ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Managerial Jacobinism and performance in the private sector: Evidence from the Turkish shipyards for a vertical frame

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Abstract

Long-lasting euphoria of the private sector managerialism has begun to be questioned even by its ardent advocators in recent years. Substantiating a distinct concern, this paper sheds light on what one might call 'managerial Jacobinism' through unstructured interviews conducted in Turkey's shipyards. As its most defining characteristics, the undervaluation of managerial work by the companies and the punitive treatment of good practices by the mediocre superiors provoke ill-concealed defensive reactions among the managers to their insecurity at work while undermining both employees' productivity and the firms' performance in the midst of regulatory deficiencies. Managerial Jacobinism also spirals around a vertical frame by being more apparent and survival-driven in the case of immediate managers whereas more ambition-driven and detrimental when it comes to top managers resonating with their higher influence. Empirical findings further indicate that results are officiated by the intersecting variations in age, gender, ethnicity, occupations, administrative divisions and establishment size.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The proponents of neoliberalism have praised private sector managerialism since the beginning of global privatisation and deregulation initiations in the early 1980s (World Bank, 2019). As globalisation loses momentum nowadays, however, their optimism has begun to be treated with caution not only by the critical opponents but also by a growing number of nervous marketeers. An important reason for the rise of scepticism was related to the unsustainable impacts of globalisation on inequalities between social classes and nations.

In recent years, attention was also paid to the challenges that the middle classes have encountered. They become, for example, more vulnerable to financial downturns, whereas upward mobility demises, especially in the West (Green, 2019). In particular, a growing proportion of managers were reported to earn minimum wage or less as a culmination of deskilling and over-qualification processes (Lloyd & Payne, 2016). It was further documented that those who have higher incomes than the rest of the workforce experience a paradoxical precarity: they feel less secure and less satisfied with pay, working hours and participation than others (Cam & Palaz, 2018).

Building on such observations, this paper will contribute to the debate by specifically arguing that workplace pressures in the private sector create what one might call for the sake of convenience 'managerial Jacobinism' predicated on the defensive reactions of managers. As expounded in what follows, we will contend that despite a progressive and unitarist rhetoric that promises to serve both companies and employees, managerial Jacobinism has adverse implications for the company performance and labour productivity. It will also be stipulated that managerial Jacobinism takes place within a vertical frame because the individual motivations behind the reactionariness shift up from survival to ambition and its harm heightens along with the managerial ranking. Approaching the issue from a critically intersectional perspective, we will further argue that this situation is not altered, but reproduced through the variations in age, gender, ethnicity, occupations, administrative divisions and establishment size.

Turkish shipyards constitute a suitable setting for the purpose of this paper. Being an off-shore manufacturing hub of Europe, the industry boasts strategic roles for the EU and NATO as a civilian and military maritime supplier. Shipyards are also quintessential for Turkey as one of the largest and fastest growing emerging market economies in the World. Following a long-term expansion, however, Turkey's shipyards have endured financial hardships ignited by the 2008 turmoil. The surge in the number of employees during the decade preceding the recession, for example, was from less than 5000 to 34 000 in 2007 as opposed to a one-third plunge by 2012 (UBAK, 2014). Yearly exports of the ships also halved to $1.3bn between 2009 and 2012 (Ship2Shore, 2012). The recovery signs were modest until 2018, with a growth in the output capacity to 4.4 m dwt, exports to $1.4bn and employment to 32 500 (MofTMAC, 2019). Although empirical research in the sector is limited, it has already been established that managerial pitfalls such as authoritarianism and patronage prevail across the industry (Cam & Palaz, 2016).

1.1 | Conflict of interests

Unitarist interlockers have long argued that enterprises and employees are on the same side owing to the complementary nature of their interests as a misfortune for the firms, for instance, generates knock-on effects on labour in the shape of low wages, limited welfare provisions and

higher unemployment rates (Barman, 2016). Such a model also dismisses contradictions between managers and other employees in relation to their interests (Budd & Bhave, 2008).

However, Marxists approaches repudiate the short-sightedness of unitarist frames with the assertion that the conflict of interests between 'producers and owners' is rooted in the very foundations of capital as the confiscated surplus by the bourgeoisie (Burawoy, 1979). Radical analysts have also underlined that the dichotomy is not just about the extortion, but the degree of unfairness as well (Thompson, 2010). That is, the extent to which employees' contributions to institutions are underrated by the 'profiteers' plays a supplementary role in the conflict of interests (Frege et al., 2011). Managers, in particular, are regarded as 'labourers' by the critical discussants and hence in conflict with the firms 'objectively'. Even so, they are also seen in conflict with the shop floor workers 'subjectively' because they are 'bought out' by the corporations (Nichols, 1969).

Social democratic genres have seized on the failure of radical approaches to understand that some essential interest conflicts might be reconciled under capitalism (Sofer, 1970). Especially the unfolding of Keynesian economy had prompted confidence in socially acceptable resolutions for the political tensions between social classes and the industrial disputers. It was postulated that securing effective demand for the Fordist mass production required full employment, miscellaneous welfare provisions and strong links between social democratic parties and trade unions (Dahrendorf, 1957). Crucially, managers, too, could join the unions to protect their legitimate rights (King, 1979).

Liberal pundits took a further step and praised interest conflicts between not only companies and employees, but also between managers and the shop floor workers as a progressive virtue. Competition between the rivalling actors are believed to be an impetus for more efforts to maximise self-interests and hence motivation to work harder (Coser, 2007). In addition, 'managerial squabbling' is considered a positive force to perform better at the individual and institutional levels (Knights & Murray, 1994).

Nevertheless, even some neo-liberals guardedly pointed to excessive interest conflicts fearing that competition may lose its benefits for the stakeholders if it goes out of control (Stiglitz, 2002). Managerial rationality, for example, is claimed to be threatened by idiosyncrasy as in the case of unfettered corporate greed against the interests of employees. Bearing this in mind, the present paper will draw attention to a different form of detrimental conflicts. It will lay down that sometimes 'no good deed goes unpunished' (Brown, 2008) in the relations of managers with their superiors. Such a situation, along with the undervaluing of managerial inputs by the organisations (Gallie et al., 2017), will be further shown to make managers feel insecure and hence entice them into defensive reactions about the job-related pressures.

1.2 | Managerial Jacobinism

Employees' resistance to workplace pressures takes various forms from strikes to hidden resistance such as slowing down the production and applying to employment tribunals or seeking support from NGO's including Citizens Advice Bureau and the Law Centres as well as individual negotiations with managers (Bryson et al., 2006).

The modes of responses to workplace pressures are shaped by the socio-economic and historical conjectures. At the times of high managerial pressures, for instance, hidden resistance becomes more preferable (Yucesan-Ozdemir, 2003). It was also noted that the political

weaknesses of unions in terms of organising and legal prerogatives may urge employees to try to utilise non-collective actions (Pollert, 2005).

Reactionariness to pressures, in particular, did not draw much attention, especially in recent times. Speaking historically, the Luddites, for example, were condemned in Marxist writings emphasising that smashing the machineries would not be a way for reaching or substituting the socialist transfer of power from the ruling classes to proletariat (Hobsbawm, 1952). Reactionary practices may also come in various yet no less controversial demeanours. Some commentators in Turkey, for instance, interpreted the bribery from customers as a retaliation of employees to the failure of companies to provide the staff with adequate renumeration (YeniSafak, 2005).

This paper provides a distinct look at the defensive reactions of managers to workplace pressures in the private sector, using the word 'managerial Jacobinism' for a systematic analysis. As a critical reference to the members of the Jacobin Club in the political debates about the 1789 French Revolution, the term Jacobinism has been interpreted in miscellaneous ways (Scott, 1990), but there are widely accepted attributions to the concept. A fundamental one among them is continuity: Gramsci considered the modern West a hegemonic political system as opposed to pre-capitalist dominancy. However, post-Gramscian disciples have pointed to growing complexities overtime beyond a clear-cut differentiation between consent and coercion while depicting Jacobinism as the 'post-modern prince' (Shilliam, 2008). Accordingly, the term is used with regard to the various aspects of contemporary societies in which consent is manufactured with the backing of some coercion (Motta, 2014). Bearing this in mind, we will study defensive reactions of company managers through the lenses of Jacobinism.

Certain facts which had been historically well established lend notable support to the idea of benefiting from the Jacobinism concept in understanding managerial affairs. For instance, a critical aspect of Jacobinism is its radicalistic and revolutionary propensity with the political/ ideological end to oust 'aristocratic parasites'. Such a trait is also embedded in the managerial ambition for advocating a radical shift of control from the owners of businesses to the managers as a new 'social class' (Nichols, 1969). Further, Jacobinism has tried to legitimise itself on the rationality principle of a good governance that would serve as a progressive force to accumulate more wealth for the nations by centralising the regime in the hands of 'philosopher stateman' (Shusterman, 2014). This is what the managerial affidavit similarly claims to be about as the army of professionals who are reputedly equipped with the specialised skills to better run the firms (King, 1979).

Through the use of original empirical evidence from the Turkish shipyards, we will further delineate how Jacobinism as a concept helps develop more elaborated insights into managerial domains. As an ideological positioning, the term is associated with the 'civic good' connotation that promises to serve the interest of all citizens (Macridis, 1990). Congruently, we will elucidate that there is a considerable subscription to the unitarist rhetoric among the managers investigated.

Even so, Jacobinism has bogged down to oppressive maneuverers in the name of rectifying the failure of citizens to acquire sufficient loyalty to the common good (Levy, 2004). We will evidence that this is again well founded in the managerial compulsion as it may attempt to consolidate the commitment of employees to the unitarist cause by applying pressure via, for instance, precarity and under-valuing (or even punishing) benevolent endeavours.

Jacobinism has evolved from an ideological devotion to the common good to a pragmatist pursuit of self-interests. We will explicate that administrative spectrums can also ebb away from a unitarist idealism to the survival or ambition-driven practices among the managers through their defensive reactions to the work pressures.

Jacobinism is paradoxically reproduced by the resistance against itself because its universalism which purports to benefit all citizens equally is imitated/replicated by the uniformist modernism of oppositionary individualism (Macridis, 1990). Managerial Jacobinism is not worlds apart in relation to such an aspect, either. We will illustrate that the reason for this is because the defensive reactions of managers to the workplace pressures counterproductively surrogate more pressure.

In particular, we will argue that managerial Jacobinism adversely affects performance. Although performance has been investigated in miscellaneous ways there is no consensus about its definition yet (Franco-Santos et al., 2007). Some researchers describe it, for example, in respect of profits, whereas some others take expenditures as the core integrant (Bevilacqua et al., 2016). The present paper uses the term for its pertinence to investments' efficiency, labour productivity and the final profitability as perceived by the participants (Furman & Orszag, 2018).

There are a myriad of enquiries delving into various factors on performance such as human resources (HR) management, logistics and socio-economic circumstances beyond the companies (Chow et al., 1994). A recent work has also documented positive impacts of employees' subjective wellbeing on performance (Bryson et al., 2017). Because little attention has been paid to managers' reactionary responses to workplace pressures, we do not know how they would influence performance.

Managers' status at work may be affected by their ranks in connection with quite a few dimensions such as pay, responsibilities and authority (Knights & Murray, 1994). Therefore, one can plausibly propose that managerial Jacobinism and its impact on performance may well be informed by the positions in the managerial hierarchy. In view of this, we will systematically examine the role of such variations through an 'upward frame': we will assess to what extent, if at all, managerial Jacobinism and its influence on productivity is driven by career ambitions and survival needs among the managers as a distinguishing benchmark between higher and lower bracket leaders (Borgogni et al., 2011). Likewise, we will check whether managerial Jacobinism is more prevalent among the immediate or top managers making a distinction between 'more apparent' and 'more influential' inputs (Sofer, 1970).

Considering the discussions so far, this paper will unravel managerial Jacobinism with regard to a number of points: (i) it is superficially glossed with a unitarist rhetoric commonly used by the managers; (ii) however, we will underscore that, beneath the surface, managers have a multitude of interest conflicts with their peers and companies as well as with the shop floor workers; (iii) among the various dynamics of conflicts, we will focus on the undervaluing of managerial undertakings by the firms and the punitive treatment of their good deeds by the mediocre superiors because these two dynamics are most likely to engender a sense of insecurity; (iv) then, we will demonstrate that managers respond to this situation by defensive reactions; (v) we will highlight that such defensiveness inflicts serious damages on the company performance as well as the labour productivity; (vi) it will be further evidenced that managerial Jacobinism comes about within a vertical frame as it leans to being more prevalent among the immediate managers whereas more detrimental in the case of high-ranking managers; (vii) we will finally expound that, alongside the managerial upstream, the individual motive of defensive reactions to the workplace pressures typically swings from survival to ambition at the expense of more pressure at work.

2 | METHOD

Scholars have underlined that for a comprehensive understanding of events, research should take on board the impacts of intersecting factors (Bradley & Fenton, 1999). Such influences may

comprise a range of social/personal profile characteristics from gender to age, ethnicity and occupations (Anthias, 2013). Accordingly, we will hone in on the roles of these potentially intermediating affects in the relationship between interest conflicts, managerial defensiveness and performance.

We will further include workplace characteristics covering establishment size and administrative divisions because they may also be important in terms of employment relations (van Wanrooy et al., 2013). Although we predict that these diverse conditions would result in different outcomes as the intersectional interventions espoused, we will additionally evaluate their opposite impacts in the shape of reproducing similarities between the observations as in the well-known case of, for example, ageism against both younger and older people.

The present study draws on unstructured interviews with 70 managers and 10 employers conducted in 2018. We have interviewed only five women and five older (over 60 years old) participants as a reflection of segregated demography in the industry (Cam & Palaz, 2018). The paper also benefits from nine elite interviews in various sectorial bodies, including Portal Authorities, Chamber of Shipbuilders, Association of Shipbuilders, the Ministry of Transport and Trade Unions.

The companies studied are located in the Marmara, Aegean and the Black Sea regions where most of the Turkish shipyards are situated. Six shipyards were investigated: two of them are smaller, two of them are medium and the remaining two are larger establishments – the smaller ones in Turkey are officially defined as those with less than 50 employees as opposed to the medium-sized ones, with up to 250 employees, in line with the international literature (Forth et al., 2006).

Ethical matters have been paid special attention. Quotations are conveyed anonymously or with pseudonyms. Because this paper is on a critical topic, participants were told that they did not have to talk explicitly about themselves. Instead, they were advised to reveal their general feelings only. Even so, they occasionally cited personal experiences. For that reason, institutional and personal details are reported in a way that cannot be traced back to the data sources.

3 | MANAGERIAL HARMONY AND CONFLICT AT WORK

In this part, we will determine to what extent managers think that there is a concord or conflict between their interests, the company's as well as those of other employees.

3.1 | Unitarist rhetoric

Managers often argued that their own interests and those of shop floor workers were perfectly compatible as epitomised in this paternalistic remark of a small workshop owner:

> Employees are part of our family. Because we are a small shipyard, we know each worker in person. When they have weddings or circumcision ceremonies, for example, we contribute toward the cost as well as sending gifts and organising the transport to the local villages for social gatherings.

It is also a common assumption that managers' interests are naturally in harmony with their fellow managers. One reason occasionally mentioned for this was the *interdependency through the division of labour* as exemplified by a finance manager:

All managers just like the rest of us are dependent on each other's skills. I manage the finance, somebody else sort out the electronic devices and some others organise the heating hardware. Only by doing so, can we produce and sell ships to make a living. We are on the same ark in this odyssey.

Distribution of benefits between managers and companies were also claimed to be essentially free from the conflict of interests *thanks to sensible management strategies,* according to an experienced CEO:

If managers are not happy with their share, they will not run the business thoroughly. If you hurt your manager, rest assured that there will be payback time. So, it is best to be reasonable and fair on your management team before they give you a bloody nose.

3.2 | Conflicts ubiquitous

However, the conflict of interests between managers and the rest of the employees, to start with, are unmistakable. As noted earlier, for example, an employer in one of the smaller firms likened employees to the members of his family to prove that there was no conflict of interests. However, the reminder of the conversation points to a contrary propensity. He said that

We treat employees as though part of our family, but this may not go down well all the way along. In our families, we don't let children talk in front of the grown-ups. Just like that, we do not let employees speak out. That's why, we can't understand them as much.

Conflict of interests between managers and the shop-floor workers is no less evident when it comes to unions. One of the CEO's in Istanbul burst out with anger:

Don't say a word about unions. I am sick of them. They call in ambulances for no reason other than spoiling the peace at work by distracting everyone's attention.

A variety of interest conflicts among the managers themselves were acknowledged during further engagements. Some of the important tensions were embedded in the ways in which the workshop was organised. For example, heavy machineries are supposed to be used in turn owing to shortages, but this paves the way for discontent as explained by a senior foreman:

Sometimes you run late, and you hang on things like lathes and cranes longer than you thought. This means that you may get other team leaders into trouble since such delays stain their CVs. You get no collegiality prize for that.

Some IT managers talked about the *conflict of priorities:*

We have recently bought ITF [a software to coordinate the production process]. I have to make sure that a manager in each department enters the data into system.

However, some foremen find it time-consuming and prioritise other tasks triggering unease as I get picked on for the missing data.

Another theme frequently addressed was the managerial allegiance to companies. A personnel officer indicated that

I sit on the recruiting panel to interview candidates. We are obliged to get the best ones with the least cost by twisting the arms of our future workmates.

Some participants, on the other hand, had no doubt that the conflict of interests between companies and managers was intrinsically a class issue as clarified by an 'electrical furniture' supervisor:

If there are conflicts of interests between companies and the shop floor workers, then it is just the same for the managers. As the directors etc, we basically earn wages whilst raising handsome profits for the proprietor by digitalising, coordinating and so on.

In one of the shipyards investigated, a human resources manager specified that the nature of interest conflict between his organisation and himself involves legal complications:

My employer asks me to check whether the tasheron [agency] workers' insurance policies are paid by the intermediaries to increase their sense of belonging. However, if I do that, I will get screwed-up as none of them has insurance. Even if I work with my team 7/24, we could not sort out this shamble in a million years' time.

3.3 | Underlying problems

Evidence suggests that two types of conflicts, inter alia, are most conducive to defensive reactions by the managers because they exacerbate the sense of insecurity at work. These are the undervaluing of managerial work by the companies and the punitive treatment of benign practices by the mediocre superiors.

3.4 | Under-valuing managerial work

Most of the time, managers were frustrated with employers having no regard for their endeavours. As a general issue in shipyards, managers have expressed concerns over the lack of appreciation by the entrepreneurs about unsustainable workloads due to, for example, saving policies pertaining to the employment of middle-level managers. A repair chief argued that

We desperately need intermediate managers. They tend to be knowledgeable and hands-on leaders, but the boss does not want to spend for them. This causes quite bit of strain on us because of the virtually unattainable responsibilities.

Pay settlements were brought up as another area in connection with the *discrediting of managerial works*. A metal engineer stipulated that

> Shop floor workers are able to do paid overtime. But as the manager of pressing [steel moulds], I can't. The employer says that they don't need engineers at all times, and they can call me in whenever necessary. This is how I earn even less than a security guard.

A large holding's CEO affirmed that *underestimating managers' works* was the norm:

> Why does the international capital come to Turkey? Well, all we know is that it is preying on cheap labour. Simple as that. If employees, especially managers are paid more, then we would lose our appeal as a nation for foreign financiers.

Some managers have protested that employers *politically liquidise* them. A construction manager in a yacht company shared his disappointment:

> In my previous workplace, I wanted to build a new pool for maintenance. But once I started the preparations, the boss has changed his mind and asked me to abandon the project. He bowed to the general coordinator who thought that the extension would overstretch the budget without reading my feasibility report.

3.5 | 'Punishing the good deed'

Occasionally quoting a common saying in Turkey, *no success gets away unpunished*, managers reported to have become penalised for their benevolent practices by superiors. A strategy expert noted that

> If you do your job too well, you won't get promotion, because it would be a hassle for the firms to find somebody else to fill your position without risking a hole on the ship, so to speak.

Some senior figures also contested that *generous dividends for the hard-working managers may put them off*. The owner of a medium-sized company tried to prove that

> Generous wage for decent work is an ingredient for headache. High earnings would be seen insufficient over time, and those lavishly paid managers would lose their appetite. If you reward people too somewhat parsimoniously though, you will be surprised to see how passionately they pace up for extra income that is vital for them.

A finance manager who is responsible for the incremental rises posited that *walking over the industrious colleagues* may paradoxically be necessary for retention:

> While you try to cost everyone the least possible as dictated in your job contract, you may flatter some managers more than they deserve. It must feel like some sort

of punishment for the hard-working ones. But you have to overpay some managers every now and then because of their skills that you need for the works in the pipeline.

Having an excellent CV was adduced among the reasons for the rejection of a job application sometimes or even for making someone redundant. This was a staffing consultant's account:

> We turn down the top talents as 'overqualified'. The reason for this actually is because you can't rely on them as they always get new job offers. They will never commit, but desert you in the middle of crunch times. Believe you me, we simply get rid of those dodgy types before it gets too late.

3.6 | Insecurity

Participants have highlighted that being undervalued and *discouragement from commitment* particularly render them insecure. Distinguishing job security from the *employment security*, a furniture manager indicated that

> Most of us work for a given project with no job security. I care more about employment security. I mean it is not too difficult to find another job. But the issues you face won't be much different. Useful things you do will be seen as a threat and sanctioned by the superiors who lack confidence ... No clue about what could be considered secure tomorrow.

Another manager administrating the post-construction cleaning stated that

> If you are besieged by the ambiguities, crooked businesses and inferior superiors, what can you do? I will tell you what you can: Defend your corner to provide for loved ones! This is the wolves' dining table.

The following account by a trail-floating chief signals *the rampant sense of nowhere to turn in the private sector:*

> No one thinks that we have any legitimate rights against employers or superiors. There is no way to stand up for ourselves. Job security is often a trade off with the hope of better living standards in the private sector. You can't rely on the union leaders either, unless you are gullible. They chill out with posh cars like the Mafia.

3.7 | Defensive reactions

The data evidence that the *degrading of managerial efforts by the employers* and *punitive treatment of diligent works by the mediocratic superiors* tempt defensive reactions in managers' relations with the peers, enterprises and the shop floor workers amid the regulatory shortfalls.

Sexism emerged as one of the catalysts for defensive reactions. A female HR manager in one of the *well-established* companies said that

We have a few women in the finance office, but none in manufacturing. I know women who can drive a fork lifter or drill a hole as well as men can. However, I have no desire to put myself under the spotlights as a woman by antagonising some womanisers for positive discrimination.

Avoiding collaborations as much as possible was unmistakable even in the case of conferring with the staff for planning. A planning chief uttered that

If I liaise with other managers to feed into planning, the next thing they would do is just go to superiors and tell them that I am totally useless, and they need somebody who can deliver decent work. And I would not be amazed if the senior managers or the boss buy into such kinds of smearing.

Nor are the task assignment practices exempt from the defensive office politics toward fellow managers. An insulation supervisor lamented *cavalier attitudes:*

One has to be cynical about task allocations to be honest. Somebody may have the skills, but not the vibe. Once assigned, he may get too argumentative. Personally, I would not get excited about entrusting important tasks to a cunning novice.

As far as a veteran deputy director is concerned, staff meetings are used for *impression management by vanquishing the junior staff:*

Meetings are regarded by the people with giant egos as their showcase to dazzle the upstream folks. They try to persuade the paymasters that this place would collapse without them since the teams that they have to put up with are just a bunch of morons whilst tricking the naive into awful situations with unfair questions or things like that.

Participants made it clear that defensive reactions were furthered in their relations with the companies. An outsourcing organiser, for example, emphasised that

I am instructed to strike a fine balance between cost and quality when I am reviewing the tender offers of subsidiary firms. In effect, this means expensive proceedings. However, I am also expected to obtain cost-effective deals. Within such strains, I often choose cheaper dispensers rather than the dearer ones.

Managers' defensiveness may involve *cronyism*. An internal/domestic supply manager pointed out that

Sometimes, I have to stick with the suppliers I know beforehand, even if they are not the best ones. I would rather work with the reliable ones. And yes, they are often my friends. You may call this discrimination, but better the devil you know, than getting the boot.

Managers may lean toward *holding the networks card close to the chest rather than sharing with the companies*. An advertisement manager explained that

> My networks are my personal human capital as a manager. They are the most valuable assets I have when looking for a new job. If I reveal my potential customers or the gate keepers, then I would not be sought after this much.

In what follows, we will delve into detrimental implications of managers' defensive reactions for the company performance as well as for the individuals.

4 | IMPACT OF JACOBINISM ON PERFORMANCE

Managerial defensiveness has a range of adverse ramifications including *damages for the interests of vulnerable staff*. A ventilation engineer in one of the larger firms, for example, complained that

> I am in charge of the aircons with another chap in two shifts. Although we make the same headway during our hours, I always get paid less because of the so-called performance appraisals. This is just bullshitting to cater for some yes-man or to stave off embarrassing technical faults.

Defensive reactions also have unfavourable affects on the company performance in terms of the productivity of shop floor workers, managers and investments as well as profitability by and large.

4.1 | Impact on the productivity of shop floor workers

An experienced health and safety (H&S) chief was certain that defensive misconducts upset the labour productivity:

> There is seldom inspection despite the regulations. When fined, managers manipulate a loophole to dodge it without pissing off the boss. But every accident shatters the morale and motivation. Sometimes it takes ages to recover fully. Even then, people work sluggishly and mortified about the horror of a new accident waiting around the corner.

An environment champion stressed that overwhelming pressures that managers feel make them go for *mind-boggling ploys like stealing raw material* at expense of work stoppages:

> For the risk of looking incompetent because of the late dispatching of raw materials, managers sometimes nick steel sheets from other departments. The work in the burgled departments is disrupted until the new material is arrived. But no one complains about this since they know that they will probably become the next culprit soon.

A workshop foreman stated that *non-sense strategies are also part of everyday life no matter how much they set back the running of work:*

> Cheaper tasheron firms sign no contracts with their employees to evade insurance premiums. However, due to the lack of contracts, workers often quit the job

without giving notice. This causes a lot of delays in finishing off the tasks handed over to them.

4.2 | Impact on the productivity of managers

Competition among the managers was claimed to have undermined their own productivity. A marketing manager was of the view that

> We need to send managers to the States and Europe for training, but ironically this is often obscured by the managers themselves. They reckon that sending somebody abroad means that he will come back and patronise everyone else. Therefore, the lucky few sent out so far were the most docile, rather than talented ones

Managers' resistance to statistical monitoring is a critical element in relation to productivity. A ministerial official from Ankara contested that

> We need statistical analyses for a more scientific management of production processes in shipyards. But managers are not keen on this. They are scared that employers would become the big brother in that case, and employers themselves are freaked out by the bureaucratic nuisances ... They are shooting themselves in the foot.

Schism emerges as another challenge for the managerial productivity. A retired IT chief noted that

> We have invisible clans of managers. To grab the important posts, you need the blessing of those factions. This is how the maintenance or conversion heads, for example, are usually selected ... They act with the horde-psyche in the managerial meetings rather than using their critical judgments to make decisions.

4.3 | Impact on the productivity of investments

Defensive strategies have negative outcomes specifically for the productivity of capital. *Repetition owing to carelessness* was referred to by a chief welder as an example for this:

> Ribs and mountings for suspension occasionally fail the quality test because of the mishandlings. To save the managers from trouble, we repeat the same work unofficially or secretly with unpaid overtime. But so much gets wasted for the repetitiveness from the electrodes to electricity and metal sheets, not to mention the labour.

Paranoia culture in financial affairs is also blamed for undermining investment productivity. A holding accountant argued that

> Budgetary discretion is monopolised by a couple of confidantes. They never inform the board about the details of fund transfers between subsidiaries. But they can't grapple with the complicated matters without expertise, no matter how hard they try ... They just scapegoat others if the worst comes to the worst.

Poor coordination of the operational procedures is another challenge for the productivity of financing. A furniture manager said that

> Sometimes upholsterers, for example, arrive a day or so earlier or plumbers run late somehow. All team leaders want to finish off the work asap to comfort their superiors and team members. That's why, the furniture may get fixed before the sockets or pipes. This means ruined furniture or paint (and more work?) to say the least.

4.4 | Impact on profitability

Defensive office politics also has adverse bearings on profits in general. *Queasy technical errors*, for example, were one of the reasons singled out for the profit losses. A conversion chief summarised that

> To transform an old cargo to a livestock ship, we needed to put cages in two storeys. However, the height would breach the regulations. To down-size them, we needed the customer's permission. The hardware installer ignored this to please the boss, but then we had to remake the cages. No wonder why the company makes no profit.

Overconfidence of managers is believed to compromise profits as well. A solicitor pointed out that

> We have to sign contracts in English with lots of provisos. We need signatories specialised in international law. The CEO brags that he can handle the contracts. But recently the firm had to compensate massively for his mistake since he missed out a crucial clause.

Indifference of managers to armatures' opportunism to maintain their personal relations in future was held responsible for jeopardising profits. A pool manager underlined that

> We are charged for late deliveries. Sometimes we are fined even if we are punctual. Armatures find excuses since they don't want to admit the vessels on time due to some revisions in their plans. But the CEOs turn a blind eye to this, favouring personal networking and future business prospects in the likelihood of leading different shipyards.

4.5 | Upward frame of Jacobinism

In this section, it will be demonstrated that managerial Jacobinism is embedded within a vertical frame as it tends to be more prevalent among *the subordinate managers* whereas more

detrimental in the case of high-ranking managers. Further, the individual drive of defensive reactions to insecurity will be proven to shift from survival to ambition alongside the managerial upstream.

4.6 | Prevalence and impact variation

Conversations with the participants have produced plenty of evidence indicating that *managerial shenanigans* as defensive reactions to pressures are more pronounced among the lower-ranking managers compared to the opposite end. A supply manager opined that *the impotence of impoverished managers leaves them with no choice other than flowing with the water of helm:*

> I am supposed to buy all the necessary material from the pressure gauges to teacups, but I can't do that properly, because I don't have enough discretion. Refusing power-sharing, top dogs bestow on us very stingy spending caps. So, I have to opt for the cheaper alternatives in lieu of quality to ensure the business stays afloat.

A workshop foreman remarked that *you are hording the masses of shop floor workers and this means that you have to do whatever it takes to handle each one of them:*

> As the low-status managers, we are stacked in between the rock and hard place all the time. I have to make sure that workers do not squander a lot of time for the toilet. Easy to say. Rest rooms are very few and miles away. I rush them during the essential needs. They must be swearing at us every single day.

Participants occasionally drew attention to the issue of what they called *blood change in the private sector*. A quality control manager, for example, explained that

> A new bigwig sets up his own team, and each team member arranges his own group. Unlike the partisan reshufflings in the public sector, some managers simply get fired in the private sector consequently. The lower the rank you have, the more victims you may have arithmetically because of the managerial pyramid.

Some assistant managers did not deny remaining silent about their need for training about the job-specific skills. A ship releasing engineer made it plain that

> Each shipbuilding project requires some peculiar set of skills. Every now and then engineers suffer from the skills gap. As the ground force so to speak, they continuously need skills upgrading ... But if you ask for training, they would just kick you out and get a more apt engineer within the same pay bracket.

Although participants are more likely to associate the lower-strata managers with the *defensive misdeeds*, they think that it is the *managerial aristocracy* whose wrong-doings are most harmful to performance. This is basically seen as a direct reflection of their supremacy. A general director from Izmir emphasised that

The private sector has more hierarchy than the public companies where even the porters are more relaxed thanks to their job security. As a result of this command-chain, upper managers are inevitably held accountable for the poor performance as well as for the uplifting indicators.

A finance manager was convinced that *the top brass does not even have to do anything to cause colossal damages through their blunders:*

> We need to set up a semi-autonomous trade fund in the drawing department to sell diagrams to other shipyards. With the turn out, we can hire several technicians to cease the [drawing] errors due to unviable workloads. But the fat-cats want no failure-risks.

Senior managers were alleged to be toxicated by an inclination to *learned helplessness*. One of the central figures from the Portal Authorities based in the Marmara region stressed that

> Official recognition of shipyards as a 'heavy industry' could enable all employees to work fewer hours, retire earlier and have longer lives. It could also entitle the companies to tax allowances, but managers are hesitant about the idea and afraid of crossing employers with the loss of profits. We need more assertive leaders.

Making further explanations on the topic, some union stewards insisted that *dry-powdered managers' passivism* about the official recognition of the sector as a heavy industry *hampers productivity through ageism*. For instance, a *liberal* union leader in Izmit who has recently started to work in collaboration with the *mildly Islamic* trade union confederation HAK-IS in order to help resolve the problem stipulated that

> Privileged managers and companies oppose our campaign since in the current climate they can arbitrarily sack people above sixty years old with no lump sum or contribution to the pensions fund. But it is the managers who should know best that this inhumane policy is hostage to fortune owing to the skills shortages it generates.

Although the pressure from the bottom sometimes urges *lofted managers to take actions for the sake of all*, this time *they show the left punch, but hit with the right one*, according to a hangar curator:

> Management decided to clear off a huge mess from the backyard by expanding the sheds for the stuff hardly used. But they have brought in more clutter as part of a submarine agreement with the military. Sure, we will be cracked opened soon, failing to honour the deadlines.

The lack of clear definitions about the authority and responsibilities was claimed by the participants *to have spawned managerial slacks at the top with severe handicaps for performance*. A supply manager critically spoke of the superiors:

Overpowered managers arbitrarily make up the rules of engagement tearing up the book. The CEO had recently commissioned a satellite distributor, although this falls into the remit of supply chief. The guy ran late putting the whole production process on halt. Then, the CEO demoted others for incompetence, ghastly!

4.7 | Drifting up from survival to ambition

It would be wrong to assume that managerial Jacobinism as defined by the defensive reactions to the underrating of managerial inputs and the repression of good deed are simply about the desire to remain safe in the midst of insecurity. It is also about ambitious attempts to turn the problems to opportunities, especially among the high-ranking managers. Indeed, although the main individual drive is more likely to be fuelled by the survival concerns among the junior managers, it is more likely to be inspired by the career aspirations among the higher-ranking counterparts.

A Kurdish *tasheron* who operates in Yalova which is one of the most densely populated towns with shipyards gave his exploitative relations with workers as an example for the vitality of defensive reactions among the lower ranking managers. After asserting that *the private sector widely uses intermediaries to slash wages*, he carried on:

> If I am exploiting workers, then so are all the well-established private firms. If I pay the staff more, I will go bankrupt, and they will lose their jobs. I am using my tribal ties to bring the workers from miles away [from hamlets of the South East], bearing the cost on my own. If I didn't get them over, they would not be better off anyway.

An external supplies (imports) officer underlined that his job is *to squeeze mitzvah out of the evil:*

> Imported items like dashboards, depressurisers and funnels get occasionally stacked in the customs due to red tape. My job is to get them through asap. Therefore, I often have to resort to taking the help of a high-profile with me to coerce the clerks. Otherwise, I would have no place here.

As for the high-ranking managers, some of them contested that *ambition is rooted in the very nature of the beast*. A deputy executive articulated his observations:

> You want to lead a shipyard which is one of the largest ones in the World. It would be ridiculous if I say that I am not ambitious. The higher you go, the fewer the posts will be available with more stiffened competition. And no one is a white spoon out of the milk.

A chief electrician mentioned *the scarcity of gratification* among his colleagues hinting at their collective readiness for a hidden resistance to protect *vested interests*, if necessary:

> Job satisfaction is lower among the managerial elite. We earn more, but we can't do shopping with the street peddlers. I occasionally struggle to reimburse my credit

cards … Of course, our work appetite could get spoiled if we had no bonus as we strive for pacing up with the deadlines [about the sequential production stages].

A propellants manager was of the view that they have worked harder than the rest to acquire their educational attainments while acknowledging *the perils of school chauvinism:*

> I studied for years to get my degree specifically on ship making while some others idled around. I expect something worthier than survival … Because my uni is a prestigious one, we actually choose most of the staff from the same school … Having similar backgrounds strengthens our solidarity … but some diversity could further benefit productivity.

Flagging up the difference between *key and core managers*, a container supervisor indicated that

> As the high-ranking managers, we are the core team, but only a few people are the key members. None of us is dutiful enough to step on the toes of the key ones for the sake of work. I would not, for example, go around and suggest moving to a more responsive structure to tighten the screws around the suppliers.

In the views of some high-ranking managers, *putting things into perspective may compel one to cut corners*. An IT chief said that

> Who knows, you may retire or get a ministerial job offer tomorrow? Keeping this in mind, you have to stay above the rest. And such a competitive mind set wouldn't let you get lost in details. Who cares, for example, if you don't reject a useless person sent over by his company as the IT specialist, a company that is politically well-connected.

In extreme cases, some participants argued, *shaky grounds* in ethical terms may become conducive to *blatant corruptions*. A retired executive manager from the Black Sea region stated that

> The culture of making easy money is spawning everywhere, but the ability to do something like that is monopolised by the privileged. You barely hear a foreman getting involved in corruption, but probably you read the recent news about the CEO who overvalued the cost of a yacht more than ten times.

5 | CONCLUSION

This paper has shed light on managerial Jacobinism in the private sector by exploring Turkey's shipyards. The evidence pointed to its various characteristics: multitude of the conflict of interests among managers as well as with the companies and shop floor workers are ill-concealed by their unitarist rhetoric. *Inter alias*, we have specifically examined the undervaluing of managerial endeavour by the enterprises and the punitive treatments of their constructive efforts by the mediocratic superiors because particularly these two dynamics create a strong sense of insecurity among the managers amid the milieu of under regulations. We have also unearthed that

this situation elicits defensive reactions from managers. In return, their defensiveness inflicts serious damages on the company performance as well as employees' productivity. In particular, we have illustrated that managerial Jacobinism is embedded within a vertical frame as it is perceived more apparent among the immediate managers yet more detrimental in the case of high-ranking managers resonating with their stronger influences over the firms. Moreover, the individual motive of defensive reactions typically swings up from survival to ambition alongside the managerial upstream. Even so, defensive reactions in general foster a vicious circle because they counterproductively yield more pressure at work by hindering productivity. Throughout the article, we have also demonstrated that managerial Jacobinism officiated by intersecting variations in gender, age, occupations, ethnicity, administrative divisions and establishment size.

Our work failed to uphold the optimism of orthodox marketeers about the private sector managerialism (World Bank, 2019). On the contrary, for highlighting a distinct issue, namely the managerial Jacobinism, it consolidates more guarded approaches informed by the loss of momentum in the current phase of globalisation. Although interest conflicts between managers and workers are occasionally reported by the academic research (Frege et al., 2011), the ones with the fellow managers and firms have largely been ignored assuming that they are non-existent or trivial (Budd & Bhave, 2008) or benign (Coser, 2007). Such an oversighting does not happily sit with the findings provided in the present study over the multitude of interest conflicts that the managers have with their colleagues and companies as well as with the shop floor workers. Sanguine views are further challenged by the data about the adverse implications of conflicts for both employees' productivity and companies' performance. The evidence regarding the root-causes of managers' defensive reactions, that is the undervaluing of managerial work by the employers and the punitive treatment of managers' benevolent practices by the mediocre superiors, on the other hand, should serve a valuable insight for the performance students (Furman & Orszag, 2018).

The results constitute another testimony to the rise of paradoxical precarity among the managerial classes (Cam & Palaz, 2018). Nevertheless, the findings also lend support to the HR debates over the bifurcation of managers (Gallie et al., 2017) because the managerial Jacobinism and its impact on performance are predicated on a vertical frame by appearing to be more prevalent among the immediate managers, yet more harmful in the case of top managers resonating with their higher influence. No less significantly, the evidence backs the notion of 'managerial proletariat' (Knights & Murray, 1994) as the main drive of managerial Jacobinism moves up from survival to ambition alongside the managerial upstream. Further, despite the fact that outcomes are affected by the intermediating factors as proposed by the intersectionality approaches (Anthias, 2013), this impact should not only be seen as alteration, but also perpetuation (through the managerial instrumentalisation of profile differences). In other words, managerial Jacobinism is reproduced by the variations in age, gender, ethnicity, occupations, establishment size and administrative divisions.

Cultural aspects of managerial practices in Turkey have been emphasised, especially with regard to authoritarianism (Yucesan-Ozdemir, 2003), family-dominated decision-making processes and nepotism (Cam & Palaz, 2016). In addition to such matters, the phenomenon of managerial Jacobinism has implications for the policy practices. That is to say, there is no reason for a categorical rejection of reconciliations between the interests of managers, companies and the shop floor workers (Burawoy, 1979). It is possible, for example, to improve regulations in order to curtail vague definitions of managerial responsibilities and discretions. Likewise, the degrading of managerial works by the employers and the punishment of good practices by the

mediocre superiors need to be tackled, not least for the resolution of their detrimental impacts on the company performance and employees' productivity. Encouraging the institutions by, for instance, financial incentives to bridge managerial contracts in-between projects could help boost administrative leaders' job security and commitment to firms as a way of alleviating the problem low productivity (Cam & Palaz, 2018). Effective judicial channels should also be reinforced to settle down managers' grievances with employers and superiors.

Empirical findings conveyed in this paper have implications for future research. Managerial Jacobinism should to be investigated in the public sector for comparative purposes, along with some typologies of managerial defensiveness. Besides, workplace studies are overly compartmentalised into disciplines: financial affairs, for example, are almost exclusively studied by the economists whereas human resources are dealt with by the other social sciences (Newton, 2019). The evidence corroborates that logistic matters are too important to leave to the business analysts. There is a need for interdisciplinary collaborations to better understand the interactions between logistic and HR-related matters. Finally, intersectional approaches should go beyond variations in the observed events on the basis of intermediating influences. It is also necessary to dissect how the intersectional diversity officiates resemblances across different social settings.

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