ways in which these governance mechanisms have been enacted to deter workplace accidents. Secondly, the empirical evidence presented in Chapters 5 and 6 clearly shows that these initiatives have remained unsuccessful in winning the moral support of most factory managers. The power of these initiatives does not thus seem to rely on moral suasion; rather, it appears to be dependent on institutional force and compulsion. Some literature also partially echoes this; for example, a few recent studies have critiqued these safety governance initiatives as heralds of a new CSR paradigm that afford buyers new methods for controlling any liability over supplier factories and have called them ‘CSR gimmicks’ (Donaghey & Reinecke, 2017). Some contemporary studies have further highlighted the inadequacies of these initiatives by labelling them as a ‘whitewashing effect’ (Salminen, 2018) and ‘limited and tokenistic’ (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019).

While there is clear evidence of safety violations and unethical business practices in the industry, the participating managers were found to be convinced that they were playing a functional role in practising workplace safety and also in complying with institutional demands for safety. On this point, MacIntyre’s (1999) notion of moral agency in constraining contexts appears relevant (see Section 3.1.1). MacIntyre posited that an individual’s capacity for exercising moral agency typically depends on particular social

settings in which individuals are immersed in the organisational rule systems (MacIntyre, 1999, 2007). The findings of this study seem similarly portray managers as part of the norms of social and organisational rule systems, which influence their moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices. This means that they base their morality on interpretations that are consistent with social and organisational norms. In this regard, several themes (presented in Sections 5.2, 5.3, and 6.1.3) show managers having adopted their ‘own style’ of safety practices—which is not always relevant to the institutionally enacted safety governance mechanisms—with most of them having even confidently interpreted such adoption as an attitude of compliance towards institutionally enacted safety governance mechanisms. However, this study found that to avoid or circumvent these governance mechanisms, managers regularly engage in several apparently unethical actions that they consider as a normal facet of doing business. Some of the participant managers admitted that, while these were in fact ‘unethical acts’, they had no other choice than engage in them to ensure the survival of their businesses due to the complexity, corruption, and competition that exist in the supply chains and local business environments.

In the context of this study, the wider institutional factors experienced by the managers appear to have causal foundations that side-line their agent-centric values and sense of moral obligation, constraining their ethical decision-making process in relation to workplace safety. In Dobson’s (2009:45) view, managers “compartmentalise themselves within the confines of a morally stunted version of utilitarianism, namely cost-benefit analysis”, which in the context of this research is a morally disengaged behaviour where managers do a utilitarian cost-benefit calculation where the benefits resulting from avoiding safety practices are deemed to outweigh compliance. So, to construct managerial moral agency and explain the instances of moral disengagement found in the context of this study, the loci and the associated mechanisms of Bandura’s moral disengagement theory are now revisited and discussed in the order in which they occur according to Bandura himself.

Table 3.2 showed and explained the four loci of moral disengagement and their eight associated mechanisms. The first such locus was ‘behavioural’, which claims that people morally disengage by rationalising their behaviours in three different ways: moral justification, euphemistic labelling, and advantageous comparison (Bandura, 1999). Examples of these behavioural disengagements were evidenced in the empirical findings of this study. For example, the sample factory owners justified their unethical behaviours—such as paying the lowest wage to workers, scrimping in regard to statutory benefits like maternity leave and holidays, offering no job security, etc.—by proudly claiming that they were creating jobs for millions of poor and unemployed people who would otherwise be a burden on

society, and giving financial freedom to females, thus contributing to the socio-economic growth of the nation. Their contraposition of unemployed females having to live through domestic violence, prostitution, scavenging, and human trafficking, against working in their factories show their attitude of ‘advantageous comparisons’, whereby they confidently affirmed that their factories were a safe haven for women despite evidence of sweatshop conditions in the industry. Similar behavioural relevance can be drawn in those instances in which the sample managers were found to be involved in various unethical business activities such as bribing, falsifying and concealing documents, deceiving supply chain actors about safety records, etc. The managers morally justified these unethical behaviours by verbally sanitising them (euphemistic labelling)—i.e., by making them seem justified and turning them into reasonable ways of doing business under prevailing competitive and challenging conditions. The tendency to call bribes ‘speed money’ is clear evidence of euphemistic labelling. Furthermore, the findings (Chapter 5) show that any institutional demands for safety compliance and institutional safety governance mechanisms were interpreted by the sample managers as bureaucratic, costly, rigid, and stressful—and, in places, their associated comments were euphemistically labelled in order to blame the supply chain and the local government. The institutionally enacted safety provisions were therefore tweaked or circumvented, which ultimately points towards morally disengaged behaviours.

The next locus was ‘agency’, which refers to the ways in which people make sense of their own choices and associated actions, and was associated with mechanisms of displacement and diffusion of responsibilities (Bandura, 1999). These types of behaviour were found among the participating managers in those instances in which they mentioned that they were just following the factory owners’ orders related to factory safety. In these ‘top-down’ factory governance situations, displacement of responsibility was clearly being enacted by the sample mid-and junior-level managers when they highlighted that they had little authority in the safety-related decision-making processes and were not authorised to establish any safety protocol without the permission of the ‘top-management’, and hence were not responsible for any consequent safety violations. Diffusion of responsibility was also evidenced by the various unethical actions of the participating factory owners and managers, which led to safety violations and to the circumvention of institutional safety governance mechanisms, and for which they blamed the supply chains and global buyers, and their way of doing business. They did not view themselves as liable for any safety violations taking place in the industry or for what other irresponsible factory owners/managers were doing. Several other comments presented in the findings (Chapter 6) further show how the attitude whereby managers displace and diffuse their responsibility towards safety is linked to various local

contextual issues, for which they blame on corruption, cronyism, oligarchy, the inefficiency of the government, and various cultural and contextual barriers.

The third locus—outcomes—included a mechanism of disregard or distortion of consequences (Bandura, 1999). This is the only disengagement mechanism for which this study did not find any direct evidence. Disregard or distortion of consequences occurs when an individual morally disengages by ignoring or verbally minimising the negativity of an outcome (Newman et al., 2020). In section 4.4.2, it was mentioned that the scope of this study excluded any factory that had been the scene of any recent accident. So, the participants, in this study had not been personally involved in or experienced any tragic incidents involving severe injuries and deaths in their factories. Therefore, it was expected that the participants would not show any disregard or distortion of consequences referring to any workplace disaster, rather showing their sympathy and concern for such incidents. However, a few participants (an owner and a few workers) affirmed that not all accidents occur due to human errors, but that some happen as ‘acts of God’ or just simply because they are ‘accidents’ devoid of any human involvement. Capturing such a cast of mind is outside the scope of moral disengagement theory. In this regard, it may be assumed that evidence of disregard or distortion of consequences could have been found, had the sample included factories in which accidents had taken place. As the apparel industry is 100% export-oriented, immediately after an accident, supply chain and government investigations usually take place. So, it could be presumed that the post-accident investigation reports would sufficiently provide the details of the accidents and of any damage to human lives and property. As a result, the factory personnel may have less scope to disregard or distort any actual consequences of accidents.

The last locus—victim—explained how the perpetrator addresses the victim of any unethical conduct and included the mechanisms labelled dehumanisation and attribution of blame (Bandura, 1999). Evidence of these two mechanisms can be found in the responses of the participants to this study. It was interesting to find that the factory owners who referenced religion and highlighted their personal morality as the driving force behind their motivation to ‘do the right thing’, also showed a dehumanising attitude towards workers—e.g., as a mechanism of controlling workers, they mentioned that they did not provide them with some statutory benefits and welfare support (e.g., maternity leave, holidays, job security, bargaining freedom, adequate PPE for HAZMAT protection, etc.) and that their workers ‘deserved’ such treatment for their continuous demands and disruptions. This type of neglectful attitude towards workers involves dehumanisation, with workers’ lives being seen as liable to be endangered in order to satisfy the need for production from a purely utilitarian standpoint. Similarly, attribution of blame was also found to be

common among the participating managers, who blamed the workers for workplace accidents, commenting that these mostly occur due to the negligence shown by the workers, and further commenting that, although they were been doing their best to increase awareness among them, their poor socio-economic background (see section 6.3) meant that they remained negligent towards safety. This type of neglectful attitude towards workers involves dehumanisation, with workers' lives being seen as liable to be endangered to satisfy the need for production from a purely utilitarian standpoint.

The above discussion makes it clear that managerial moral agency is significantly influenced by various institutional and local contextual factors. The two research questions of this study entailed the exploration of the broad array of underlying factors that can initiate moral disengagement mechanisms among managers both at the individual and organisational levels. These disengaged acts or behaviours were sometimes expressed explicitly by some of the individual managers. At the same time, their references to visibly established malpractices in the industry or carelessness shown by other factory managers without any repercussion affirm the presence of shared or collective morally disengaged behaviours. The institutional safety governance mechanisms are not targeted at a single factory, rather it is a collective effort and ideally an industry-wide practice. If each manager individually participates in some form of morally disengaged activities following other morally disengaged managers, the collective impact of these can build up to disastrous outcomes, with managers individually remaining unable to realise how their immoral activities are affecting each other and the wider impact they have as a whole. Nonetheless, such morally disengaged behaviours almost always affect the livelihoods of the people associated with apparel production, especially the workers, and therefore have an ethical dimension that should not be omitted from the managers' moral and ethical frames of reference. While Bandura's moral disengagement theory is eminently capable of capturing managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices in the global apparel supply chain context, this study involved the exploration of some conceptual gaps in the theory and the subsequent proposal of an extension of it involving a spectrum of managerial moral agency. The next section provides the details of this theoretical contribution.

7.2 Theoretical Contribution

In developing the concept of moral agency, Bandura built on his ideas of moral disengagement to explain how individuals justify any unethical behaviours in which they engage. Bandura argued that individuals exercise their moral reasoning and agency, which are then translated into immoral actions through moral disengagement mechanisms rooted in their moral standards (Bandura, 1999, 2001). By looking at Bandura's work on moral agency over the past four decades (see Bandura, 1986, 1990*a*, 1990*b*, 2016;

Bandura et al., 1996, 2000), this study has uncovered two interesting moral disengagement theory positions. First, it appeared that Bandura predominantly considered all individuals to have some sort of moral disengagement mechanisms at work within themselves. He argued that, together with their eight cognitive mechanisms, the four loci (behavioural, agency, outcomes, and victim) of his moral disengagement theory function as individual-level, trait-based phenomena. Second, Bandura suggested that people's self-regulation of morality always originates from their own instincts—e.g., their inner principles of morality and ethics.

The empirical investigation conducted for this study refutes these positions. Firstly, this study did not find all its participants to be morally disengaged or involved with unethical activities. Secondly, it also did not find managers' self-sanction of morality to always be originated from their own instincts, rather it was empirically evidenced that morally disengaged behaviours can also be fostered by social and institutional factors. This is further supported by the literature presented earlier (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2) which shows that peoples' moral and ethical values are constructed and developed by dominant social authorities and institutional value systems (e.g., society, religion, culture, government, education, etc.). It was further explained (see Sections 2.4 and 4.2.3) that individual moral agency can be shaped, constrained, and enabled by evolving and emergent institutional rule systems and various contextual factors (see Hodgson 2006, 2003; March & Olsen, 2010; Stocking & Watkins, 2013). So, this study posits that individual moral agency is not always originated and determined by people's internal factors alone; rather it is cultivated through their interactions with other individuals and institutional elements which can result in moral disengagement. So, this study intends to extend Bandura's original conceptualisation of moral disengagement mechanisms from self-originated, individual-level, trait-based phenomena towards social and organisational-level ones where morally disengaged behaviours can be triggered by contextual factors.

The findings of this study, as presented earlier (see Chapters 5 and 6), show that factory managers are governed—and perhaps inhibited—by various institutional and social factors; hence, any morally disengaged attitudes they may hold towards workplace safety practices are guided by their moral choices. This implies a degree of latitude in the interpretation of the safety governance mechanisms that either associate or disassociate them with the safety practice decisions they make for their factories. In this regard, based on its empirical findings, this study proposes the following moral agency spectrum (Table 7.1) suited to explain managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety in apparel factories.

Table 7.1: Managerial moral agency spectrum

Moral Engagement		↔	Moral Disengagement	
Managerial Attitude	Committed	Compliant	Discontent	Defiant
Interpretations (Themes)	- Functional	- Costly - Rigid	- Bureaucratic	- Stressful
Responses (Themes)	- Conformity	- Authority	- Ignorance - Dishonesty	- Blame

In regard to investigating managerial moral agency, the themes discussed in Chapter 5 clearly illustrate, through ten themes, the manager’ interpretations of safety and their responses to institutional safety governance mechanisms. Table 7.1 shows these thematic representations of managerial attitudes, placed along a spectrum of four salient attitude types: committed, compliant, discontent, and defiant, with ‘committed’ as the most engaged and ‘defiant’ being the most disengaged moral agency positions at the two extremities, and ‘compliant’ and ‘discontent’ attitudes in the middle. Table 7.2 shows the description of these attitude types, whereby, among the agencies demonstrated by participating managers in this study, ‘committed’ is considered as fully engaged, ‘compliant’ as partially engaged, ‘discontent’ as partially disengaged and ‘defiant’ as fully disengaged. These attitude types were developed selectively based on cues drawn from the collected data and the literature on strategic responses to institutional pressure and influences (see Clemens & Douglas, 2005; Soundararajan 2014; Vermeulen et al., 2016; Wijethilake et al., 2017). Although the idea of developing a spectrum of moral agency was inspired by the literature, it should be noted that the various responses found in it may overlap or paint a dispersed picture. Against this backdrop, this study offered four agency types that capture the managerial attitudes towards workplace safety found in its context. Three things are important to note here. First, the descriptions of these agencies and attitudes have been developed based on the researchers’ own interpretations of the empirical data. Second, these agency and attitude types, along with their descriptions, should be considered in the context of this study only and should not be taken as universal or standard terms or definitions. Third, it is also important to understand that the relationship between a manager and his work environment may change over time. So, a manager can demonstrate multiple agency types in different situations, as his attitude towards workplace safety may change in different circumstances and be influenced by different institutional factors.

Table 7.2: Types of managerial moral agency and their attitudes types

Moral Agency	Attitude Type	Descriptions
Fully Engaged	Committed	Managerial moral choice or inner motivation towards workplace safety practices. Their belief is that institutional safety governance mechanisms can bring benefit to not only their businesses but also the overall industry. Managers play a functional role in conforming with any institutional safety requirements. Lapses are non-existent.
Partially Engaged	Compliant	Managerial moral choice of conditional conformity with institutional safety governance mechanisms. Safety compliance is maintained at a basic level and only because it is required by the regulations or demanded and monitored by institutional actors. Occasional lapses in safety can be found.
Partially Disengaged	Discontent	Managerial dissatisfaction with the institutional demands for safety governance mechanisms. Managers comply at the bare minimum level simply because they are forced to do so. The importance of safety is little understood and violations occur. Dishonest behaviours aimed at bypassing safety protocols are encouraged by ‘cost and benefit’ judgements and a prevailing culture of impunity.
Fully Disengaged	Defiant	Managerial disapproval of any institutional safety governance mechanisms. Their tendency/intention to avoid or circumvent safety protocols is imposed on them by various unethical means. They consider that safety practices to be stressful and unnecessary. They believe that there will be no repercussions for workplace accidents and safety non-compliance. Hence, there is no sense of moral obligation towards safety practices and safety may be maintained at a bare minimum level, if at all.

The moral agency spectrum proposed above shows that factory owners and managers can demonstrate ‘committed’, ‘compliant’, ‘discontent’, or ‘defiant’ attitudes towards a safety culture and institutional demands for compliance with safety governance mechanisms. The empirical findings of this study present a few pieces of evidence of fully engaged agency—an committed attitude—towards workplace safety, but they mostly show instances in which managers exhibit partially engaged, partially disengaged, and fully disengaged agency towards workplace safety. This highlights situations whereby, when fully engaged, managerial moral agency elevates the integrity of the profession and bolsters the ability to advocate and practice workplace safety in the best interest of people. However, in most cases, this fully engaged moral agency becomes convoluted and compromised when factory owners and managers are faced with the need to make a profit and increase their survival potential in the harsh global supply chain environment.

Hence, a partially engaged agency or compliant attitude towards workplace safety comes into play; one that may not always be self-initiated, but rather adopted in response to supply chain pressure. A partially disengaged agency or discontented attitude was reflected in those instances in which the participant factory owners and managers were found to be highly dissatisfied with the institutionally enacted safety governance mechanisms. The sample managers were found to be employing various unethical means to bypass or circumvent these mechanisms. Sometimes they just ignored some conditions of these prescribed standards or customised the mechanisms by replacing some of the conditions with inferior and less effective options, to ensure their convenience or comfort. These behaviours are a clear indication of moral disengagement. In relation to a defiant attitude towards safety, the managers did not admit their direct involvement with any such attitude, however, they presented information on other factories sufficient to suggest fully disengaged agency towards safety is apparent in the industry, with some owners and managers actively resisting and flouting any safety protocols, especially in the case of subcontracting factories (see Section 2.2 for details).

At the beginning of this section, it was highlighted how Bandura had conceptualised his moral disengagement theory as an individual-level phenomenon and had emphasised that self-censure of morality and justification of immoral behaviours (through the eight disengagement mechanisms) originates only within the agents themselves. Social science researchers assert that a complete social theory must enable researchers to work at three levels of analysis—namely, individual, social, and organisational (Lumineau & Schilke, 2018; Wright, 2015). A growing number of contemporary studies on moral disengagement show that moral disengagement is not always an individual-level phenomenon, but can occur at the social and organisational levels. For example, Moore (2008) showed that immoral behaviours become normalised within organisations through social contagion processes. Martin et al. (2014) found that moral disengagement is inherently a collective phenomenon that is influenced by the ethical climate of an organisation. Johnson and Buckley (2015) claimed that, in social and organisational settings, when one group morally disengages, other groups also follow suit. Nonetheless, all these studies were conducted at a conceptual level.

Through its empirical investigation, this study argues that moral disengagement is not always an individual-level and trait-based phenomenon, and can be a result of external reinforcements that can significantly influence moral agency. In light of this argument, the proposed moral agency spectrum has the potential to capture morally engaged and disengaged behaviour both at the individual and organisational levels. In the context of this study, these levels were found to be intertwined in such a way that the managerial moral agency, the wider institutional factors, and the internal dynamics of the apparel industry interacted with each other to produce a social phenomenon—i.e., workplace safety practices in

apparel factories. The findings of this study clearly reveal that immoral behaviours—such as avoiding or circumventing safety practices and then rationalising that behaviour (through moral disengagement mechanisms)—do not always originate within individual owners and managers, rather, can also originate among groups of owners and managers operating in very large, complex, and competitive business environments in which their moral agency is influenced by various institutional and contextual factors. This is consistent with Bandura’s (1986) social learning theory, where his Bobo doll experiment can be found to be relevant in the context of this study, whereby, managerial immoral activities were found not only to originate within the managers themselves but to also be learnt or adopted from others behaving unethically in the industry. Therefore, this study considers the proposed moral agency spectrum to be suited to work as an extension of moral disengagement theory.

7.3 Bridging Moral Disengagement and Ethical Theories

Scholars emphasise the importance of following some particular philosophical ethical framework for any theoretical construct based on morality/ethics (see Anscombe, 1958; Korsgaard, 1986; Papouli, 2018; Pfordten, 2012). One of the previously highlighted limitations of moral disengagement theory (see section 3.2.1) is that it is detached from any philosophical school of thought—i.e., the theory does not stem from or is not linked to any classical normative ethical theories—which highlights the gap between moral disengagement theory and philosophy. This discussion now endeavours to bridge this gap by explaining the proposed moral agency spectrum (Table 7.1) on the basis of some dominant ethical theories—such as virtue ethics, utilitarianism, and deontology—which were introduced earlier (Chapter 3) to explain the moral/ethical values of human actions.

The moral agency spectrum presented in Table 7.1 shows that managers can be committed, compliant, discontent, or defiant in their practice of workplace safety. It was discussed earlier (Section 3.1.2) how managers—as moral agents—are both morally and legally obliged to practice safety and to comply with any relevant laws and institutionally imposed standards. When managers feel a sense of moral obligation towards safety practices, they possess a fully engaged moral agency, and thereby play a committed role in practising safety. There can be instances when their committed attitude towards safety may not lead to planned behaviour towards compliance due to situational constraints, however, that does not affect or change their good motive/intention. Therefore, this committed attitude can be linked with Aristotelian virtue ethics—i.e., when managers play a committed role in practising safety and remain steadfast, they act in accordance with virtue, thus potentially attaining eudaimonia and remaining content (see Aristotle, 1999, 2009; Collins, 1987; Ross & Brown, 2009). In other words, a committed attitude towards safety

practices is a virtuous intention and a good deed through which managers can ensure happy and safe lives for all the people associated with the apparel industry which also brings to the foreground the rightful engagement of their moral agency in conforming with any institutional demands for safety (see Murphy, 1999; Nussbaum, 1999).

With this character of good intention/motive, a committed attitude (a fully engaged agency) is also closely connected with Kantian deontology and Al-Ghazzali's ethics of nobility. Both these ethical standpoints emphasise the agentic motive/intention of an action, suggesting that the latter's morality does not depend on its consequences, but on the motives held by the person who carries it out (see Wilson & Denis, 2018; Winter, 2016). As such, the good intention/motive behind this committed attitude towards safety, even if the attitude does not lead to planned behaviour towards compliance, will not be stripped of its moral worth. In light of Kantian deontology, the committed attitude of a manager can be explained in two ways: (i) compliance based on inclinations, and (ii) compliance based on obligations to duty (see Alexander & Moore, 2021). This means that committed managers can sense or feel their moral obligations to comply with the institutional and legal requirements of safety practices and that they are regardless of the consequences they highlighted during the interviews (e.g., increased company outlay, inconvenience, greater time deduction, smaller profits, complexity, etc.). This means that, when managers show committed attitudes towards safety compliance, they are doing so not just for the sake of duty, but out of their own free will or good intentions—i.e., personal interests (e.g., inclinations) and personal integrity (e.g., doing the right thing regardless of any challenges), to serve as a paragon for other managers in the industry, and their obedience to authority (e.g., fulfilling institutional and legal requirements/demands for safety).

However, this is not so in the cases of partially engaged agency or compliant attitudes. Compliant managers will conform to institutional requirements/demands for safety not because they feel morally inclined to do so, but because they find themselves in situations in which they have little choice other than involuntary compliance or forced obedience to authority. They would not act as moral agents in the absence of supply chain pressure, or for that matter, should they not be at risk of penalties. This partially engaged agency or compliant attitude is what Kantian deontology and Al-Ghazzali's ethics of nobility call compliance based on obligations to duty, not based on inclinations. In such cases, despite remaining a rightful act, compliance is devoid of any moral worth because we cannot be sure about the true motives—virtuous or otherwise—that underpin it.

In contrast, in the presence of a partially disengaged moral agency with discontented attitudes, managers perceive that the costs involved in engaging in institutional safety governance mechanisms outweigh the benefits, and that such engagement has little relevance to business profit and growth. Those managers who exhibit a fully disengaged agency and defiant attitudes towards safety practices will simply disregard safety and disapprove of any institutional safety governance mechanisms. Whenever possible, they will seek opportunities to avoid or circumvent safety protocols and to achieve their goals by various unethical means. According to Aristotelian virtue ethics, it can be argued that, when managers act with iniquity, their wrongdoings pave the way towards workplace disasters, causing generalised unhappiness and frustration, thereby, leading to a lack of achievement and incomplete lives. On a similar note, following the agentic motive/intention emphasised by Al-Ghazzali and Kant (see Chapter 3 for details), it can be argued that no reason can justify managerial intentions or decisions to ignore or circumvent safety practices; thereby, such intentions become vicious motives in their own right, alongside any other related unethical activities undertaken by factory owners and managers. So, as per Al-Ghazzali's notion, acts based upon these kinds of immoral motives cause people to fall victim to worldly circumstances that can only lead them to unhappiness and failed lives (Griffel, 2020; Parrot, 2017). Similarly, as per Kantian deontology, a wrongly motivated person may not act virtuously for the right reason, but still, feel a certain degree of duty or obligation towards doing so. So, weighing the costs and benefits of a situation and thus ignoring any basic duties (i.e., neglecting safety practices in order to increase profit)—as discontent and defiant managers do—violates the Kantian axioms of categorical imperatives (see Hubbs, 2016; Johnson & Cureton, 2019). According to Kant, people should engage in activities that conform to rules; therefore, although ignoring safety practices may increase profit, it is just wrong in principle, and should thus be avoided. In this regard, discontented and defiant managers: (i) do not show inclinations to or self-interests in practising safety, (ii) demonstrate malicious motives for ignoring safety or practice unethical ways to circumvent safety requirements, and (iii) exhibit disobedience to rules and laws.

Utilitarianism, on the other hand, advocates that actions are moral if they maximise the happiness and well-being of the greatest number of people, and are immoral if they produce the reverse effect (see Hooker, 2016; Linstead et al., 2009). Earlier (Chapter 3), it was discussed how utilitarianism judges the moral worth of actions by the utility of their foreseeable consequences for the people affected by them. In the context of this research, morally engaged committed managers were found to be refrained from engaging in any utilitarian cost and benefit weighing in which workers are considered as valuable assets or production resources. So, to ensure the happiness and well-being of the greatest number of people, such managers play an active role in practising safety as well as in complying with any institutionally

required safety governance mechanisms. In contrast, morally disengaged defiant managers appeared to prioritise profits over people's safety because they consider workers to be mere instruments of production, devoid of value in themselves, but only by virtue of their ability/capacity to contribute to production. Therefore, safety-related cost-cutting is translated into greater savings, and compliance to institutional demands for safety is minimised or avoided. Nonetheless, from both utilitarian and deontological angles, the avoidance or circumvention of workplace safety practices is never a virtuous act.

Among the 28 participants of this study, 16 were managers from different hierarchical levels. When these managers were placed along the moral agency spectrum, only three (two mid-level and one senior) were found to be fully engaged. These managers were rigidly aligned to a committed attitude towards safety practices. The remaining 13 managers were found suited to be fit in the middle, with seven managers in the partially engaged and six in the partially disengaged agency, showing compliant and discontent attitudes respectively. It is worth noting that, managers placed within these two agency types showed dynamic or fluid characteristics—i.e., a tendency to switch between these two categories. This was evidenced in the empirical findings where many of these managers demonstrated both partially engaged and partially disengaged agency in different circumstances and were not aligned to any of one of these positions.

From the above discussion, it can be summarised that the four types of managerial attitudes found in the proposed moral agency spectrum can be adequately linked with dominant normative ethical theories, where Aristotelian virtue ethics, Al-Ghazzali's motives/intentions of actions, and Kantian deontology (inclination) are a good fit with the fully engaged agency. Deontology (obligation) and utilitarianism can be placed in the middle with partially engaged and partially disengaged agencies in different ways, and a lack of morality (immorality) fits within the fully disengaged agency. While Bandura's moral disengagement theory lacks association with any such classical ethical theories, the proposed spectrum may be considered to bridge the concept of moral disengagement with moral philosophy.

7.4 Methodological Contribution

Conducting research on the vast and intricate global apparel supply chain network is extremely challenging. It becomes further sensitive in nature when any attempt is made to investigate managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices in apparel factories that are often the scene of accidents. Selecting participants, then gaining access to factories and interviewing factory owners, managers, and workers, observing their activities, and teasing out the underlying realities that construct,

shape, and influence managerial moral agency are all very arduous tasks, especially when access to such establishments is restricted. Collecting data about sensitive topics such as workplace accidents, safety violations, unethical business practices, various institutional and social challenges and political issues, is strenuous due to a lack of trust between researchers and participants, unfamiliarity with the research process and research ethics, and lack of motivation. Empirical evidence shows the imbalanced power relations among factory owners, managers, and workers which play a significant role in shaping the data obtained (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Hossain, 2019). As a result, it is recommended that the research carries a value-laden axiological approach while conducting the fieldwork and data collection which should be an embedded part of the research process (see Section 4.2.3. for the axiological position and reflexivity of this study). To obtain true data from participants, especially from the managers and workers, factory premises may not always be the right place for interviews, as they may fear future repercussions for participating in research. A possible option could be to arrange interviews off-site after their working hours.

Furthermore, the investigation of workplace safety in factories in Bangladesh is fraught with difficulties for several other reasons. A long history of Western superpower colonisation (i.e., briefly by the Portuguese and the Dutch, then most recently by the British), a late integration into the world economy caused by the country's subjugation by Pakistan until the 1971 liberation war, and the recent openness to foreign trade and investment in response to globalisation has immensely influenced the country's social and cultural systems, which has subsequently given rise to diversified business practices and management styles (Lim, 2018; Mottaleb & Sonobe, 2011). Besides, akin to its neighbouring nations, Bangladesh's global apparel offshore outsourcing has contributed to the establishment of a complex and heterogeneous organisational governance system that is still evolving and does not easily lend itself to empirical investigation. Furthermore, conducting an empirical study in a non-research-focused country like Bangladesh requires an enormous amount of patience, creativity, cultural sensitivity, and resourcefulness. Research has never been prioritised or patronised by the government and in the universities, where everything else takes priority over research and its associated activities. The government never treated universities as worthy partners. As a result, and not unlike in other domains, workplace safety had traditionally remained an under-researched area until the series of large-scale disasters that struck the industry in recent years, exposing the factories' perilous working conditions.

During every stage of this research, a strenuous effort was made to compose a detailed and rich account of ground-level data drawn from the research context. The resulting data set encompassed a variety of

relevant voices—factory owners, managers from different hierarchical levels, workers (their representatives), and supply chain representatives—which were then further substantiated with non-participant observations. Without such data, this study would have been stereotypical and would not have led to the development of the moral agency spectrum proposed earlier. In fact, what makes this data set so significant is that, instead of just identifying the participants' views on workplace safety, it goes beyond the surface-level opinions and captures their confessions and the underlying realities pertaining to the ethically questionable safety practices that persist in the industry. The following sections highlight how this was achieved.

7.4.1 Familiarity with the Apparel Industry and the Business Context

As mentioned earlier (Section 1.3), my previous employment with the apparel industry meant that I was already familiar with the apparel business process and its associated context. Being a Bangladeshi, I also had the advantage of being able to establish the rapport needed to build 'trust', which was considered to be the most essential factor in gaining acceptance among the study's participants (see chapter 4 for details). This gave me an advantage over any external researchers, who would have struggled to comprehend the intricate nature of doing business in Bangladesh and local contextual issues that play a significant role in influencing managerial attitudes towards safety. Many salient and tacit features of the local culture and context could have appeared mysterious to an outsider, who would have then carried a large number of assumptions to explain the phenomenon. Furthermore, in the Bangladeshi apparel business context, any outsider or foreigner is generally considered a representative of global buyers or social compliance authorities. This may limit the level of trust established between an outsider and a study's participants, resulting in the collection of inferior-quality data. Therefore, as I was conducting my empirical investigation in the context of my own culture, I did not suffer from this critical distance from my study's subject. Referring back to the axiological position of this study (see Section 4.2.3), the potential 'researcher bias' was addressed with 'accountable reflexivity', thus ensuring the quality and reliability of the data obtained (see Finlay & Gough, 2003; Gill, 1995; King et al., 2018; Thorpe & Holt, 2007).

Furthermore, having lived abroad for a long period of time but doing my fieldwork within my own culture also helped me to more clearly understand the cultural differences, which evidently helped me to design data collection methods appropriate to the intricacies of dealing with different types of participants. Specifically, it helped me to design the interview questions and adopt different tones and styles of interaction to capture the participants' responses by acknowledging the power distance among the factory owners, managers, workers, and supply chain representatives, their gender and social class differences.

7.4.2 The Advantage of Speaking the Local Language

Language perhaps plays one of the most crucial roles in conducting any qualitative research of a sensitive nature. It enables a researcher to interact socially with the local community, which otherwise would be made quite impossible by communication barriers (Soundararajan, 2014). Lacking a good command of the participants' native language, dialect, and local parlance, a researcher would likely miss out or misinterpret some important verbal cues, idioms, and phrases, resulting in the development of shallow insights into the phenomenon under investigation. In the case of this study, this appeared to be a matter of great importance because, during their interviews, the participants frequently used such expressions. Being a native speaker, it was easier for me to understand these expressions and interpret the embedded meanings the participants attached to them. As mentioned earlier (Section 4.4.7), all the participants of this study were Bengali speakers. So, the interview questions were translated from English to Bengali. Despite it being an extremely time-consuming process, the recorded interviews were then transcribed in Bengali and translated into English. Then, the English narratives were back-translated into Bengali and retranslated into English. This was done to ensure the most authentic version of Bengali to English translations of the interview responses.

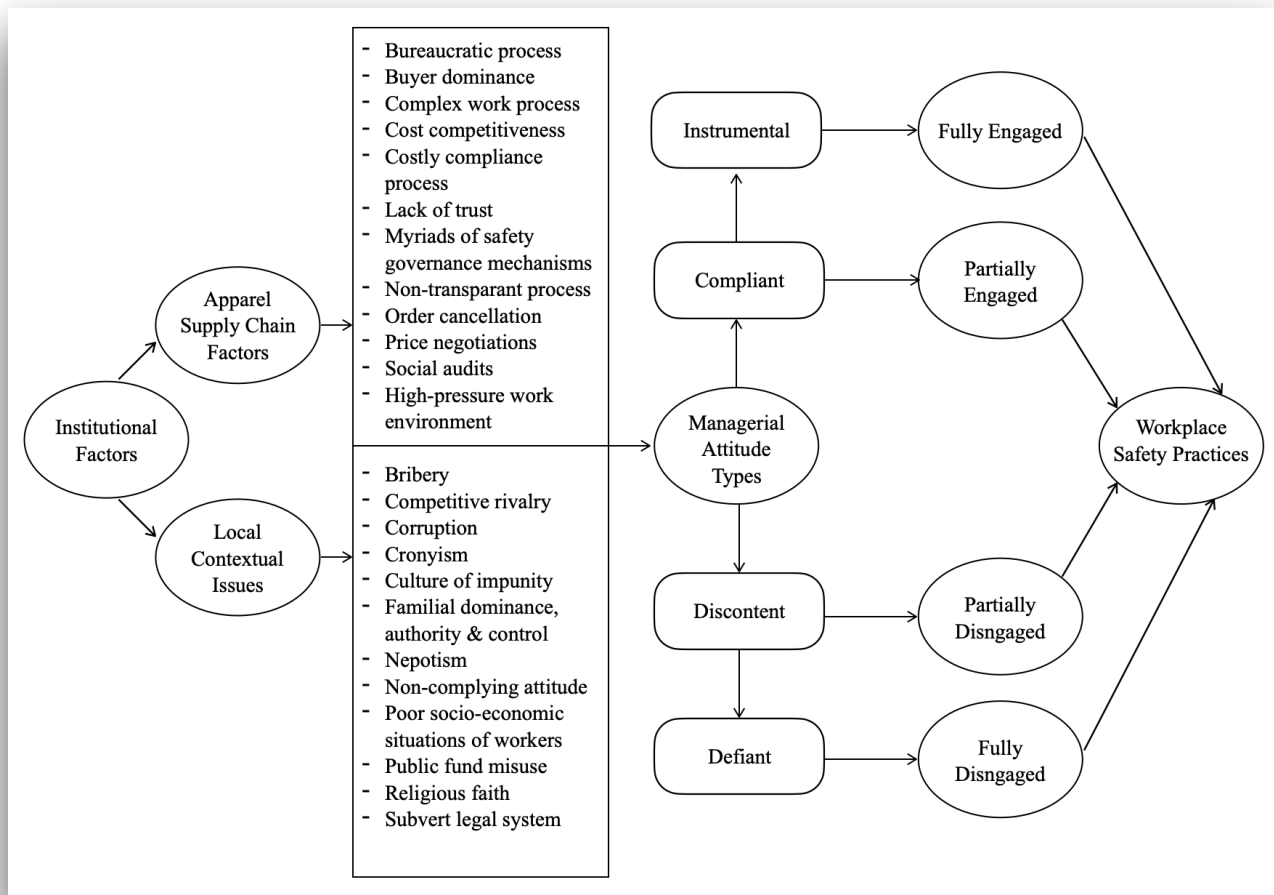
7.5 Contribution Towards Understanding the Research Phenomenon

The discussion presented in this chapter was an attempt to bridge the concept of moral agency with workplace safety practices. In this regard, the empirical findings (Chapters 5 and 6) showed how various supply chain and local contextual factors influence managerial attitudes towards workplace safety practices. It is important to note that these factors do not act alone in doing so; rather, they are interconnected and it is their totality that contributes to these varying levels of attitudes. This clearly shows how this study has evidenced the complex reciprocal interactions that occur between the wider institutional factors and managerial moral agency. This warrants the need to present a unified framework of the overall phenomenon, as investigated by this study. In this regard, Figure 7.1 is a useful representation of the overall phenomenon.

Figure 7.1 shows that, in the context of this study, the wider institutional factors are comprised of a number of supply chain and local contextual issues, which were explored through an empirical investigation. All these factors implied a degree of latitude in the interpretation of safety culture and of the institutional safety governance mechanisms, whereby managers were found to either associate themselves with or disassociate themselves from the safety practice decisions they were making for their

factories. Hence, the proposed moral agency spectrum explains four types of managerial attitudes associated with four types of moral agencies in relation to workplace safety practices.

Figure 7.1: Managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices in supply chain factories



Although the empirical studies presented in the literature review (Chapter 2) showed that the institutional capacity to redress the industry’s safety situation has increased in recent years, the scope of such capacity still remains limited to a small number of factories (James et al., 2019). Interestingly, other studies have also shown that workers’ rights have also been violated with increasing frequency over the same period of time (Berliner et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2019). The supply chain dynamics (presented in Chapter 2) and institutional factors (which surfaced in the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6) that characterise the buyer-supplier relationship and domestic work environment illustrate that any safety improvement found in the industry overall is still marginal and that there is yet no significant move towards strengthening workplace democracy. This is supported by the extant literature, with scholars claiming that, given the country’s current social and political context and supply chain prerogatives, it is highly unlikely that similar future initiatives—either taken by the supply chains or the local government—will result in gains for workplace safety (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Berliner et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2019). The empirical

evidence further suggests that the current deterrence- and compliance-based regime of institutional safety governance mechanisms has limited scope in protecting and enhancing workplace safety for those labouring at the end of global supply chains. So, understanding the varying levels of attitudes and associated moral agencies proposed in the spectrum may initiate a new conversation on moral agency and workplace safety that may contribute to bringing the necessary adjustments to the current compliance-based safety governance mechanisms or initiate new commitment-based mechanisms.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an explanation of the coherent inferences derived from the empirical findings and a discussion of them in relation to the literature reviewed in earlier chapters. This study adopted Bandura's moral disengagement theory to investigate various instances of immoral behaviours associated with managerial safety practices in factories. However, while exploring the moral agency concept, it was found that, even though moral disengagement theory is eminently capable of capturing managerial moral agency in the context of this study, it does have certain limitations and conceptual gaps. Therefore, a moral agency spectrum was proposed as an extension of the theory. Such spectrum is not claimed to be a universal model suited to theorise the attitudes underpinning moral agency or a panacea capable of redressing workplace safety violations, rather, it is aimed at contributing to the ongoing conversation on 'moral agency' initiated by Bandura and continued by Detert et al. (2008), Eriksson (2016), MacIntyre (2007), Moore et al. (2012); Petitta et al. (2017) and Newman et al. (2020). In doing so, the proposed spectrum seeks to cast further light on moral agency by revisiting the ethical theories reviewed earlier in the literature to bridge the conceptual gap that exists between moral disengagement and moral philosophy. A unified theoretical framework is then derived from the overall study to summarise its objective—i.e., to investigate managerial moral agency and wider institutional factors in relation to the workplace safety practices enacted in the apparel factories of global supply chains.

The discussion presented in this chapter further contributes to the emerging literature on workplace safety practices in the supplier factories of global supply chains and institutional safety compliance mechanisms enacted by the supply chain actors in those factories (see Alamgir & Alakavuklar, 2020; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; McCarthy et al., 2020; Soundararajan et al., 2018; Soundararajan, et al. 2021). It does so by documenting the lived experiences of individual actors (e.g., factory owners, managers, workers, and supply chain representatives) embedded in the global apparel production network through the investigation of their moral agency towards workplace safety practices. In this regard, this study draws on the insight of social economics in terms of the interface between ethics and economics, specifically, the

work centres on production relations in manufacturing in a developing economy in the Global South. Social economics highlights how the hierarchy in the production process is influenced by wider social values and institutional factors, which can lead to exploitation (see O'Hara, 2015; Snyder, 2010). Moreover, social economists stress dignity in the workplace and argue that labour cannot be morally equivalent to capital (see Figart & Mutari, 2015). While the ongoing conversation on workplace safety focuses little on the social-economic investigation of the apparel industry in the Global South using the specific lens of moral agency, this study addressed this by engaging with both strands through its investigation of moral agency in the context of workplace safety.

8. Conclusion

*If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts;
but if he will be content to begin with doubts he shall end in certainties.*³⁹

Sir Francis Bacon

Chapter Overview

This chapter brings the study to its conclusion. It begins by presenting a summary of the overall research, followed by a consideration of the study's limitations and suggestions for future research. The researcher's self-reflection on this study is then presented.

8.1 Research Summary

This study aimed at extending the research on workplace safety culture in the supplier factories of global apparel supply chains. In doing so, it focussed on exploring managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices and investigated how wider institutional factors can influence managerial attitudes towards safety. In the context of this study, managerial attitude towards safety was explored by investigating two crucial attributes: (i) interpretations and (ii) responses—i.e., the ways in which factory managers interpret safety culture and the ways in which they respond to institutional demands for compliance with safety governance mechanisms. To bring its research intention into fruition, this study considered the apparel factories located in Bangladesh.

During the examination of the industry's workplace safety practices, the extant studies were found to have basically focused on the technical aspects of safety, identified the challenges of implementing safety governance mechanisms, provided a comparative analysis of private and public safety governance mechanisms, and evaluated these from a CSR or social compliance perspective. While doing so, scholars appeared to have often blamed either factory managers or global buyers for accidents or incidents of safety violations and non-complying attitudes. This study went beyond these stereotypical claims, looked beyond the surface-level benefits and challenges of these safety mechanisms, and investigated some deeply rooted causal factors such as how these mechanisms are actually viewed or interpreted by factory managers and how they respond to institutional demands to comply with them. These questions were

³⁹ The quote is taken from researcher Faruck Morcos collection, available at: https://personal.utdallas.edu/~faruckm/Evolutionary_Information_Lab/Links_files/PhDQuotes.pdf

considered to be more elemental in investigating managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices.

The data collection process began with a pilot study, which was followed by fieldwork conducted in Bangladesh. The main data collection activities included in-depth semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations. The interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed, translated, and analysed. The collected data, which were analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis tool, was used as the main source of evidence in the study. Observational data of enacted safety practices were used to substantiate the evidence base. In this regard, the interview data were used to generate themes and the observational data were used to substantiate and reinforce those themes.

The empirical findings revealed several interesting and unique wider institutional (supply chain and local contextual) factors that significantly influence managerial moral agency in relation to safety practices. The many different ways in which managers were found to interpret institutional safety governance mechanisms were categorised as bureaucratic, costly, rigid, and stressful, and their role in complying with them as 'committed'. Themes such as authority, blame, conformity, dishonesty, and ignorance were similarly generated from numerous sub-themes to explore managers' responses towards institutional demands for safety compliance. Varying levels of managerial responses (from conformity to avoidance) towards workplace safety practices were identified; this points to a degree of latitude in the interpretation of safety governance mechanisms, which associates or disassociates the managers with the safety practice decisions made in their factories.

Bandura's moral disengagement theory, which was adopted as the dominant theoretical lens of this study, proposes eight disengagement mechanisms that decouple one's internal moral standards from one's actions. In the context of this study, the theory provided insights suited to identify the various individual-level factors that can predict managers' propensity towards immoral behaviours and unethical business practices. However, the theory was limited in terms of explaining that these individual-level factors do not always work alone; rather various institutional factors play a major role in influencing moral agency, resulting in the collective (at the social and organisational levels) disengaged or immoral behaviours adopted by factory managers. Accordingly, this study proposes a moral agency spectrum consisting of four agency types—i.e., fully engaged, partially engaged, partially disengaged, and fully disengaged—with their associated attitude types: committed, compliant, discontented, and defiant. The development of this continuum emerged from my understanding of relevant theories and the interpretation of the data.

This spectrum was found to be effective in explaining the various types of managerial attitudes found in the study—either individual or collective—in relation to workplace safety. By adopting this spectrum, this study also diverges from other contemporary research that considers moral disengagement as an individual-level phenomenon. The proposed spectrum can work as an extension of moral disengagement theory to capture immoral behaviours also occurring at social and organisational levels. Furthermore, the spectrum can be used to bridge between moral disengagement theory and moral philosophy, as moral disengagement is not linked to any classical normative ethical theories nor does it flow from them; whereas, the spectrum contributes to linking its moral agency and attitude types with such theories.

Overall, through its empirical investigation, this study makes several theoretical and methodological contributions. It extends our overall understanding of the concept of moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices in the global apparel supply chain context. The work advances the theoretical foundation of moral disengagement theory by applying it to an organisational context that has been mainly overlooked by most studies in this field. While, in their recent conceptual studies, researchers seem to have agreed, to a certain degree, that moral disengagement can be a collective characteristic among social agents, none of those studies involved empirical investigation. Through its empirical evidence, this study advances the idea that moral disengagement theory can be useful to investigate immoral behaviours at the social and organisational levels; however, to do so, the theory needs to be associated with the moral agency spectrum proposed in this study. Furthermore, by investigating the intricate global apparel supply chain network, local business context, and social environment, this study shows us how wider institutional factors interact with and influence managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety practices. This may enable the parties involved in apparel supply chains to target the resources needed to bring about the changes required to make the industry safer. Overall, this study makes an empirical contribution to knowledge by (i) providing insights by applying a stratified ontology in which managerial behaviour is an emergent property of the interaction of these various levels, (ii) documenting the lived experiences of individual actors embedded in the global apparel supply chain network, (iii) contributing to the business ethics literature in applying the concept of moral agency in the investigation of work in apparel factories of global supply chains, (iv) contributing to our understanding of the potential causes of the apparel industry's poor safety records which carries policy implications.

8.2 Research Limitations

“No research in any discipline is ideal” (Soundararajan, 2014:349). This study does not claim to be perfect in its theorisation of the mechanisms underpinning moral agency or in its provision of a robust

framework for workplace safety practices. However, through its empirical and theoretical insights, it is reasonable to say that it does provide the research community with greater knowledge of moral agency and workplace safety. The limitations of this research are discussed below.

The first is that its literature review did not encompass the entire available cohort of evidence-based literature on moral disengagement. A growing number of qualitative and quantitative studies in this area have been conducted in recent years. This study mostly looked into qualitative studies for two reasons. Firstly, its qualitative and exploratory nature steered to focus on how moral disengagement had been captured by other qualitative studies. However, this limited the scope of its examination of the theory because of the conceptual—as opposed to empirical—approach taken by the extant qualitative studies. Secondly, no consensus has hitherto been reached over how moral disengagement and its associated mechanisms can be measured in quantitative studies, with researchers developing different scales to measure morally disengaged behaviours. This limitation was highlighted in Section 3.2.2. Moreover, an evaluation of the existing scales or the development of a new one fell outside the scope of this study. However, it can be assumed that a more inclusive literature review could result in a broader scope of the examination of the theory and of its associated mechanisms.

The next limitation is related to finding empirical evidence or appropriate citations for a few politically and culturally sensitive issues—e.g., the variety of economic, political, administrative, social, and cultural factors that enable and foster the corruption, malpractices, and unethical activities prevailing in Bangladesh, which were presented in this study. This is further evidenced by those studies that have shown how various arms of the government—including its legal, executive, and legislative branches—enact repressive laws, intimidate and silence public voices and the press to protect themselves, politicians, and influential business people (Hasan, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2018). These issues appeared to be highly relevant in the context of this study, but a lack of robust empirical evidence sometimes made it challenging to present evidence-based arguments.

The last limitation is associated with this study's axiological position and reflexivity. The proposed moral agency spectrum was inspired by the literature on strategic responses to institutional pressure and influences, and was primarily developed from cues drawn from the participants' responses. In this regard, the interpretation of the collected data may have been influenced, to some extent, by the researcher's own subjective frames of reference, which is known as 'researcher bias' (see Section 4.2.3). However, as the researcher is a critical realist, it was obvious for him to be involved in the context of this study, to

communicate the perspectives from which he approached them, and demonstrate a clear understanding of how his reflexivity may have impacted them. This is known as ‘accountable reflexivity’—i.e., remaining as objective as possible by acknowledging any bias and minimising it (Gill, 1995). There is scope to challenge the interpretations and inferences presented in this study; hence, this declaration is a manifestation of the researcher’s accountable reflexivity.

8.3 Agenda for Future Research Directions

Despite the proliferation, in the moral disengagement literature, of studies highlighting the antecedents and outcomes of morally disengaged behaviours at an individual level, this study found a dearth of research conducted on collective moral disengagement (at the social and organisational levels). While this study proposes a moral agency spectrum that can be applied to capture a range of morally engaged and disengaged workplace behaviours, more empirical research needs to be conducted to establish the wider causal tendencies of this model or to propose a novel one. Similarly, the extant literature on workplace safety has adequately evaluated the current compliance-based regulatory regimes enacted by institutional actors. However, upon the 2020 expiration of the Accord and the Alliance, workplace safety in the apparel industry is now undergoing a transition period and the Bangladeshi government is working on partnering with new supply chain initiatives to be incorporated within the National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA). This opens new dimensions to continue the conversation among supply chain actors, apparel producers, and the government to formalise more appropriate safety standards and codes of conduct. The findings of this study in this regard may be useful to understand the wider institutional factors that influence and interact with owner-manager moral agency. This, in turn, may enable the parties involved to identify the resources needed to bring about the changes required to make the industry safer.

Furthermore, some scholars have recently started proposing a normative approach to an artificial moral agency—i.e., a theoretical discussion about what conditions may hold for moral agency and the extent to which these may be met by artificial entities such as AI (artificial intelligence) and automation (Behdadi & Munthe, 2020; Christman, 2020). The focus is on how and to what extent such automation should be included in human practices, normally assuming the moral agency and responsibility of the participants (Danaher, 2019). This new dimension of looking into moral agency warrants considerable attention because increasing numbers of factories in Bangladesh have started adopting automation in their production process through the use of ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning), app-based machine operations, and software-based end-to-end process automation. This lends weight to a discussion about the proper sharing of moral agency and responsibility between human beings and software, concerns

about effectiveness and safety, considerations of how human moral agency may change and what such change may imply for the possibility of software not only to do wrong, but to be wronged (Behdadi & Munthe, 2020).

8.4 Personal Reflection

The reasoning behind my decision to choose a doctoral study (PhD) was not incongruous; rather, it was the result of very thoughtful consideration and several years of preparation. The past few years into my PhD degree at the University of Glasgow have been a period of intensive learning and self-development in many areas. While I received all the guidance and support I needed to carry out this research, I was hampered by several personal, social, and study-related challenges along the way. However, the more hurdles I faced, the more my resolution to complete this journey intensified. After ending each chapter, I asked myself: “Is it the best I can do?” The answer was always “No”. After writing the last sentence of this thesis, I again went back to it and asked myself the same question and the answer was still “No”. Perhaps, this is what doing research feels like, one is never satisfied with his own creation.

Nonetheless, I must admit that this study instilled in me a tremendous interest in moral philosophy. The search for truth, the exploration of morality, probing into moral agency through an ethical lens, and the pursuit of comprehending Aristotle’s virtue ethics, Al-Ghazzali’s nobility of character, Kant’s deontology, and Mill’s utilitarianism all together made me ‘faisolosophised’! Philosophy is a subject that is not taught in the education system in Bangladesh; I was first introduced to it during my MRes at Stirling and, to be honest, all those ontological and epistemological positions were at first too complex for me to comprehend. But, somehow, such complexity transitioned into curiosity and I gradually started exploring various branches. I would like to recall Beard’s (2010:7) notion in this regard, “What philosophy is often concerned with is to make explicit what has always been implicit in our thinking and acting.” Indeed, philosophy has had an impact on my way of thinking and acting.

Even though I did have a prior understanding of the apparel industry and of its intricate operations within global supply chains, the empirical evidence that was unfolded in my research nudged my conscience. During my fieldwork, I was delighted to interview a few people who demonstrated caring attitudes towards workers and a genuine interest and intention to exercise the best safety practices within their capacity. In contrast, I also felt depressed every time I read or heard (from the news) about any accidents with subsequent injuries and deaths, and the following came across participants admitting their various unethical means of avoiding or circumventing safety practices during my interview sessions with them.

Furthermore, I also observed many safety lapses and concealment of facts and documents during my observations at the factories. At one point, I became a conscience-stricken researcher and asked myself: “Am I doing enough?” However, I then realised that, as a social science researcher investigating a sensitive topic, I am already a part of the collective social movement and conversations that are pushing forward the agenda of workplace safety. I believe, this study to be my initial contribution to it.

I intend to continue my scholarly pursuit of moral agency and workplace safety. In this study, I included small, medium, and large factories; now, I feel the need to conduct specific studies based on factory size—i.e., individual studies on small, medium, and large factories. This would enable me to precisely explore how different types of institutional factors influence the moral agency of managers working in various-sized factories. Similarly, I would also aim to extend the focus to other industries—especially leather and ship-breaking/recycling; the two major but very much neglected industries in Bangladesh where workplace safety is inadequate.

Overall, completing this research was an extraordinary learning and tremendously fulfilling experience.

8.5 Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to explore managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety and to investigate how wider institutional factors can influence managerial attitudes and enactments of safety. In doing so, it provided two invaluable sets of information: (i) the managers’ interpretations of safety culture and their responses toward institutional safety governance mechanisms, and (ii) the wider institutional factors that influence managerial moral agency in relation to workplace safety. This study also makes a novel theoretical and methodological contribution by proposing a moral agency spectrum as an extension of Bandura’s moral disengagement theory. With these crucial pieces of information and a new moral agency framework in hand, this study offers some deeper insights into the ground realities of the global apparel supply chains and provides a new tool suited to investigate the varying levels of moral agency and their associated attitudes types.

The benefits stemming from the practice of workplace safety are not always quantifiable; rather, it is a matter of moral obligation, whereby the motivation or moral inclination should originate within individuals themselves. Although supply chain actors have been acting for the last four decades to ensure workplace safety in apparel factories in Bangladesh, actual workplace safety improvements are still negligible. This does not necessarily mean that the parties involved in administering and monitoring

safety at work have always lacked sincerity in their efforts, but it does mean that all these efforts have not yielded the expected outcomes or changes in managerial attitudes towards safety. This study has provided evidence of morally disengaged behaviours among managers in relation to workplace safety practices. While contemporary scholars have suggested the need for both compliance- and commitment-based multi-stakeholder initiatives, in order to design such frameworks, it is important to understand the types and causes of such disengaged behaviours and the wider institutional factors that influence managerial attitudes towards safety practices. Supply chain actors also need to have a proper understanding of the supply chain issues creating an impact on supplier factories and their local business contexts within which the supplier factories operate. With this study in hand, these requirements are now somewhat fulfilled. This study, thereby, has the potential to be used as a foundation for the development of context-specific, more purposeful, and appropriate safety governance frameworks suited to improve the lives of all the people associated with the apparel industry.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Sample Interview Guideline

Four types of participants were considered: (i) top-level factory managers (factory owners/CEOs); (ii) mid-level factory managers (General Managers/Deputy General Managers/Assistant General Managers); (iii) shop-floor workers (i.e., their representatives); and (iv) social compliance auditors of the local liaison offices (supply chain representatives) of global apparel retailers. Hence, besides the three pilot interviews, a total of 28 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with five top-level managers (owners and CEOs), 11 mid-level managers, eight worker representatives (WPC members) and four supply chain representatives (social compliance auditors employed in the local liaison offices of UK high street clothing brands).

A. Interview Questions - Managers

Section A1: Information about the respondent

1	Can you confirm your current job title / designation in the company and what it entails?
2	How long have you been with this business?
3	Which age group do you fall under? (a) 18 — 25; (b) 26 —35; (c) 36 —45; (d) 46 — 55; (e) 56 — 65; (f) Over 65
4	What is your level of education? (a) SSC or similar; (b) HSC or similar; (c) Bachelor’s or Undergraduate; (d) Master’s or Postgraduate
5	Do you own any other business? If yes, then what type?
6	Are you a member of any professional or industrial bodies?

Section A2: Information about the business / factory

1	When was the factory / business established?
2	What is the business ownership type? (e.g., wholly-owned by an MNC, local ownership, part of a group, independent factory, joint-venture, etc.)
3	What is the size of your factory? (e.g., floor space, floors)
4	What is the size of your workforce in this factory? (e.g., total number of people)
5	What type of apparel /home-textile products does your factory manufacture?

6	What is the major export market of the products? or Who are the major buyers?
7	Apart from the direct work-orders from the global buyers, does the factory also work in a 'sub-contracted' capacity?
8	Is there any formal trade union representation in your factory?
9	Is there any representation of workers for collective bargaining within the factory?
10	What social compliance certification does your factory currently have?

Section A3: Questions

1.	How do you view the industry's current workplace safety practice and compliance situation?
১.	বাংলাদেশের তৈরী পোশাক শিল্প কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তার বর্তমান অবস্থা সম্পর্কে আপনার কি মতামত?
2.	How do you think the industry norms and institutional regulation (e.g., local government, international buyers, and third-party audits) affect the workplace safety practices?
২.	কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তা কি কি বিষয়ের কারণে (যেমন, সামাজিক ব্যাপারসমূহ, সরকারি চাপ, আন্তর্জাতিক সংস্থাগুলোর চাপ, ক্রেতাদের চাপ, দামের প্রতিযোগিতা, ইত্যাদি) প্রভাবিত হয় বলে আপনি মনে করেন?
3.	What type of responsibility do you think our apparel industry has towards the people, the society, and the environment?
৩.	মানুষ, সমাজ ও পরিবেশের প্রতি আমাদের তৈরী পোশাক শিল্পের কি ধরণের দায়িত্ব রয়েছে বলে আপনি মনে করেন?
4.	What do you think about the role of managers in maintaining and promoting safety standards in factories? Do you believe your view is commonly held among the managers at different levels across the industry?
৪.	কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিতকরণে কারখানার ব্যবস্থাপকদের কি কি ভূমিকা রয়েছে? এই ধারণা কি অন্যান্য সকল কারখানার ব্যবস্থাপকেরা সমষ্টিগত ভাবে পোষণ করে বলে মনে করেন?
5.	From your industry experience, what factors do you think contribute to workplace accidents?
৫.	আপনার অভিজ্ঞতার আলোকে তৈরী পোশাক শিল্পে কারখানার দুর্ঘটনার পিছনে কি কি কারণ রয়েছে বলে আপনি মনে করেন?

B. Interview Questions - Workers / Workers' Representatives

Section B1: Information about the participant

1	Can you please confirm your current job position in the factory and what it entails?
2	How long have you been with this factory and industry?
3	Which age group do you fall under? (a) 18 — 25; (b) 26 —35; (c) 36 —45; (d) 46 — 55; (e) 56 — 65
4	What is your level of education? (a) SSC or similar; (b) HSC or similar; (c) Bachelor's or Undergraduate; (d) Master's or Postgraduate
5	Are you a member of any trade union or worker participation committee (WPC)?

Section B2: Questions

1. What is your understanding about workplace safety? ১. কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তা সম্পর্কে আপনার ধারণা কি?
2. Can you please describe the safety related training/activities that you attend/participate in this factory? ২. এই কারখানায় আপনি কি কি সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তা বিষয়ক ট্রেনিং বা কাজে অংশগ্রহণ করেছেন?
3. Why do you think it is important to follow the safety standards? ৩. কেন আপনি সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তার বিষয়কে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ মনে করেন?
4. Do you think all workers (including yourself) and managers in this factory possess a common level of understanding of workplace safety and follow the required safety standards? ৪. আপনি কি মনে করেন যে এই ফ্যাক্টরি তে কর্মরত সকল কর্মকর্তা ও শ্রমিকরা কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তার বিষয়ে সমান ভাবে ধারণা রাখেন এবং সেগুলো পালন করেন?
5. What factors do you think contribute to workplace accidents? [and/or] ৫. কারখানায় কেন দুর্ঘটনা হয় বলে আপনি মনে করেন? [অথবা]
6. Do you think there are reasons for people to ignore/circumvent workplace safety provisions? ৬. ফ্যাক্টরির মালিকপক্ষ বা ম্যানেজাররা কি কি কারণে কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তার বিষয়ে অবহেলাসূলভ আচরণ করে বলে আপনি মনে করেন?

C. Interview Questions - Supply Chain Representatives

Section C1: Information about the participant

1	Can you please confirm your current job title / designation in this company and what it entails?
2	How long have you been with this job/industry?
3	Which age group do you fall under? (a) 18 — 25; (b) 26 —35; (c) 36 —45; (d) 46 — 55; (e) 56 — 65
4	What is your level of education? (a) SSC or similar; (b) HSC or similar; (c) Bachelor's or Undergraduate; (d) Master's or Postgraduate

Section C2: Questions

1. How do you view the industry's current workplace safety practice and compliance situation?
১. বাংলাদেশের তৈরী পোশাক শিল্প কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তার বর্তমান অবস্থা সম্পর্কে আপনার কি মতামত?
2. What factors in your opinion affect the safety practices most (e.g., industry norms, pressure from supply chains/third-party audits, government/institutional regulation)?
২. কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তা কি কি বিষয়ের কারণে (যেমন, সামাজিক ব্যাপারসমূহ, সরকারি চাপ, আন্তর্জাতিক সংস্থাগুলোর চাপ, ক্রেতাদের চাপ, দামের প্রতিযোগিতা, ইত্যাদি) প্রভাবিত হয় বলে আপনি মনে করেন?
3. What do you think are the challenges for a factory owner/managers to conform to the safety guidelines recommended to them?
৩. কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিতকরণে কারখানার মালিকগণ কি কি সমস্যা বা চ্যালেঞ্জের মুখোমুখি হন বলে আপনি মনে করেন?
4. Why do you think sometimes the apparel industry fails to ensure workplace safety? [and/or]
5. Do you think there are reasons for people to ignore/circumvent workplace safety provisions?
৪. আপনি কি মনে করেন যে কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিতকরণে কিছু কারখানার মালিকদের অবহেলা বা অনাগ্রহ বা নেতিবাচক মনোভাব রয়েছে? এই রকম মনোভাবের কারণ কি?

Appendix Two: Non-participant Observation (structured) Schedule

A. Resource person/observer: Being the researcher I will visit the factories to carry out my non-participant observations. In this regard the following observer qualities provide me with the necessary expertise required to conduct the observation accurately:

- a. My previous work experience in the apparel industry;
- b. Familiarity with the apparel industry and its workplace safety-related issues;
- c. Familiarity with the cultural background of the people who will be observed;
- d. Ability to understand their language;

As a ‘neutral’ observer I will not engage myself in the activities or interact with the people being observed but will keep a detailed record (including photographs) of all relevant events, situations, and behaviours as inconspicuously as possible.

B. People and issues to be observed: My observation will take place on factory floors. Therefore, it will include everyone who will be present on the floors. The following table provides a provisional list of issues that will be observed:

List of issues to be observed

Workplace Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building safety management (staircases, lifts, floor area, roof, warehouse, store room, tool room, generator room, toilets, etc.). - Ventilation and lighting, level of cleanliness, ergonomics (dust, noise, etc.). - Fire safety (alarm, emergency exit doors & stairs, firefighting equipments, access to equipments, designated firefighting team, etc.). - Emergency evacuation plan. - Storage, labelling, handling and transportation of chemicals. - Marked floors, adequate safety signposts, HAZMAT and identification signs, required emergency contacts display-boards for police, ambulance and firefighters, WPC/supply chain/buyer’s representative’s contact details, etc.). - Use of PPE (personal protective equipment). - Mechanical safety management (placement, operation, and maintenance of machines etc.). - Electrical safety management. - First-aid facility. - Use of ETP (effluent treatment plan), waste management, etc.
Welfare Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Break time, resting facility, worker common rooms. - Healthy eating and safe drinking facility, canteen. - Childcare facility, daycare centre. - Medical centre with certified doctors and nurses. - Working hours, overtime.

Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updated internal safety compliance audit. - Updated third-party social audit/compliance reports & certifications. - Firefighting training, drill record. - Fire and other incident record. - Overall factory safety manuals / HR/ compliance policies (fire, chemical, sharp tools, machineries & equipments, boiler, risk assessment, etc.). - Employee/worker safety training record.
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C. Number of observations per factory: The number of observations per factory will depend on the aim of my research, purpose of my observation, logistical support, time, and so forth. However, approximately 2 to 3 visits (8 hours each) would be considered to adequately describe the safety practices at each factory.

D. Validation: This schedule was prepared by following the EFS standards prescribed in the Accord and the Alliance safety governance framework agreements and the HAZMAT and other welfare support aspects mentioned in the CoCs of four global brands.

Appendix Three: Plain Language Statement (PLS)

Research Title: Workplace safety practices in apparel factories in Bangladesh

You are being invited to take part in a research study. The researcher has obtained permission from the owner of the company to approach you in this regard. The researcher, will, however, not report back to the owner who actually agreed to participate, so no one other than the researcher will know whether you agreed or refused to participate in this research.

Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask the researcher (contact details at the end of this information sheet) if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

Researcher: Muhammad Faisal Chowdhury, Doctoral Researcher, Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow, Scotland

Research Aim

This research aims to understand workplace safety practices in apparel manufacturing factories in Bangladesh. The role of owners, managers, employees, and institutions, such as regulators in promoting and enacting these practices is investigated.

Interview Participation

Participation in the interview is **entirely voluntary**. If you decide to participate in the interview, you will be asked to answer some questions by the researcher. The interview should take approximately an hour. There is no right or wrong answer as the responses are your opinions only.

You have the right to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. As stated above, no one other than the researcher will know who agrees or does not agree to actually participate in the research.

Data Protection

The information gained from this interview will be kept confidential. All data and results will be anonymised and de-identified (i.e., meaning that no one is able to match your information with your responses). Confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints. However, should any risks to the safety of participants, or others, be identified, it may be necessary to compromise anonymity, in order to take remedial action.

Use of Data

Data collected from this interview will be used primarily for the researcher's doctoral (PhD) research. After the successful completion of the research, a written summary of the research findings can be made available to the participants upon request. This summary will be fully anonymised with data not able to be attributed to individuals, in line with the above principle. Fully anonymised interview data may also be used in future research works (e.g., academic journal articles, conference papers, and book).

For the purpose of the research, interview answers provided in Bengali will be translated into English by the researcher. With your consent, the interview will be recorded by a digital voice recorder. For use in future research, the personal and research data will be retained for 10 years from the completion of this research. The electronic version of the data will be securely stored in the researcher's personal password protected and encrypted computer. The paper-based data will be kept secured inside the locked file cabinet in the researcher's university office. After 10 years, all data (paper and electronic) will be securely disposed of.

Withdrawal

As a participant, you have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason. If you do withdraw, all your data will be destroyed and not be included in the research. In such circumstances please contact me.

Approval

This research has been considered and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow, Scotland. Further details or any concerns regarding this research should be communicated to: **Dr Muir Houston**, College Ethics Officer, Email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

The research supervisors can also be contacted if required: (i) **Dr Scott Hurrell**, Adam Smith Business School, Email: Scott.Hurrell@glasgow.ac.uk; and (ii) **Professor Robert McMaster**, Adam Smith Business School, Email: Robert.McMaster@glasgow.ac.uk.

For any other questions about this research, feel free to contact the researcher **Muhammad Faisal Chowdhury**, Doctoral Researcher, Adam Smith Business School, Email: Muhhammad.Chowdhury@glasgow.ac.uk.

[End of Participant Information Sheet]

Bangla Translation (বাংলা অনুবাদ)

গবেষণার শিরোনাম: বাংলাদেশের তৈরী-পোশাক কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থা

আপনাকে একটি গবেষণায় অংশগ্রহণের জন্য আমন্ত্রণ জানানো হচ্ছে। এই গবেষণায় অংশগ্রহণের জন্য আপনি রাজি আছেন কি না তা শুধুমাত্র গবেষক ছাড়া অন্য কেউ জানবে না এবং এ সম্পর্কিত কোনো তথ্য আপনার কর্মস্থলে জানানো হবে না।

এই গবেষণায় অংশগ্রহণের পূর্বে এই গবেষণাটি কেন করা হচ্ছে তা আপনার জানা প্রয়োজন। অনুগ্রহ করে নিম্নলিখিত বিষয়গুলো সময় নিয়ে মনোযোগ সহকারে পড়ুন এবং আপনি চাইলে অন্য কারো সাথে এ সম্পর্কে আলোচনাও করে নিতে পারেন। যে কোনো প্রশ্ন বা আরো কিছু জানার থাকলে অনুগ্রহ করে গবেষক কে জিজ্ঞাসা করুন বা নিম্নে বর্ণিত মোবাইল বা ইমেইল এ যোগাযোগ করুন। সময় নিয়ে চিন্তা করে জানান যে আপনি এই গবেষণায় অংশগ্রহণ করতে ইচ্ছুক কি না।

আপনার সহযোগিতার জন্য ধন্যবাদ।

গবেষক: মুহম্মদ ফয়সল চৌধুরী, পিএইচডি গবেষক, এডাম স্মিথ বিসনেস স্কুল, ইউনিভার্সিটি অফ গ্লাসগো, স্কটল্যান্ড।

গবেষণার উদ্দেশ্য: এই গবেষণাটি বাংলাদেশের তৈরী-পোশাক শিল্প কারখানার সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তা সম্পর্কিত। কর্মক্ষেত্রের সুরক্ষা ও নিরাপত্তার প্রসার ও প্রয়োগের ক্ষেত্রে মালিক, ব্যবস্থাপক, কর্মচারী, ও প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক ভূমিকা সম্পর্কে আপনাদের মতামত জানা।

আপনার অংশগ্রহণ: এই গবেষণায় আপনার অংশগ্রহণ **সম্পূর্ণ ঐচ্ছিক**। আপনি যদি এই গবেষণায় অংশগ্রহণ করতে ইচ্ছুক হন, তাহলে আপনাকে গবেষকের সাথে একটি সাক্ষাৎকারে অংশগ্রহণ করতে হবে। এই সাক্ষাৎকারটি আনুমানিক এক ঘন্টার হতে পারে। এই সাক্ষাৎকারে কোনো সঠিক বা ভুল উত্তর নাই, প্রশ্নের উত্তরগুলো সম্পূর্ণ আপনার মতামত ভিত্তিক।

সাক্ষাৎকারের সময় যেকোনো প্রশ্নের উত্তর না দেয়ার অধিকার আপনার আছে। যে কোনো সময় কোনো কারণ ছাড়া আপনি এই সাক্ষাৎকারটি সমাপ্ত করারও অধিকার রাখেন। পূর্বেউল্লেখিত, সাক্ষাৎকারে আপনার অংশগ্রহণ করা বা না করা শুধুমাত্র গবেষক ছাড়া আর অন্য কেউ জানবে না।

তথ্য সুরক্ষা: সাক্ষাৎকার থেকে প্রাপ্ত তথ্য সম্পূর্ণ গোপন রাখা হবে। প্রাপ্ত সকল তথ্যের সাথে আপনার বা আপনার প্রতিষ্ঠানের কোনো নাম সম্পর্কিত থাকবে না। গবেষণার নিয়ম ও ইউনিভার্সিটি অফ গ্লাসগোর আইন অনুযায়ী সকল তথ্যের সুরক্ষা নিশ্চিত করা হবে। কিন্তু, তথ্য সংগ্রহের সময় যদি আপনার বা সংশ্লিষ্ট কারোর কোনো অনিরাপত্তাজনিত বিষয়ের সূচনা হলে প্রয়োজনীয় নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হবে।

তথ্যের ব্যবহার: সাক্ষাৎকার থেকে প্রাপ্ত তথ্য গবেষকের পিএইচডি গবেষণায় ব্যবহৃত হবে। আপনি চাইলে, এই গবেষণা সমাপ্ত হওয়ার পর এর একটি সারমর্ম লিখিতভাবে আপনাকে দেয়া যেতে পারে। গবেষণার নিয়ম অনুযায়ী এই সারমর্মটিতেও আপনার বা আপনার প্রতিষ্ঠানের কোনো নাম উল্লেখ থাকবে না। প্রাপ্ত তথ্য পরবর্তীতে অন্যান্য গবেষণার কাজেও ব্যবহার হতে পারে।

আপনার দেয়া সাক্ষাৎকারটি গবেষণার প্রয়োজনে গবেষক নিজে বাংলা থেকে ইংরেজিতে অনুবাদ করবেন। সেজন্য, আপনার অনুমতি সাপেক্ষে এই সাক্ষাৎকারটি একটি অডিও রেকর্ডারের মাধ্যমে ধারণ করা হবে। পরবর্তী গবেষণার কাজে ব্যবহারের জন্য প্রাপ্ত তথ্য সমূহ আগামী ১০ বছরের জন্য সংরক্ষিত থাকবে। সকল তথ্য গবেষকের পাসওয়ার্ড দ্বারা সুরক্ষিত নিজস্ব কম্পিউটারে ও গবেষকের ইউনিভার্সিটি অফ গ্লাসগো-র অফিস-এ তালা-চাবি সুরক্ষিত ফাইল-আলমারিতে রাখা হবে। ১০ বছর পরে এই সকল তথ্য বিনষ্ট করে ফেলা হবে।

প্রত্যাহার অধিকার: গবেষণার একজন অংশগ্রাহক হিসেবে এই গবেষণায় কোনো কারণ উল্লেখ ছাড়াই অংশগ্রহণ না করার আপনার সম্পূর্ণ অধিকার রয়েছে। যে কোনো সময় যদি আপনি এই গবেষণায় অংশগ্রহণ থেকে বিরত থাকতে চান, তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে গবেষকের সাথে (আমার সাথে) যোগাযোগ করুন। সেক্ষেত্রে আপনার সাক্ষাৎকার থেকে প্রাপ্ত সকল তথ্য বিনষ্ট করে ফেলা হবে এবং গবেষণায় এর কোনো প্রয়োগ থাকবে না।

অনুমোদন: এই গবেষণাটি স্কটল্যান্ডের ইউনিভার্সিটি অফ গ্লাসগো-র কলেজ অফ সোশ্যাল সাইন্স এর এথিক্স কমিটি দ্বারা অনুমোদিত। এই গবেষণা সম্পর্কে আপনার আরো কোনো প্রশ্ন থাকলে যোগাযোগ করুন: ডক্টর মুইর হিউস্টন, কলেজ এথিক্স অফিসার, ইমেইল: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

এই গবেষণার অধীক্ষকদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করতে চাইলে: (i) ডক্টর স্কট হারেল, এডাম স্মিথ বিসনেস স্কুল, ইমেইল: Scott.Hurrell@glasgow.ac.uk, এবং (ii) প্রফেসর রবার্ট ম্যাকমাস্টার, এডাম স্মিথ বিসনেস স্কুল, ইমেইল: Robert.McMaster@glasgow.ac.uk

যে কোনো প্রশ্নের জন্য গবেষকের সাথে নিশ্চিন্তে যোগাযোগ করুন: **মুহম্মদ ফয়সল চৌধুরী**, পিএইচডি গবেষক, এডাম স্মিথ বিসনেস স্কুল, ইউনিভার্সিটি অফ গ্লাসগো, ইমেইল: muhammad.chowdhury@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix Four: Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: Workplace safety practices in apparel factories in Bangladesh

Name of Researcher: Muhammad Faisal Chowdhury

Research Supervisors: Dr Scott Hurrell
Professor Robert McMaster

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

- I consent to interviews being audio-recorded.
- I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonyms.
- I acknowledge that the collected data may be used in future research and publication.

All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

I agree to take part in this research study.

Name of Participant _____

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher: Muhammad Faisal Chowdhury

Signature

Date

[End of consent form]