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## **Role of Identity in Creating Work Centrality among Young Sri Lankan Professionals in the Era of Late Capitalism**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores how contemporary young Sri Lankan professionals' value centrality of work in their lives and how this perception is shaped by their identities. Based on the social constructionist paradigm, we have used qualitative methodology to explore the issue. Purposive sampling was employed in selecting the respondents for the study and in-depth interviews and group discussions were used as data collection methods. It was thus revealed that the respondents placed a high value in their work roles, which is mainly due to the identity created through work. Even though some respondents' views indicated a form of identity fragmentation, they were not directly linked with the consequences of contemporary postmodern, late capital social conditions. Further analysis into the dominant role of identity formation in creating work revealed that the national culture plays a dominant role in shaping the work centrality among young Sri Lankan professionals even in the era of late capitalism.

*Keywords:* Identity, Work Centrality, Late Capitalism, National Culture

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### **1. Introduction**

Understanding work values of employees is very important for employers, as it spells out what behaviours and attitudes would be portrayed by the employees and whether the employees will be successful in the organization.

Work values are "the evaluative standards relating to work or the work environment by which individuals discern what is 'right' or assess the importance of preferences" (Smola & Sutton, 2002, p. 366). Studies across different socio-cultural settings, different time periods and different age groups

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have indicated that work values of employees are affected by culture, society, and generational experience (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2007; Harpaz & Sharabi, 2007; Holt, Kai-Cheng, Ralson & Terpstra, 2007; Li & Madsen, 2010; Lipset, 1980; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Thus, employees of different generations, different cultures and different societies would think and behave differently. Among these employees of different generations, cultures and social contexts, understanding the younger or new employees' thinking pattern and values is very important for organizations as they represent the future of organizations as well as the future work force.

A broader understanding about the employees' work related values can also be obtained by looking at their work centrality. Work centrality refers to the "degree of importance that working has in the life of individuals and to what extent people put work above other aspects of their life" (Chandrakumara & Sparrow, 2004, p. 579). Work centrality among employees will determine their commitment as well as performance (Baruch, Mannheim, & Tal 1997; Hakim, 2003).

Properly understanding these work related values including work centrality of employees by the management can lead to improvement of job satisfaction of employees through the various interventions management can make (Blood, 1969; Bretz & Judge, 1997; Kalleberg, 1977). This in turn, will make the organization a better place to work, increasing employees' work performance, and thereby increasing organizational performance and profitability.

As indicated by the preliminary survey we conducted in six manufacturing and service organizations, difficulty in understanding the work values of the contemporary young employees has resulted in difficulties in attracting and retaining them. Thus, it is very important for organizations to pay special attention to work related values, including work centrality of employees in attracting, managing, and retaining them.

Among the employees of different make-up, contemporary young professionals at Sri Lankan workplaces can be treated as a cohort of people that represent some unique generational characteristics. Many of these generational characteristics are consequences of the socio-economic changes that took place during the late 1970s such as market liberalization, emergence of multi-national capitalism, increased labour migration, expansion of informal economy and Non Government Organizational sector, and the resulting alteration of traditional value systems. In this new situation, social status and individual identity are increasingly defined not in terms of social position or education, but rather, in terms of life-style (Hettige, 2004; Liyanage, 2003; Sarachchandra, 1982). "Good life" is increasingly defined in terms of consumption patterns and acquisition of status symbols (Liyanage, 2003).

The present literature about young employees (Barling & Louglin, 2001; Cole, Lucas, & Smith, 2002; Iyer & Reisenwitz, 2009; Nicholas, 2009; Smola & Sutton, 2002) are mainly based on western social settings and do not clearly explain the work values and work centrality of Sri Lankan young professionals. Values of contemporary Sri Lankan youth have been a point of interest on some consumer (Hewawasam, 2007; Liyanage, 2003) and sociological (Hettige & Mayer, 2002) studies. However, work values among them have not been significantly researched. These studies on Sri Lankan youth (Hewawasam, 2007; Hettige & Mayer, 2002; Liyanage, 2003) indicate that the value system of contemporary Sri Lankan youth is quite different from the youth in the western world due to the dominant role played by the traditional culture. A study by Ranasinghe (1996) indicated a high degree of work centrality among Sri Lankan employees, even though they were not aligned with the materialist gains indicated by Protestant Work Ethics.

Protestant Work Ethics are a set of work values that associated with the ideals of individuality, asceticism and hard work in modern industrial societies (Frey & Powell 2009). Weber (2001) argued that Protestant ethic of individual economic acquisition through hard work would act as the foundation of capitalism.

Literature on work values of Sri Lanka during nineteenth century (Davy, 2002; Peiris, 2001) indicate that identity formation has played a dominant role among Sri Lankans. Considering these facts, and the various arguments and viewpoints presented above, this study explores the role played by identity in forming work centrality among young Sri Lankan professionals in the present context.

Thus, in this paper, we attempt to answer the research question “how does the identity shape the work centrality of young Sri Lankan professionals in the age of late capitalism?” First, literature on identity and work centrality of young employees in age of late capitalism will be reviewed, followed by a discussion about the influence of Sri Lankan national culture in shaping work identities. Then the selected paradigm, methodology, data collection and data analysis methods used in the study will be discussed. Thereafter, findings of the study will be discussed in the light of available literature. The paper will conclude with a discussion of limitations of the study and managerial implications.

## **2. Work Centrality and Identity of Young Professionals in the Era of Late Capitalism**

In understanding the role of identity in creating work centrality among young professionals in contemporary Sri Lanka, it is important to understand how work centrality and identities are constructed in the era of late capitalism.

Mandel (1976) uses the term “late capitalism” to denote the period of multinational capitalism where capitalism transcends national country boundaries:

When capitalist commodity production conquered and unified the world market, it did not create a uniform system of production prices, but a differentiated system of varying national prices of production and unified world market prices. This allowed the capital of the most developed capitalist countries to achieve surplus-profits, for its commodities could be sold above their 'own' national price of production and yet below the national price of production' of the buying country. In the final analysis, this internationally hierarchized and differentiated system of varying commodity values is explained by an internationally hierarchized and differentiated system of varying levels of labour productivity (Mandel, 1976, p. 83).

People's values and views are changed when the societies enter into era of late capitalism (Jameson, 1984). This shift in culture or peoples' values is also known as a move from modernity to postmodernity (Jameson, 1984; Lyotard, 1984). Considering the socio-economic changes that took place during late 1970s we can identify the social setting of contemporary young professionals as the era of late capitalism.

### *2.1 Work Centrality in the Era of Late Capitalism*

Spiro (2006) who explored and compared work centrality of young employees in this era of late capitalism with the previous generation, states that “unlike the previous generations, they tend to balance their other non-work activities with work. The more psychologists and social scientists study this generation, the more they realize that Generation Y members are most drawn to flexibility and balance in their day-to-day life ” (p.17). Similar observations had been made by some other scholars who had also studied young employees in US (Cole et al., 2002; McCrindle, 2011). The study conducted by Iyer and Reisenwitz (2009) among a regional sample in Southeastern United States

indicated that even though there is no significant difference between work centrality of past and present generation, it can be expected that there will be a reduction in the centrality of work in the future. Carraher, Forret, Mainiero, and Sullivan (2009) who carried out a quantitative study to find the work values of young employees across North, South, Midwest and Western USA found out that contemporary young employees feel a higher need towards work life balance when compared with the previous generations.

## 2.2 Identity in the Era of Late Capitalism

The declining tendency in work centrality can be seen as a consequence of the conditions of late capitalism and resulting changes in life styles. People's identities in this era become fragmented. "If identity is a social production, identity will be relatively stable in homogeneous and stable societies with few dominant discourses. In contemporary, heterogeneous, global, teleconnected societies the available discourses expand greatly. They also change rapidly. The individual comes to be spoken by so many discourses that fragmentation is virtually inevitable" (Alvesson & Deetz, 2005, p. 87). This definition on fragmentation suggests that many discourses emerge in the contemporary global, teleconnected or late capitalist societies to give different identities to people. These ever changing fragmented identities are created because of the globalization, development of internet and other telecommunication modes, as well as expansion of consumption.

Popular literature about young employees indicate that their lack of work centrality is linked with the leisure and social life spheres among those young adults (Cole et al., 2002; Spiro, 2006). This can be seen as a result of the fragmented identities. Due to the rapid flow of images through the media in the postmodern culture, people assume different identities. Identities created by activities in leisure culture reduce the prominence of the worker's identity as a worker. As an example, a person who is logging in to a social network in the internet and interacts with other members in that social network assumes a new identity which is constructed by that particular social network which is quite different from his or her identity as a member of a family, immediate society or the workplace.

However, studies conducted among Sri Lankan youth in the era of late capitalism has indicated that their values are influenced not only by these consequences of late capitalism, but also through the values and norms of the national culture (Hewawasam, 2007; Liyanage, 2003). Here, it is suggested that work values of the traditional Sri Lanka may play a dominant role in Sri Lankans' work values. Thus, a deeper exploration into how the national culture plays a role in work values in Sri Lanka would provide better understanding of work centrality of young professionals.

## 3. Influence of National Culture on Work Values in Sri Lanka

People who lived in the colonial Sri Lanka had to perform certain duties – *Rajakaaree* – to pay their debt for the king. These different duties were performed by different families or castes. This caste system was highly influential in all social relationships in pre-colonial Sri Lanka (Davy, 2002). This created their identity in the society through the respective work that they carried out (Peiris, 2001).

This traditional value system is altered when the society entered into capitalist production system. In his discussions on primitive accumulation, Marx (2007) indicates how the traditional value systems are replaced by modern values with the emergence of capitalism, where mode of production is changed from feudalism to capitalism. However, in societies where the capitalism is developed through merchant capitalism, one cannot see such a radical alteration of value systems. As indicated by Kay (1975), merchants generate profits by controlling the existing markets, instead of radically

changing the production system. As indicated by Jayawardena (2000), the emergence of capitalism in Sri Lanka can be identified as such a process. "With colonialism and the rise of capitalism, feudalism did not disappear and many of its practices were often reactivated, utilized and reinforced, by the colonial rulers and local capitalists. Some of these vestiges of feudalism remain today" (Jayawardena 2000, p. 358).

Since the identity creation through work had played a dominant role in Sri Lankans' lives under feudalism, and feudalism has not been completely eradicated by the emerging capitalism, it can be suggested that identity creation through work play a leading role in determining the work centrality of young Sri Lankan professionals today. However, this assumption has not been researched yet.

In this background the present study attempts to further explore the different aspects of identity creation and identity fragmentation among young Sri Lankan professionals in the era of late capitalism, with its influence of national culture, in terms of work centrality.

#### **4. Methodology**

The present study assumes that people's work values have been constructed in people's mind according to their own cultural patterns. Work values are not something externally given to individuals, but something that is created by the people's interaction with others in the society. Therefore the ontological position of this study is social constructionist (Ponterotto, 2005). In this study, we attempted to explore people's life experiences. In addition, we attempted to understand their work centrality through the interaction with research participants to get an in-depth understanding about their point of view. Therefore, we adopted social constructionist-interpretive epistemology (Ponterotto, 2005) for this study.

Followed by the social constructionist ontological and epistemological assumptions, we adopted the constructionist or the qualitative research methodology for the study. It allowed us to view work centrality of these young professionals from their point of view, providing us with a richer and in-depth understanding.

In order to ensure richness of information, respondents were selected purposively based on their ability to provide relevant and rich data, overcoming the crisis of representation, i.e. the problems associated with representing the phenomena to be studied adequately (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Thus the respondents selected were excellent participants who had experienced the phenomena; had time to share their experience; were willing to share them; and had the ability to clearly articulate them (Morse, 2007). To get an in-depth understanding about these respondents' views towards work, we employed interviews and group discussions as the main modes of information collection for the study. Interviews provided us elaborated and detailed answers which improved the richness of data. The group discussions elaborated the way the respondents collectively constructed meanings about work. In addition, the interaction between the team members in group discussions helped new ideas to emerge, providing new insights to the study. Furthermore, it facilitated easy expression of their views as the members selected for each group were friends known to each other.

Four group discussions with 16 respondents and two in-depth interviews were conducted. All the respondents were below the age of 30. They had studied in leading schools in Colombo; were familiar with internet and electronic media; lived in Colombo or in the suburban areas for more than 5 years; and were currently employed in leading government or private institutions of Sri Lanka. These characteristics ensured the respondents' exposure to the conditions of late capitalism.

**Table 1: Details of Respondents**

	<b>Details of Respondents</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
<b>Age</b>	20-25	12
	26-30	6
<b>School</b>	Colombo	13
	Gampaha	3
	Kalutara	2
<b>Education</b>	Degree	14
	Professional exams	4
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	7
	Unmarried	11

Qualitative data analysis was carried out following the six steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarizing with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report.

Familiarizing with the data started with the transcribing process itself. Once the interviews were digitally recorded, the recorded interviews were transcribed personally. The transcribed interviews were checked for accuracy and missing data. Thereafter, the transcriptions were read again to obtain a rough idea about the initial codes. As a result, we were very much familiar with the data before coding.

Once the data became familiar, we started doing initial coding, identifying interesting points of all the responses. The coding system used was open ended coding. After the coding was done, the entire initial code set was recorded in a separate sheet and initial themes were identified by carefully going through the coding sheet, keeping the research questions in mind. Then the generated themes were refined considering the concepts used in postmodern literature to identify those phenomena. Once the themes were refined and reviewed, they were named using the concepts of identity construction and identity fragmentation from postmodern literature. Ultimately the study used inductive coding, i.e. emergent codes (codes generated from the responses), followed by borrowed codes (from the existing literature), in the analysis.

## **5. Findings**

In contrast to previous literature about young adults at the workplace, the respondents of the study expressed a high moral value to work roles in their lives. The moral importance given to work over other aspect of life was mainly derived by the respondents' need to have an identity through work. This identity formation could be seen along four dimensions: (a) creating self identity (b) creating social identity (c) disciplining identity and (d) fragmentation of identities.

### 5.1 Creating Self identity

Self identity is someone's awareness and identification of him or herself as a unique personality (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1999). The study revealed that the young Sri Lankan professionals place a significant importance to the self identity created through work. This self identity was mainly created out of the personal satisfaction which is obtained through becoming productive and creative.

Subash (Age 25, graduate from a leading university), who is working at a leading software corporation:

*We should have a commercial return to the work we do. And also, we need to have a personal satisfaction as well. As a person, we should have a satisfaction. If I am not satisfied with the work I do, then I do not exist as a man, live as a man. Rather than anything else, I think about the personal satisfaction.*

This respondent indicates his willingness to have a commercial return to the work he does. It is similar to the materialistic needs that are indicated by the protestant work ethic. However, the driving factor for him to work is not the materialistic needs, but the satisfaction he derives through work. That gives a sense of identification to himself. Through work, he understands that he is existing; he is living as a man. That creates a self identity for him (Hogg et al., 1999). This self identity is more important to him more than anything else.

Kavindra (Age 28, graduate from a leading university) who is working as a University lecturer:

*I think work is necessary for a person. I sustain through work. I can't function without having it in my life. I feel crazy without work. So, I sort of need to work. For me, I think work has to be there... I think when I am not doing anything – there were periods that I did not do anything and was at home – I felt totally useless. I felt that I am not doing anything productive in this world. So, I think work is really necessary for me.*

During the times she didn't have a job, she didn't have a sense of existence or a self identity. She identifies her current job as an activity which helps to occupy in some productive work and make a sense of her existence. For her, work is an activity needed for individual existence. By occupying in some productive and satisfactory work, she creates an identity for herself.

Both the respondents above indicate their willingness to work for the self identity created through their work. This factor is further visible in Kavindra's statement when she does a comparison between domestic work and professional work:

*If we take a case of a woman, she spends every minute of her life cooking, washing clothes, and everything. No appreciation will come for such work and also no exposure is received through such work.*

Here, the respondent indicates two choices she has to make in order to become satisfied about herself. Either she can become a 'good mother' or become a 'good professional'. By comparing both the identities, she prefers to become a professional.

### 5.2 Creating Social Identity

Social identity is the recognition obtained from others for belonging to a particular group or society (Hogg et al., 1999). The study revealed that young Sri Lankan professionals are highly interested in the social identity they obtain through work. When working in a particular organization or a particular profession, they are recognized by others as individuals who belong to that particular

organizational or professional community. That social identity worked as a stimulant for them to work in their current profession.

Dasun (age 25, studied at a leading boy's school) who is working at a leading private firm:

*I think especially a male should do a job. That gives stability for a boy. Then only he will be able to emphasize things. Especially when a boy becomes an adult, he should do a job as it gives him a certain power and respect.*

Traditional cultural norms in Sri Lanka have depicted the male as the breadwinner of the family (Peiris, 2001). That role makes him a powerful and respectable person as indicated by the above respondent. Therefore, the social identity through work is dominant for males.

Sayuri, who works as a university lecturer:

*I think work creates a self for us. When I go to my home town, all the people [family and friends] are happy. I know that is solely because of the work I do. It is due to the work that I get the status, celebrity, and the respect. Recognition from friends, relatives... all this come from work. Therefore, I think work as a necessity for a person.*

Here, the respondent explains her status as a lecturer among friends and family members. She is celebrated and recognized by others as a member of the 'academic community'. This indicates a social identity that is created through work discourse. "As discourses structure the world they at the same time structure the person's subjectivity, providing him/her with a particular social identity and way of being in the world. The person... is always social first and only mistakenly claims the personal self as the origin of experience" (Alvesson & Deetz, 2005, p. 85). Thus, a social identity is created through work and that social identity functions as a drive for her to work.

Ayomi (age 28, studied at a leading girls' school in Colombo) who works as Project Manager at an IT firm:

*In personal life, if people close to you respect you that's enough. I would not care whether anybody respects me or not, but if people close to me respects me that means a lot. I know my job helped a lot in gaining the respect I receive that now from my closest friends and even the family.*

Gangani (age 25, studied at a leading girls' school in Colombo), who is working at a leading international bank:

*To me, being respected by my community is more important than the satisfaction. When we become older and mature we feel being respected by other... As an example, my father and mother still do jobs. At the beginning their main concern was earning their living. But now, self esteem is the driving forces that drive them for jobs.*

These respondents' close friends and family members respect them as members of 'professional community.' For them, the social identity created through work, functions as the main stimulant for working, and that identity creation is shaped by their family orientations.

The above respondents' views indicate how the social identity created through work becomes a major cause for the work centrality among young Sri Lankan professionals. For females, that social identity helps them to gain more recognition from their families. For males, that social identity helps them to strengthen or stabilize the identity given to them by the traditional culture (Davy, 2002; Peiris, 2001).



### 5.3 Disciplining the Identity

Work place surroundings act as mechanisms for the employee to achieve their preferred identity (Brown & Thornborrow, 2009). Respondents of the study elaborated how work disciplined them to obtain their preferred identity.

Ayomi:

*It's a discipline actually. If you work at a place that adheres to the code of ethic and work ethic and the standards, everything will groom you and it will build a... mm... It will give you discipline actually. So, that will help in your personal life also to respect the other person, do your duties properly, and gain their respect as well in return.*

Gangani:

*When compared with the time I was out from the campus and stayed at home, now I feel there are a lot of things that have come to my life by doing a job... how to live in the society, how to face problems, I have learnt all these things with the exposure I got by doing a job... It helps me to become the professional I want to become.*

With the advancement of technology, people in the late capitalist era have become more and more social beings. Apart from being a member of a certain organization, people are members of the broader society. Both these responses indicate the way the work disciplines a person in a broader level. In addition to their social identity as members of certain professional community in the eyes of others, they indicate how the exposure through occupation has disciplined them to become members of the broader society.

### 5.4 Fragmentation of Identities

Above findings on the views of young professionals in Sri Lanka indicates that they highly value the identity they derive through work. However, literature suggests that people's identities in the era of late capitalism become fragmented (Alvesson & Deetz, 2005; Dholakia, Firat, & Venkatesh, 1995). This fragmentation is due to the impact of the electronic media as well as changes in the lifestyles. The respondents of the study too, indicated a certain degree of exposure to the electronic media and urban leisure culture. However, these conditions did not play an influential role in fragmenting the identities of the respondents.

Sankha (age 24, studied at a boys' school in Colombo), a software engineer in a leading IT firm:

*I do have Facebook accounts and all. Face book is something... like.... It's not face to face, it is not the reality. If you go into virtual world, you can move deep into it. But finally you won't know what will happen at the end. It's a stimulated environment. It's a kind of addiction. I spend lot of my time in Facebook. But, that is only when I am working. But in my leisure time, I used to spend with my friends. I prefer to go to visit friends and be with my family. I do not like to spend the leisure time with such social networks.*

As a software engineer the respondent is highly involved with the electronic media, internet and social networking. However, that exposure does not have a considerable impact on him. For him, electronic media is something he had to use "only when he is working". . So, it can be assumed rapidly changing images in the electronic media does not play a major role in constructing his identity.

In addition, the respondents indicated a similar attitude towards their leisure activities. Even though they participated in leisure activities at their workplace, they tend to see those activities as some kind of a duty that they have to perform, in order to not to become alienated among the fellow

members at the workplace. Considering these factors we can see that conditions of late capitalism such as internet or the leisure culture does not play a major role to fragment their identities. This can be seen as another reason for the respondents' willingness to have stable identities from their work roles.

## **6. Discussion and Conclusion**

In Contrast to the previous studies on work centrality in the era of late capitalism (Cole et al., 2002; McCrindle, 2011; Spiro, 2006), findings of the present study indicated that young Sri Lankan professionals in the era of late capitalism expressed a high moral importance to work. However, the main reason for this moral importance towards work or work centrality was not materialist gains that were indicated by Protestant Work Ethic, but rather the identity created through work, which can be seen as an element of pre-capitalist value system. This is again contradictory to idea of existing literature (Frey & Powell, 2009; Weber, 2001) which suggest that work values are determined by Protestant ethics such as individualism and materialist gains which can be treated as main factors of capitalism.

Weber (2001) indicated Protestantism as a necessary condition of the rise of modern capitalistic societies. Protestant value system created a new set of social norms that justified the practices and unequal wealth distribution among emergent social strata. Even though Protestant missionaries were active during the emergence of capitalism in Sri Lanka during the colonial period, they had not been powerful enough to completely eradicate the traditional social norms of the national culture which was embedded in Buddhism (Obeyesekere, 1997).

“The dominant ideology was fashioned by Sinhalese Buddhism, a variety of peasant religion that incorporated Hindu-Buddhistic syncretism and magico-animism.... The religion practiced in the Kandyan Kingdom had long lost the radical orientation it possessed in the days of its emergence in the Gangetic valley and had become a justificatory of feudalism” (Gunasinghe, 2007, p. 35). During the colonial period, the dominance of Buddhism and its associated value system was challenged by Protestantism and as a result a new form of Buddhism was emerged to confront this influence of Protestantism. Obeyesekere (1970) uses the term “Protestant Buddhism” to elaborate this revivalist Buddhism, which acted against British imperialism and expansion Protestantism while using some of the basics of the Protestantism. “Up to the sixteenth century, being a Sinhalese implied being a Buddhist. After that time, with the advent of European powers, a split in Sinhalese identity occurred... Sinhalese ceased to be an ethnic identity. Buddhism also lost its prominence as national religion; its position was usurped by Protestantism” (Obeyesekere, 1997, p. 355). The Protestant Buddhism helped Sri Lankans to reaffirm their collectivist ethnic identity which was prevailing during the pre-capitalist era. Thus the Protestantism had not been able to completely eradicate the values of feudalism, for the expansion of capitalism in Sri Lanka. This may be one reason for the visibility of pre-capitalist values in the work centrality among young Sri Lankan professionals.

Further, the nature of development of capitalism, which reactivated and utilized the feudal practices for its benefit by the colonial rulers (de Silva, 1982; Gunasinghe, 2007; Jayawardena, 2000) too could be another reason to the above finding. “What happened was not the demise of the old aristocracy and emergence of a local bourgeoisie, but the mobility of a subordinate stratum to the position of a new aristocracy, under the benevolence of the colonial state. “Unlike the old aristocracy, which was an authentic ruling class, the new aristocracy was merely a subaltern class, who helped the colonial power to rule” (Gunasinghe, 2007, p. 211). As such, this new bourgeois class did not have an interest in revolutionizing pre-capitalist mode of production and values associated to it. Thus, while

the religion supported to reactivate pre-capitalist values in an ideological level, newly emerged bourgeois too, did the same at a juridico-political level.

There was a fragmentation of identities of the respondents among family and work spheres. However, this identity fragmentation is different from the identity fragmentation in the late capitalism (Alvesson & Deetz, 2005; Dholakia et al., 1995). Even though young Sri Lankan professionals were highly exposed to electronic media and leisure activities, they did not play a significant role in the respondents' identities. Most of their leisure activities and social activities were again linked with their jobs making the leisure and social spheres another work domain. This may be due to the unavailability of an independent leisure culture in the country. However, with the present expansion of capitalism in the country, it can be suggested that this situation would change in the future.

Identity formation through work among the respondents could be viewed along three dimensions: First, the work created a self identity for them: work gives them a sense of existence; work became a means for themselves to understand who they are. Especially, the females placed a high value to their job roles in the new economy in this sense. When compared with the unrecognized domestic roles of women in the previous generation, the self identity or the sense of existence given to them by their work was highly valued by the female respondents of the study. Second, the work gave them a social identity. This social identity acted as a main determining factor for the high moral value the respondents placed on work. They highly valued the recognition they obtained from their families, close friends and relatives, by doing a job. In addition this social identity was shaped by the traditional cultural norms in the country (such as men as the breadwinner of the house). Third, they viewed work as a site to discipline their identities. On contrary to the literature about generation Y as a group of people who challenge the authority structures ((Barling & Loughlin, 2001; Nicholas, 2009), the respondents of this study voluntarily submitted themselves to the order in the workplaces, with the hope of disciplining themselves to achieve the preferred social identity. This again indicates the importance of identity created through work for young Sri Lankan employees.

Based on these findings, it can be identified that there is a dominant role played by identity when shaping the work centrality among young Sri Lankan professionals in the era of late capitalism.

## **7. Directions for Further Research**

Since this study restricted the exploration of work centrality among young Sri Lankan professionals to respondents from the Sinhalese nationality, a further research could be undertaken to explore the work centrality among young professionals from other nationalities such as Tamil and Muslim. Respondents of the study were educated from leading local and private schools in the Western province. However, it is important to include respondents from international school in a future research as now we can observe an increasing tendency among parents to send their children to international schools. Furthermore, as technology, urbanization, media, consumerism and capitalist organizations are rapidly expanding to remote areas, a study including respondents from rural areas too can shed more light to the findings of the present study.

## **8. Managerial Implications**

Findings of this study indicated several implications for the practitioners. First of all, the study indicated that uncritical adaptation of knowledge in a different social context will not be helpful to understand the young Sri Lankan professionals. Understanding these young adults through some generalizations such as Generation X or Y would avoid the specific nature of these employees and

they will be more distanced from the organization. This can be seen as one of the reasons behind the respondents' view that present organizations are unable to grab new people.

Second, the study indicated that the young Sri Lankan professionals are driven to work mainly by the identity created through work. On one hand, the work should make a self identity for them. They should be satisfied about their work. Work needs to be designed in a way the individual has a space for his creativity. On the other hand, they valued the social identity created through their work. When designing jobs in HR planning, managers need to pay attention to this aspect as well.

Further, the results of the study indicate that social activities or leisure activities by the organizations do not act as a major stimulant among young professionals in Sri Lanka. However, being empathetic and paying more attention to the family related matters are much important when managing them. Especially, keeping a soft corner for family related matters is an important factor when managing young females.

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