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DOCTORAL THESIS

Professional Ethics as a Cohesive Force

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

Organizations operate in increasingly complex environments, making the study of trust, cooperation, and ethics essential for understanding organizational behavior and ethical leadership.

Professional ethics are particularly important for helping people work together. Ethical standards shape how people make decisions and solve problems. This helps managers build trust and ensure everyone understands the organization's goals. People view organizational ethics as important because companies have often failed and faced scandals. These events showed that rules alone are not enough. Recent studies show that ethics is a major advantage for an organization. It helps people trust the company more, work better together, build respect, and sustain long-term success. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also says ethics is important for trust and good governance.

In the context of business ethics, researchers have examined many factors, including good leadership, workplace culture, how companies are run, and responsibility to the community. Studies on workplace feelings show that when people believe certain behaviors are right, they become more committed and perform better at their jobs. Rules, leadership behavior and how managers do their jobs shape these feelings.

Although much research exists, the specific ways professional ethics help people work together remain understudied. Using Crozier and Friedberg's model can empower managers to feel more in control of organizational behavior and dynamics.

1.2 Managerial Problem and Context

Modern business settings depend heavily on people working together, sharing knowledge, and making decisions without strict rules. In these situations, leaders cannot rely on power or strict rules to get people to act the way they want. Instead, the organization's effectiveness depends on relationships, shared ethics, and trust.

When ethical rules are unclear or applied inconsistently, it causes major problems. When companies do not meet expectations consistently, people lose trust, conflict increases, communication worsens, and employees become less engaged. These things break the team. It stops the company from doing what it wants. When ethical rules are strong, people work harder, help each other without being told, and follow the company's goals even when no one is watching.

For people pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) and leaders in organizations, ethics is not just about following the law. Managers need to understand how ethics helps in their actions. Specifically, they need to know how ethics builds trust, balances power, reduces confusion, and helps people work together. This understanding can help managers use ethics to improve organizational performance.

This problem matters most in places where work depends on people working together. These places include knowledge-based areas, service businesses, health care, consulting, and schools. In these places, ethics is not an idea. It becomes a part of what makes the organization work well.

1.3 Research Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to examine how professional ethics brings people together within an organization in a system where people act together.

Drawing on Crozier and Friedberg (1980), this study explores how ethical standards influence power dynamics and help managers improve organizational cooperation.

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 Main Objective

To examine how professional ethics helps bring people together in organizations.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To look at how people in the organization see and explain ethics in their work.
2. To look at how professional ethics affects trust between people and between people and the company.
3. To look at how professional ethics helps people work together and do things as a group.
4. To look at how professional ethics helps with power issues and controls power in the company.

To examine how ethical rules reduce confusion and uncertainty in the organization, this study explores how clear ethical standards can create stability and confidence among employees and managers alike.

To support organizational effectiveness, this study aims to develop practical strategies for managers to leverage ethical behavior, reduce conflicts, and improve teamwork, aligning theory with practice.

1.5 Research Questions

1.5.1 Main Research Question

How does professional ethics help bring people in the organization together when they are in systems where people act together?

1.5.2 Sub-Questions

1. How do people in the organization understand professional ethics in their daily work?
2. How does professional ethics help people trust each other and trust the company?
3. In what ways does professional ethics manage power, deal with uncertainty, and guide people to work
4. How can managers use examples of professional ethics to help the organization work better?

1.6 Significance of Study

1.6.1 Academic Relevance

This study adds to the ideas about how organizations work and business ethics. It connects workplace feelings with Crozier and Friedberg's (1980) theory. While earlier studies focus on leadership and following rules, this study views ethics as a way to control things informally. It shapes how power works and how people act in the company.

1.6.2 Managerial Relevance

For leaders, this study offers ways to address workplace problems that are not covered by strict rules. By seeing ethics as a tool to support work, managers can use strict rules to reduce problems, create a safer environment, and build teams that work well together.

1.6.3 Societal Relevance

At a prominent level, good ethics helps the organization gain respect, build confidence, and last longer. Showing that ethics is valued in work helps ensure people learn to be responsible and helps create good rules for society.

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CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the existing literature on ethics and organizational cohesion to spark interest and demonstrate the importance of this research, establishing a compelling foundation for further inquiry.

A substantial body of business ethics scholarship has historically focused on decision-making, ethical leadership styles, organizational ethical climates, and CSR. Building on these insights, this review highlights gaps that need to be addressed to deepen understanding and improve practice.

In organizational environments—where actors must continuously navigate asymmetric dependencies, conflicting goals, and strategic ambiguity—treating ethics merely as a set of rules fails to capture its role in daily operations. To address these limitations, this study utilizes the analysis perspective developed by Crozier and Friedberg (1980). This theoretical framework provides a lens for conceptualizing professional ethics not as a static constraint but as an informal regulatory mechanism that facilitates collective action and sustains organizational cohesion.

2.2 Professional Ethics: Concepts and Foundations

2.2.1 Philosophical Origins of Ethics

Ethics has served as a cornerstone of inquiry since antiquity, addressing fundamental principles and values that underpin moral responsibility and lending credibility and depth to the study of professional ethics.

The first tradition, virtue ethics, derives from Aristotelian philosophy and emphasizes developing moral character. Within this framework, ethical behavior is not dictated by rules but arises from cultivating core virtues such as integrity, prudence, fairness, and justice.

The second tradition, deontology, is anchored in ethics (Kant, 1785/1993). Deontology holds that ethical actions are defined by a duty to follow universal moral rules regardless

of immediate consequences. This perspective heavily influences professional standards, codes of conduct, and fiduciary frameworks.

The third tradition, consequentialism, evaluates the morality of actions based on their outcomes. Associated with Bentham (1789/2007) and utilitarian thought, this framework asserts that ethical decisions should maximize utility and minimize harm.

Although these philosophical paradigms provide normative definitions, they do not fully explain how ethics shapes organizational behavior. As Hosmer (1995) notes, organizational actions cannot be understood through individual moral philosophy because organizational conduct occurs within complex, interdependent social systems.

2.2.2 Professional Ethics in Organizational Contexts

Ethics denotes a shared system of standards, values, and behavioral expectations that regulate conduct within professional communities. Within settings, these ethical structures promote accountability, protect stakeholder interests, and enhance institutional legitimacy.

Historically, most management literature has adopted a compliance-driven approach to business ethics. From this perspective, ethical mechanisms are evaluated based on their ability to prevent misconduct, mitigate risk, and enforce control. While compliance frameworks are necessary, overemphasizing them risks underestimating ethics' constructive role in fostering workplace trust and voluntary cooperation.

Climate research shows strong links between ethical working environments and positive employee attitudes, commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Newman et al., 2017). However, empirical studies often operationalize climate as a static, top-down variable rather than examining how ethical norms are dynamically negotiated through day-to-day interactions. Addressing this oversight requires a shift to an interaction-relational perspective that treats professional ethics as a shared resource for operational coordination.

2.2.3 Ethics, Values and Professional Conduct

Organizational literature extensively explores the relationship between ethics and values. Values represent enduring core beliefs regarding behaviors and strategic outcomes, serving as cognitive guides for individual and collective decision-making.

Organizations regularly articulate values—such as integrity, transparency, accountability, and mutual respect—through mission statements and corporate codes of conduct. Scholarship often assumes that these shared values naturally generate cohesion by setting clear behavioral expectations.

However, organizational research highlights a gap between espoused values (what organizations formally state) and enacted values (how actors behave). Organizations frequently endorse codes in theory while rewarding behaviors that contradict those standards in practice. Consequently, professional ethics cannot be evaluated through formal corporate statements; it must be investigated through the lived practices and daily interactions of organizational actors.

2.3 Organizational Cohesion

2.3.1 Social Cohesion within Organizations

The concept of cohesion originates in sociology, notably in Durkheim's (1893/2014) work, which establishes that social stability relies on shared norms, values, and collective consciousness. In research, cohesion refers to the degree of unity, solidarity, and connectedness among members. Cohesive organizations are consistently characterized by trust, voluntary cooperation, and alignment toward collective objectives (Putnam, 2000).

Empirical literature links organizational cohesion to lower interpersonal conflict, more efficient communication, greater engagement, and overall performance (Blau, 1964; Putnam, 2000). Nevertheless, theoretical explanations of how cohesion appears remain divided. Structural perspectives emphasize organizational design and official reporting channels, whereas relational perspectives prioritize informal networks, social capital, and shared identity. Little scholarship investigates how professional ethics directly facilitates or sustains these cohesive dynamics.

2.3.2 Trust and Cooperation

Trust is an element of organizational cooperation enabling individuals to collaborate under uncertainty and risk. Literature links high-trust environments to organizational agility, knowledge sharing, innovation, and strategic performance.

Ethical climate research indicates that trust develops readily in environments governed by clear ethical norms, as employees perceive these systems as predictable, fair, and supportive (Newman et al., 2017).

However, policy declarations alone cannot generate trust. Instead, trust appears through repeated interactions in which actors observe consistency between stated ethical values and actual managerial actions.

2.4 Ethical Climate, Leadership and Informal Governance

2.4.1 Ethical Leadership

Contemporary management literature has widely studied leadership. Ethical leaders shape behavior by demonstrating normative conduct, communicating explicit expectations, and reinforcing ethical standards through reward systems.

Although studies show strong correlations between leadership and positive employee attitudes, leadership-centric models often overemphasize top-down influence. In doing so, they can overlook the active role non-executive employees play in constructing, changing, and keeping ethical norms across the organization.

2.4.2 Ethical Climate as an Evolving

Ethical climates develop through shared perceptions of appropriate workplace behavior. While conventional quantitative studies treat climate as an enduring organizational attribute, empirical reality suggests that actors continuously reinterpret and negotiate ethical norms as operational contexts change.

2.4.3 Professional Ethics as Informal Regulation

Classical management paradigms generally view administrative structures as the primary mechanisms for organizational control. Conversely, organizational sociology demonstrates the limitations of relying exclusively on formal rules.

Crozier (1964) argued that formal rules cannot fully dictate organizational life because actors continuously interpret, bypass, and adapt administrative constraints. Building on this foundation, Crozier and Friedberg (1980) developed the theory of “ action,” conceptualizing organizations as complex political systems in which actors navigate power dependencies, exploit zones of uncertainty, and pursue strategic objectives.

From this perspective, professional ethics can be operationalized as an informal regulatory system. By establishing shared expectations and boundary conditions, ethics reduces behavioral ambiguity and provides the stability needed for coordinated collective action.

2.5 Professional Ethics and Organizational Outcomes

2.5.1 Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange

Ethical working environments promote functional collaboration. When fairness and mutual respect govern interactions, actors are more willing to share tacit knowledge, pool critical resources, and engage in joint problem-solving.

2.5.2 Conflict Management

Clear professional ethics frameworks support conflict resolution by providing transparent, objective criteria for resolving operational disputes. Conversely, ambiguous or competing interpretations of principles can themselves become active drivers of organizational friction.

2.5.3 Governance

Recent scholarship increasingly frames ethics as a strategic organizational asset rather than an administrative burden. Organizations that embed practices into their operational routines consistently cultivate higher stakeholder trust, protect institutional reputation, and achieve greater long-term sustainability.

2.6 Identification of Literature Gaps

An analysis of the literature reveals four gaps that justify this research:

1. Conceptual Gap: Prior research overwhelmingly examines ethics through the lens of compliance and risk mitigation, neglecting its active role as a mechanism for generating organizational cohesion.
2. Gap: Existing literature relies heavily on individual psychological and leadership-focused theories, offering limited insight into how ethics intersects with power dynamics, structural dependencies, and organizational uncertainty.
3. Gap: The field is dominated by cross-sectional quantitative survey designs that measure ethical perceptions as static variables, providing limited insight into how actors enact ethical norms in daily practice.
4. Gap: There is a lack of scholarship integrating core business ethics literature with Crozier and Friedberg's (1980) strategic analysis and theory of organized action.

2.7 Chapter Summary

The reviewed literature confirms that professional ethics significantly influences trust, collaboration, and organizational effectiveness. However, existing approaches rely primarily on downward, compliance-driven, or individual-level perspectives, leaving the interactive and regulatory role of ethics undertheorized.

This study directly addresses these gaps by using Crozier and Friedberg's (1980) analysis as a primary framework. By viewing organizations as systems of organized action, Chapter 3 will outline the methodological approaches used to examine professional ethics as an informal regulatory mechanism for organizational cohesion.

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CHAPTER 3

Theoretical Framework: Strategic Analysis of Organizations and Professional Ethics

3.1 Introduction

This chapter establishes, justifies, and extends the framework underlying this study. To examine how professional ethics functions as a mechanism of cohesion, this research draws on Strategic Analysis of Organizations, developed by Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg in 1980. While conventional business ethics literature treats ethics as either a rule-based constraint or a psychological trait, these approaches do not explain how ethical norms operate dynamically within complex organizational systems.

3.2 Strategic Analysis: Theoretical Foundations

3.2.1 Origins and Intellectual Contributions

Strategic Analysis appeared in organizational sociology as a critique of classical bureaucratic models and early structural-functionalist ideas. Influenced by organizational theory, early management scholars saw organizations as rigid administrative hierarchies governed only by impersonal rules and formal authority. In The Bureaucratic Phenomenon, Crozier challenged this view by showing that formal administrative structures do not dictate daily workplace interactions.

Instead, Crozier and Friedberg envisioned organizations as social fields where actors constantly interpret, adapt, and bypass formal rules to pursue personal and group objectives. While Strategic Analysis highlighted the political side of organizations, its early version overemphasized structure and ignored the stabilizing power of shared moral values and professional ethics.

3.2.2 Actors and Strategic Behavior

Central to Strategic Analysis is the idea of actor autonomy. The theory argues that organizational actors are never mere executors of command; instead, they keep agency and exhibit strategic behavior. Operating under rationality, actors weigh their options and use available organizational resources to advance their specific interests.

However, traditional Strategic Analysis focuses much on self-interested calculations. By portraying life mainly as a game of political maneuvering, the original theory does not explain altruistic behavior, professional solidarity, or voluntary adherence to ethical norms. This study addresses this shortfall by arguing that professional ethics gives actors a cognitive and moral framework that guides agency beyond immediate self-interest.

3.2.3 Rationality, Interests and Organizational Action

Actors in organizations juggle competing professional and unit-level objectives. Strategic Analysis explains how actors align or negotiate these interests to enable collective action. The theory explains how interests are pursued strategically but does not explain how those interests form initially.

Professional ethics shapes organizational interests. Rather than acting only as an external restriction on rational calculation, ethical values reshape what actors see as acceptable, desirable, and legitimate outcomes. Ethics therefore acts as both a filter and a normative framework that informs organizational action.

3.2.4 Power, Dependence and Organizational Control

In Strategic Analysis, power is not a feature of formal hierarchy; it is a dynamic relationship of asymmetric dependency between actors. Power comes from an actor's ability to control resources and manage organizational dependencies.

While resource dependence explains leverage, it ignores non-material forms of influence. Influence in organizations often comes from moral authority, personal integrity, and ethical standing. To capture these dynamics, this research introduces legitimacy as a separate source of influence.

3.3 Organizations as Systems of Organized Action

3.3.1 The Problem of Collective Action

Organizations exist to achieve objectives that are beyond the capacity of individual actors. However, because actors have interests and strategic autonomy, sustaining cooperation is a fundamental challenge.

Strategic Analysis says that collective action occurs through a negotiated order—a process of implicit and explicit bargaining among actors. Although Strategic Analysis explains short-term cooperation well, it does not explain long-term cohesion. Bargained arrangements stay fragile without shared mechanisms. Professional ethics provides

stability, offering shared expectations that sustain cooperation beyond immediate transactions.

3.3.2 Formal and Informal Regulation

Organizational stability relies on both formal structures, such as job descriptions, policies, and reporting lines, and informal regulatory systems, such as culture, social norms, and unwritten rules. Strategic Analysis shows that formal rules are always incomplete and that organizations need social regulation to work smoothly.

This research extends Strategic Analysis by showing that professional ethics is a form of informal governance. Professional ethics gives hidden guidance for discretionary actions when formal policy is unclear or missing.

3.3.3 Regulation Mechanisms and Organizational Stability

Formal governance mechanisms like auditing and supervisory monitoring require significant administrative effort. Can make employees act defensively. Informal governance mechanisms rely on self-regulation and mutual accountability. When professional ethics shapes interactions, it stabilizes relationships by setting shared standards of fairness, consistency, and respect.

3.4 Zones of Uncertainty and Organizational Dynamics

3.4.1 Uncertainty as a Source of Power

A key idea in strategic analysis is that control over zones of uncertainty is a major source of informal power. An actor who controls a source of unpredictability—such as technical expertise, external regulatory knowledge, or key stakeholder connections—gains a big strategic advantage over others.

3.4.2 Resource Control and Organizational Influence

Strategic Analysis divides resources into expertise, information access, and interpersonal networks. In settings, professional ethics is an equally significant resource. Actors with professional ethics have more moral authority, allowing them to mediate conflict, build coalitions, and influence outcomes.

3.4.3 Strategic Interactions and Organizational Behavior

Daily workplace interactions involve negotiation, conflict, adaptation, and teamwork. Strategic Analysis shows how actors navigate these moments strategically. Adding ethics to this view shows that ethical expectations limit strategy, stop opportunistic moves, and encourage prosocial teamwork.

3.5 Professional Ethics Through the Lens of Strategic Analysis

3.5.1 Ethics as Informal Governance

Viewed through Strategic Analysis, professional ethics acts as an informal governance mechanism that fills administrative gaps. Because formal procedures cannot foresee every situation, professional ethics guides decisions and provides predictable standards of behavior.

3.5.2 Ethics and Cooperation

Professional ethics helps cooperation by setting shared expectations and deterring opportunism. When actors follow ethics, mutual accountability cuts the risk of exploitation, turning bargaining into collaborative problem-solving.

3.5.3 Ethics and Trust Formation

Trust connects ethics to organizational cohesion. Consistent professional ethics builds trust, reducing the need for costly monitoring and boosting agility. While earlier Strategic Analysis did not fully develop trust, this study shows that trust is vital for lasting action.

3.5.4 Ethics and the Management of Uncertainty

Ethics directly reduces relational uncertainty. By encouraging behavior, open communication, and moral consistency, professional ethics lessens social friction and ambiguity inside teams.

3.6 Theoretical Contribution of the Study

3.6.1 Professional Ethics as a Mechanism of Organized Action

This study extends Strategic Analysis by showing that cooperation comes from arrangements reinforced by shared professional ethics. Professional ethics becomes central to action.

3.6.2 Extending Zones of Uncertainty: Relational Uncertainty

While classic Strategic Analysis focuses on informational uncertainty, this study adds relational uncertainty. Relational uncertainty means uncertainty about an actor’s motives, reliability, integrity, and consistency. Professional ethics directly cuts uncertainty by setting clear behavioral expectations.

3.6.3 Ethical Legitimacy as a Source of Power

This research expands Strategic Analysis’s power types by adding legitimacy. Ethical legitimacy refers to the influence an actor gains from demonstrated standing, integrity, and

professional ethics. Unlike position or resource power, ethical legitimacy comes from approval by peers and subordinates.

3.6.4 Toward an Ethics-Based Theory of Organizational Cohesion

By mixing business ethics with Strategic Analysis, this research proposes a combined framework for cohesion. The theory argues that professional ethics creates legitimacy, reduces relational uncertainty, builds trust, encourages cooperation, and sustains cohesion.

3.6.5 Central Theoretical Proposition

Professional ethics works as a rule system inside organized groups. By reducing uncertainty, creating ethical legitimacy, building trust, and supporting cooperation, professional ethics directly contributes to organizational cohesion.

3.7 Conceptual Framework of the Research

3.7.1 Key Concepts

1. Professional ethics: principles and values that guide how an organization acts.
2. Ethical legitimacy: Power that comes from credibility and good moral standing.
3. Relational uncertainty: Unpredictability of what actors intend, their motives, and their integrity.
4. Trust: Dependence on the integrity and predictability of people in the organization.
5. Cooperation: joint effort aimed at shared goals of the organization.
6. Organizational cohesion: The overall unity, solidarity, and connectedness that exists inside an organization.

3.7.2 Relationships Among Concepts

The conceptual model posits reinforcing relationships among these key variables:

- Professional ethics leads to ethical legitimacy and a lower level of relational uncertainty. By following norms, personal credibility grows, and confusion about intent decreases.
- Ethical legitimacy and lower relational uncertainty create trust. Reduced risk and higher moral credibility lay the groundwork for trust among people and within the organization.
- Trust allows cooperation. When trust exists, actors can work together freely without fear of retaliation.
- Cooperation builds cohesion. Ongoing multi-level cooperation produces lasting unity and cohesion inside the organization.

3.7.3 Analytical Model

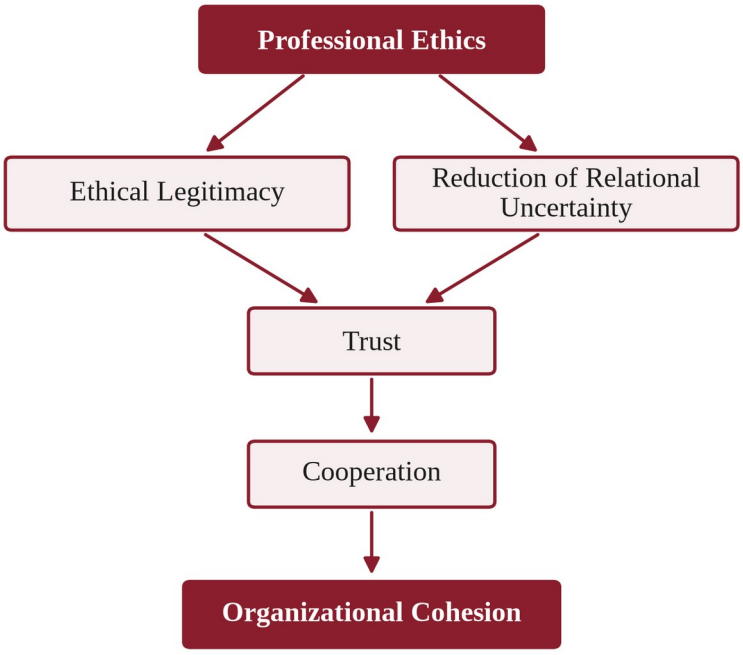


Figure 3.1. Analytical Model

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter critically examined Crozier and Friedberg's (1980) Strategic Analysis of Organizations, highlighting its strengths in studying informal power and its limits on normative governance. By adding uncertainty and ethical legitimacy, this research

expands Strategic Analysis into a framework that relies on ethics to strengthen organizational cohesion.

Chapter 4 explains the method that was used to evaluate these ideas in real modern organizational settings.

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CHAPTER 4

Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the framework for investigating how professional ethics works as a cohesive mechanism among organizational actors within systems of organized action. The study examines how people interpret and experience workplace standards and how these standards influence interpersonal trust, informal authority, cooperation, reduced relational uncertainty, and overall organizational cohesion.

This chapter details the position, research design, sampling strategy, data collection instruments, analytical procedures, trustworthiness criteria, and ethical safeguards that guide the empirical investigation, emphasizing the study's thoroughness to reassure readers of its credibility.

4.2 Philosophical Positioning

4.2.1 Ontological Position

This study adopts an ontology that holds that organizational reality is not an objective, single truth waiting to be measured, but is built through the perceptions, actions, and experiences of social actors. In this view, professional ethics is an evolving phenomenon whose meaning changes with context, power relationships, and interpersonal dynamics.

4.2.2 Epistemological Position

The research is based on epistemology. Constructivism assumes that researchers and participants co-construct knowledge through interaction, rather than passively discovering it. Therefore, understanding how professional ethics promotes organizational cohesion requires exploring the meanings actors give to ethical conduct in their workplaces.

4.2.3 Interpretivist Paradigm

Aligning with its epistemological foundations, the study works within an interpretivist research paradigm (Schwandt, 2014). Interpretivism prioritizes understanding individuals' subjective sense-making in their settings. This paradigm aligns with Crozier and Friedberg (1980), which stresses that organizational dynamics arise from the strategic interactions, interpretations, and choices of independent actors.

4.3 Research Design

4.3.1 Qualitative Research Strategy

A qualitative research strategy is most effective for exploring context-dependent social processes (Creswell & Poth 2018). Quantitative tools can count ethical codes or gauge surface-level attitudes, but they cannot fully capture the nuance of how ethics manages power relations or builds informal legitimacy. Qualitative inquiry provides the depth needed to analyze the mechanics that allow ethics to contribute to organizational cohesion.

4.3.2 Multiple-Case Study Design

The study uses a qualitative multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018). Case studies are well suited to examining real-world phenomena within their contexts, especially when the lines between phenomenon and context are unclear.

A multiple-case design improves generalization (Yin, 2018). By examining ethics in different organizational settings, the study can compare results, identify patterns across cases, and refine the ethics-based theoretical model from Chapter 3.

4.4 Sampling Strategy

4.4.1 Participant Selection

Participants are selected using a non-probability sampling method that includes key informants with deep, direct experience in organizational decision-making, cross-functional collaboration, and ethical governance (Patton, 2015). To get organizational viewpoints, participants are taken from four organizational levels:

- Senior executives (strategic leadership and governance)
- Middle managers (operational translation and team oversight)
- Team leaders and supervisors (direct task coordination)
- Professional and operational staff (ground-level execution)

4.4.2 Inclusion Criteria

To ensure data quality and relevance, participants must meet specific inclusion criteria:

1. Have a minimum of three years of organizational experience.
2. Hold employment within one of the participating case organizations.
3. Be involved in collaborative teamwork, cross-functional projects, or managerial decision-making.
4. Provide voluntary written consent prior to data collection.

4.4.3 Sample Size and Data Saturation

The target sample size is between 20 and 30 participants across the chosen case organizations. The final sample size is determined by data saturation, the point at which additional interviews yield no new theoretical insights or analytical themes related to the research questions (Guest et al., 2020).

4.5 Data Collection Methods

4.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are the data collection method. This format allows flexibility to follow insights while keeping a consistent focus across participants (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015).

The interview guide covers five core domains:

- Conceptualizations and experiences of professional ethics
- Interpersonal trust and collaborative practices
- Informal power, authority and ethical legitimacy
- Organizational cohesion and solidarity
- Navigating uncertainty and decision-making during organizational change

Interviews are conducted in person or via secure video conferencing platforms and last between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews are audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

4.5.2 Documentary Analysis

To complement interview data, the researcher analyzes organizational documents. Documentary sources include codes of conduct, ethical guidelines, mission statements, corporate governance frameworks, and internal communications related to organizational

values. Document analysis provides triangulation, enabling the researcher to compare official policy declarations with participants' lived experiences.

4.5.3 Reflexive Journaling

The researcher keeps a reflexive journal throughout the research life cycle. This journal records decisions, analytical insights, post-interview impressions, and personal reflections on potential researcher bias. Reflexive journaling helps maintain critical self-awareness and methodological rigor.

4.6 Data Analysis

4.6.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Interview transcripts and textual documents are analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis following the six-phase framework established by Braun and Clarke (2022):

1. Familiarization with the data: Repeated reading of transcripts and review of recordings.
2. Generating codes: Systematic line-by-line coding of meaningful text segments.
3. Searching for themes: Collapsing codes into candidate themes aligned with theoretical concepts.
4. Reviewing themes: Verifying themes against candidate codes and the full dataset.
5. Defining and naming themes: Refining each theme's scope and narrative definitions.
6. Producing the report: Integrating extracts with theoretical arguments and empirical literature.

4.6.2 Coding Strategy

The researcher uses a thematic coding approach that combines deductive and inductive logic. Initial deductive codes are structured around the concepts derived from the extended Strategic Analysis framework:

- Professional Ethics
- Interpersonal and Organizational Trust
- Cross-Functional Cooperation
- Ethical Legitimacy

- Relational Uncertainty
- Organizational Cohesion

Inductive coding also allows themes and contextual nuances to appear directly from participant narratives.

4.6.3 Cross-Case Analysis

Following within-case analysis for each organization, a cross-case synthesis identifies patterns, institutional differences, and contextual nuances across settings. The synthesis is interpreted through the theoretical lens of Strategic Analysis (Crozier & Friedberg 1980) to evaluate theoretical propositions.

4.7 Research Quality and Trustworthiness

To ensure rigor, the researcher adopts the criteria for qualitative trustworthiness established by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- **Credibility:** Supported through data source triangulation (interviews, documents, notes), participant validation (member checking), and the use of rich direct quotations in reporting.
- **Transferability:** Facilitated by providing a thick description of the case contexts, participant roles, and organizational environments, allowing readers to evaluate applicability to other organizational settings.
- **Dependability:** Demonstrated through an audit trail documenting methodological choices, raw data files, coding structures, and analytical notes.
- **Confirmability:** Achieved by practicing reflexivity and ensuring that empirical data extracts directly support analytical conclusions.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

The researcher adheres to established guidelines for research ethics. Before data collection begins, participants receive an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, methodology, nature, and right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Written informed consent is obtained prior to every interview.

To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information is removed. Organizations and individual participants are assigned pseudonyms (e.g., Participant A1, Executive, Firm Alpha). Audio files and transcripts are stored on encrypted, password-protected cloud

storage accessible by the researcher and will be kept in accordance with institutional data retention standards.

4.9 Researcher Positionality

In this inquiry, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. The researcher acknowledges that prior professional experience in consulting, business development, management, and higher education provides contextual understanding of organizational operations but may also introduce cognitive biases.

To mitigate bias, the researcher uses reflexive practices throughout the study. The reflexive journal provides a space to critically examine personal assumptions, pre-existing beliefs, and emotional responses during data collection and thematic analysis, safeguarding the integrity of the findings.

4.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter explains the qualitative, interpretivist approach used to explore how professional ethics functions as a tool for organizational cohesion. The research employed a multiple-case study design, gathering data from semi-structured interviews, company documents, and reflexive journals. To ensure validity and reliability, the analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive method, and a hybrid coding system guided by Strategic Analysis (Crozier & Friedberg, 1980). The study adhered to established quality standards and ethical guidelines, keeping trustworthiness throughout. Chapter 5 presents the results of this research.

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CHAPTER 5

Empirical Findings and Cross-Case Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data on how professional ethics helps keep organizations together in organized action. The study uses the ideas from Chapter 3. It uses detailed methods from Chapter 4.

The data come from semi-structured interviews with five senior executive leaders from different industries: Hospitality (H1), Higher Education (E1), Tourism (T1), Retail/Human Resources (R1), and Luxury Brand Management (L1). These leaders have operational responsibilities in strategy, stakeholder engagement, organizational alignment, and staff leadership within their organizations.

The findings are organized around six empirical themes:

1. Conceptualizations of ethics
2. Professional Cross-actor cooperation
3. Ethics, power dynamics and informal influence
4. Ethics and the management of zones of uncertainty
5. Formal versus organizational regulation
6. Ethics as a primary driver of organizational cohesion

The findings show that across sectors, professional ethics act as a relational tool that builds trust, provides informal legitimacy, and crucially, helps manage uncertainty, giving organizations a sense of stability amid change.

5.2 Conceptualizing Professional Ethics

5.2.1 Ethics as Integrity in Action and Personal Responsibility

A key point in all executive cases is that participants keep seeing professional ethics as “integrity in action” rather than simply following formal rules. Participants largely rejected narrow definitions of ethics, seeing professional ethics as passive and not enough for complex workplaces. Instead, professional ethics is defined as the match between stated values, executive choices, and everyday work behavior.

The Hospitality Director (H1) said professional ethics means matching manager promises with real actions. H1 said ethical behavior shows when leaders keep standards even under pressure and tight budgets. H1 also said that staff judge an organization's ethics by watching conduct, not by reading policy statements.

In education, the Executive Dean (E1) linked professional ethics to keeping influence within power structures, emphasizing that ethics shape how authority and responsibility are balanced to sustain legitimacy and protect stakeholders. Recognizing this influence helps the audience appreciate organizational complexity.

5.2.2 Interplay Between Formal and Informal Ethical Expectations

Participants made clear that formal ethical rules and social expectations are different. Formal rules—like written codes, compliance guides, reporting rules, and governance groups—provide structure. Executive participants said that informal expectations push people more strongly day to day.

The Human Resources Director (R1) said that while onboarding programs establish policy knowledge, staff learn professional ethics mainly by watching the daily choices and peer talk of executive leaders. The Luxury Vice President (L1) added that professional ethics becomes part of workplace culture when leaders show those values consistently under pressure. These data show that professional ethics works both as a control and as an informal social process.

5.2.3 Ethics as a Shared Organizational Reference System

The finding was that professional ethics works as a shared mental map. Participants said shared ethical ideas give staff a language to interpret decisions, judge peer actions, and resolve work disputes.

This shared map was particularly useful in mixed workplaces where staff from diverse backgrounds must work together. By giving rules of fairness, duty, and accountability, professional ethics bridges departments and cuts mental strain across work units.

5.3 Professional Ethics and Cross-Actor Cooperation

5.3.1 Trust as the Central Intermediary of Cooperation

Trust, both personal and group trust, appears as a key factor that fosters confidence and reassurance, strengthening the link between professional ethics and teamwork. All executive respondents emphasized that professional ethics builds organizational trust, making cooperation feel more secure and dependable.

Trust was seen as necessary for cooperation, allowing people to share resources without heavy, expensive control.

This data shows that trust, both personal and group trust, is central to ethical cooperation. Ethical behavior fosters interdepartmental safety and mutual reliance during operational peaks. In long-term strategic alliances, trust built through consistent ethical conduct serves as a vital component that sustains cooperation beyond formal contracts. These insights highlight how ethical practices can strengthen organizational cohesion and practical collaboration.

5.3.2 Ethics and Open Communication Channels

Executive interviews demonstrated that ethical workplace environments significantly improve communication. Participant R1 argued that transparent managerial communication increases employee confidence in decisions and encourages open dialogue on operational vulnerabilities. Employees are willing to share critical information when they trust leadership will manage disclosures fairly and ethically.

In the domain, Participant E1 observed that an ethical environment is vital for keeping open discourse and intellectual collaboration among faculty members. Across all cases, ethical conduct was directly associated with communication channels characterized by transparency, reciprocity, and psychological safety.

5.3.3 Facilitating Cooperation Amid Divergent Interests

An empirical insight concerns ethics' role in helping actors with competing goals. Participants recognized that organizational actors have operational priorities, resource constraints, and career ambitions; thus, collective action cannot be explained solely by aligned individual objectives.

Participant L1 described operational friction between creative marketing teams, retail operations, and client experience departments. L1 noted that shared ethical principles provide a framework for negotiation, allowing these units to reach compromise despite conflicting functional goals. Participant T1 reported dynamics among external tourism stakeholders, where shared behavioral expectations enabled long-term collaboration despite competing commercial interests.

5.4 Professional Ethics and Organizational Power Dynamics

5.4.1 Ethical Credibility as Informal Influence

Participants consistently linked behavior to gaining informal influence. While formal positional authority remains a mechanism for decision-making, executive respondents emphasized that demonstrated ethical credibility enhances an actor's sphere of influence far beyond their formal hierarchical rank.

Participant E1 noted that academic faculty members show higher commitment to strategic initiatives when executive leaders demonstrate personal integrity and fairness. Ethical consistency builds trust in judgment and increases acceptance of difficult strategic trade-offs.

Participant H1 added that operational staff routinely seek guidance from peers and leaders perceived as trustworthy, regardless of their position on the formal organizational chart.

5.4.2 Ethical Legitimacy as an Organizational Resource

The empirical data strongly supports the concept of ethical legitimacy proposed in Chapter 3. Participant T1 explained that external stakeholder confidence depends on perceptions of integrity. Organizations that demonstrate ethical conduct gain institutional legitimacy, which translates into stakeholder support, favorable regulatory relations, and operational flexibility.

Participant L1 emphasized that in the luxury sector, brand reputation and executive credibility create leverage that financial resources or legal structures alone cannot replicate. Ethical legitimacy thus constitutes a non-material power resource.

5.4.3 Executive Leadership and Moral Authority

The interviews revealed a distinction between authority and moral authority. While positional authority is granted by appointment, moral authority is earned through observed integrity, objective fairness, and behavioral consistency.

Participant R1 noted that employees comply with managerial directions primarily because they perceive the decision-making process as morally legitimate rather than out of fear of formal administrative sanctions. Moral authority shifts compliance from obligation to voluntary organizational alignment.

5.5 Professional Ethics and the Management of Zones of Uncertainty

5.5.1 Identification of Relational Uncertainty

Participants identified operational, strategic, market, and regulatory forms of uncertainty. However, relational uncertainty—defined as unpredictability in actors' motives, integrity, and future behavior—was identified as the most disruptive form of internal ambiguity.

Executives reported that important levels of uncertainty lead to defensive behavior, information hoarding, and reduced operational velocity. Mitigating uncertainty is therefore a primary governance priority for executive leaders.

5.5.2 Ethics as a Heuristic Framework for Decision-Making

When formal policies or standard operating procedures fail to offer guidance, professional ethics serves as a primary decision-making heuristic. Participant H1 explained that frontline staff frequently meet novel guest scenarios that fall outside written policy manuals; in such instances, core ethical values provide the framework for discretionary decisions.

Participant E1 noted that academic governance involves moral judgments regarding research ethics and faculty evaluations that cannot be fully standardized. Shared ethical principles guide decisions and help ensure fair outcomes in unclear cases.

5.5.3 Behavioral Predictability and System Stability

Ethics enhances stability by making human interactions more predictable. Participant R1 observed that when ethical principles guide managerial decisions, employees can accurately predict executive responses to future challenges.

Even when employees disagree with strategic choices, their trust in the underlying process of ethical integrity keeps them engaged and reduces organizational disruption. Professional ethics stabilizes the workplace by lowering uncertainty.

5.6 Professional Ethics and Organizational Regulation

5.6.1 Structural Limits of Formal Governance

While participants acknowledged the need for regulatory tools—such as compliance handbooks, internal audits, and whistleblowing channels- they consistently highlighted their structural limits. They described formal compliance mechanisms as reactive, backward-looking, and unable to govern real-time behavior.

5.6.2 Informal Social Regulation in Practice

Governance mechanisms were seen as more effective at shaping daily organizational behavior. Participant L1 argued that executive modeling and peer accountability regulate workplace behavior more powerfully than written policies. Participant E1 added that ethical norms are kept through social reinforcement during daily interactions, functioning as a real-time informal governance system.

5.6.3 Operational Consequences of Ethical Breaches

The executive interviews stressed how organizations respond to deliberate violations of their culture. Participants noted that failing to address severe breaches of trust weakens moral authority and erodes cohesion.

Conversely, decisive responses to breaches reinforce shared expectations, signal executive commitment, and restore systemic stability.

5.7 Professional Ethics as a Driver of Organizational Cohesion

5.7.1 Shared Ethical Values and Collective Identity

Participants explicitly linked ethics to collective identity and organizational commitment. Participant E1 explained that shared academic values create pride and professional solidarity among faculty members.

Participant L1 noted that ethical integrity strengthens employee identification with the brand’s purpose, aligning professional identity with organizational objectives. Shared ethical frameworks establish reference points that foster social integration.

5.7.2 Constructive Conflict Management

Executive respondents agreed that professional ethics does not eliminate conflict but determines how conflict is managed. Participant H1 observed that transparent ethical governance prevents disagreements from deteriorating into personal rivalries.

Participant R1 noted that ethical boundaries provide a framework for constructive task conflict, enabling teams to debate operational alternatives without damaging interpersonal relationships. Professional ethics protects cohesion by keeping conflict focused on problem-solving.

5.7.3 Synthesis of Mechanisms

Across all executive cases, participants confirmed professional ethics as a foundational cohesive force. As summarized by participants, professional ethics sustains cohesion through five operational mechanisms:

- **Trust Generation:** Establishing the foundation for voluntary collaboration.
- **Cooperation Facilitation:** Enabling action across functional and goal boundaries.
- **Legitimacy Creation:** Generating moral authority and informal influence.
- **Uncertainty Reduction:** Mitigating ambiguity and increasing behavioral predictability.
- **Identity Reinforcement:** Aligning individual purpose with collective institutional goals.

5.8 Ethical Tensions and Strategic Behavior

5.8.1 Navigating Ethics and Performance Pressures

Executive participants acknowledged that tensions frequently arise between principles and short-term performance demands. Participant T1 described scenarios where immediate commercial opportunities conflicted with long-term sustainability and community trust.

Participant L1 detailed the strain of balancing ambitious quarterly revenue targets with brand heritage, craft integrity, and responsible sourcing.

5.8.2 Strategic Trade-Offs and Managerial Decision-Making

Empirical findings indicate that managers continuously navigate trade-offs between principles, resource constraints, and stakeholder demands. However, executive participants overwhelmingly argued that sacrificing standards for short-term financial gain damages long-term organizational viability.

Ethical compromises erode trust and brand equity, ultimately undermining the organization’s position.

5.8.3 Ethics as a Driver of Organizational Resilience

An insight from the cross-case analysis is the link between ethics and organizational resilience. Participants noted that ethical organizations navigate crises and market disruptions effectively because accumulated trust, internal cohesion, and external legitimacy buffer uncertainty.

Professional ethics serves not as a mechanism for internal cohesion but as a strategic asset that supports long-term organizational survival.

5.9 Cross-Case Analysis and Conceptual Synthesis

Synthesis of the empirical data reveals four overarching theoretical patterns that confirm and refine the extended Strategic Analysis framework:

1. Theme 1: Ethics Is Fundamentally Relational. Professional ethics operates through interpersonal dynamics—specifically trust, moral credibility, transparency, and objective fairness—rather than administrative compliance structures.
2. Theme 2: Ethics Produces Systemic Trust. Trust serves as the intermediary through which professional ethics transforms into voluntary cooperation and operational agility.
3. Theme 3: Ethics Generates Power and Legitimacy. Professional ethics endow actors with authority and intimidation, expanding their power beyond formal position.
4. Theme 4: Ethics Directly Mitigates Relational Uncertainty. Shared ethical standards set behavioral limits, reducing confusion about actors' intentions, and creating a predictable environment for teamwork.

5.9.1 Empirical Path Model of Organizational Cohesion

The structure links seen across the five cases are brought together in the empirical path model below:

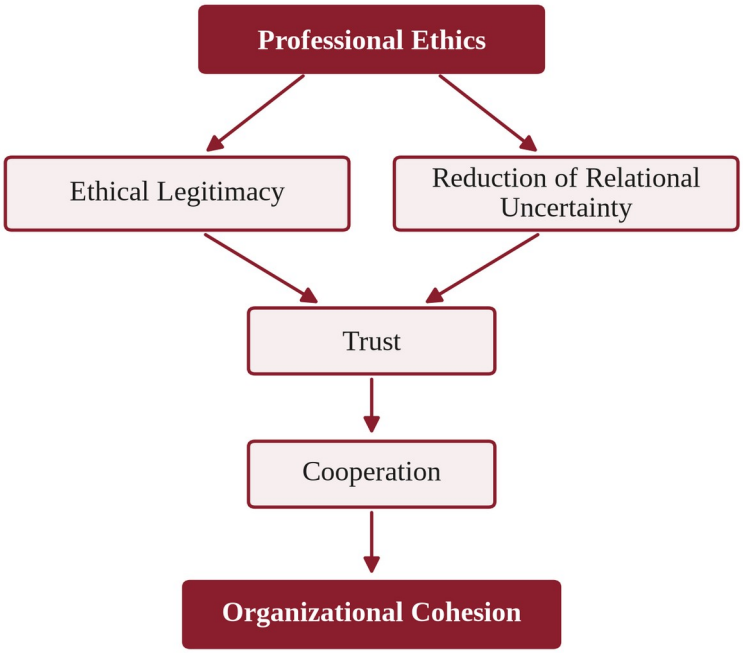


Figure 5.1. Empirical Path Model of Organizational Cohesion

5.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter shares findings from executive interviews across five industry sectors, examining how professional ethics works as a tool for organizational cohesion. The evidence shows that professional ethics goes beyond compliance, acting as a dynamic relational system that builds trust, provides ethical legitimacy, reduces relational uncertainty, and encourages voluntary cooperation.

This chapter links findings to practical insights for managers, discusses theoretical contributions, and suggests future research directions to emphasize relevance.

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CHAPTER 6

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the results from Chapter 5, placing them in the larger conversation about professional ethics, power in organizations, and how systems stay together. Chapter 5 presented the results of interviews with executives, while this chapter examines what those results mean in theory and practice.

Although the data show that professional ethics helps keep organizations stable, this discussion highlights how trust and legitimacy foster confidence, which is essential for organizational stability and effective collaboration.

6.2 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

6.2.1 Primary Research Question

How does professional ethics help people in an organization work together?

The data show that professional ethics helps keep the organization running by setting clear behavioral expectations, which helps people work together consistently. In organizations where various parts depend on each other, and uncertainty is high, professional ethics helps ensure people know what to expect from one another. Across all areas studied, ethics was linked to trust, leaders being seen as reliable, the organization being seen as legitimate, and people acting in a certain way.

Importantly, the data show that professional ethics does not create cohesion on its own. Instead, ethics works through relationships, such as trust, legitimacy, and reduced uncertainty. These depend on leaders who are genuine and can make people feel good about the future.

For this reason, professional ethics should not be seen as something forced on people or as a fixed part of the organization. Instead, it helps people work together and stay connected. This view contributes to research on ethical climate by challenging older models and suggesting a new way to think about how ethics guides behavior.

6.2.2 Research Question 1

How do people in the organization see ethics in their daily work?

The data show that people see ethics mainly by watching what others do, not by looking at the rules and policies. In all cases studied, people described ethics through actions like honesty, taking responsibility, fairness, and openness. This shows that informal talk and behavior matter more than written rules.

This differs from much business ethics research, which argues that people act ethically mainly through rules, legal compliance, and written codes (Treviño et al., 2006). The data show that these rules matter less than how people act. Leaders' choices and how people treat one another shape how people see what the organization stands for.

People judge an organization's ethics by how people act over time. When what the organization says does not match what people do, the rules lose their power. This shows how daily actions shape people's perceptions of the organization's values and trust.

6.2.3 Research Question 2

How does professional ethics help people trust each other and work together?

The data shows that professional ethics builds trust, which helps people work together. When people act in ways that make others feel confident, they are reliable and have good intentions. Trust grows, making it easier to solve problems without constantly checking everything.

Trust only grows when people see that what is said matches what is done. This shows how real ethics that people believe in help build cooperation.

People in the study clearly distinguish between what the organization says about ethics and what people do. Trust only grows when people see that what is promised matches what is done. So, ethics helps people work together by making things seem fair and safe, not by forcing people to do things.

6.2.4 Research Question 3

How does professional ethics control power and deal with uncertainty?

One main idea from this study is that professional ethics helps control how power works in an organization and reduces uncertainty. People clearly distinguish between power and the influence that comes from being seen as ethical. Leaders who act honestly can have considerable influence even if they are not in a prominent position.

This idea builds on Crozier and Friedberg's (1980) Strategic Analysis theory. In their view, power comes from controlling important resources and managing areas of uncertainty. The data show that while controlling resources is still important, being seen as ethical is another kind of power. People are willing to follow leaders they see as ethical, which shifts power from something forced to something seen as right.

The data also show that professional ethics helps with uncertainty. The main kind of uncertainty ethics addresses is not about problems or the environment, but about not knowing what people in the organization will do. By setting rules, ethics helps people act more predictably, which helps them work together even when they do not have all the information.

6.2.5 Research Question 4

How does professional ethics help the organization stay together?

The organization stays together when people trust each other, work voluntarily, and face uncertainty. Explicitly linking professional ethics to this trust shows how ethics support organizational stability and confidence.

Rather than eliminating differences, professional ethics helps people work together by setting shared rules that foster trust, influence power dynamics, and promote organizational stability. This should inspire your audience to see ethics as a continuous effort that fosters cooperation.

Cohesion does not require everyone to be the same. Instead, shared values and trust create expectations that reassure the audience about the organization's stability and resilience.

6.3 Revisiting the Strategic Analysis Framework

6.3.1 Strengths of the Strategic Analysis Framework

The data supports Crozier and Friedberg's (1980) Strategic Analysis theory. People describe their workplaces as places where people negotiate who gets what and use uncertainty to their advantage.

Cooperation was not seen as something that happens automatically because of the organization's structure. It was seen as something that must be worked on constantly. Strategic Analysis was particularly good at understanding these kinds of situations and explaining how people work together when they are not all the same.

6.3.2 Limitations Revealed by Empirical Findings

Even though it explains a lot, the data shows that the old Strategic Analysis theory has some problems. The original theory focuses only on power based on resources and what people can control. It does not explain much about shared values, trust, or being seen as fair.

Throughout the interviews, people emphasized the importance of feeling that leaders are honest, that people trust each other, and that expectations for how people should act are clear. Recognizing this can make your audience feel more confident and secure in the organization's environment.

6.3.3 Toward an Ethics-Based Extension of Strategic Analysis

To address this, this study suggests adding ethics to Strategic Analysis theory to explain how people act and how they connect. For example, managers can implement ethical decision-making frameworks or stakeholder engagement tools to embed ethical considerations into strategic processes, helping readers understand how to apply these concepts effectively.

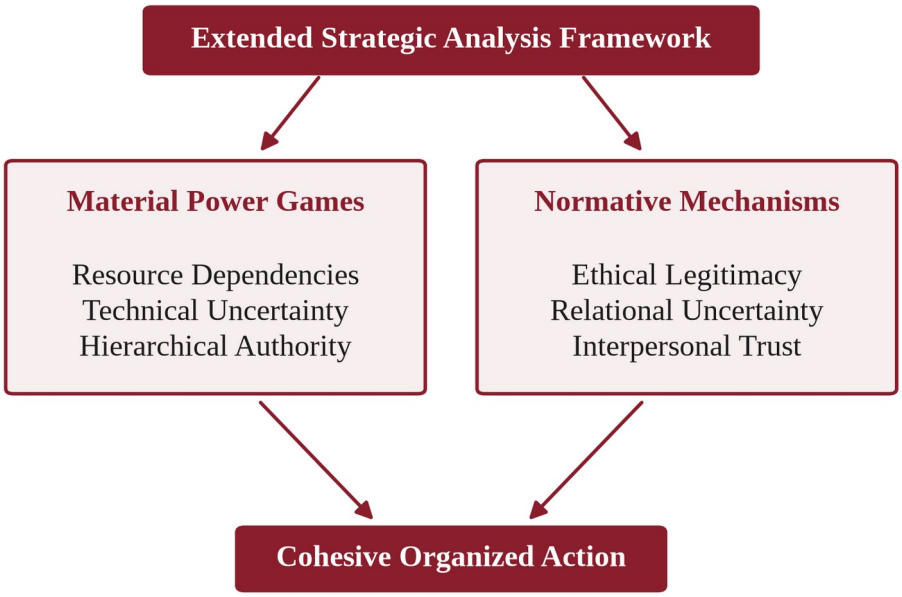


Figure 6.1. Extended Strategic Analysis Framework

In this view, professional ethics helps in organizations by:

1. Making an influence that is not based on money or resources.
2. Stopping people from trying to take advantage of others by reducing uncertainty about what others will do.
3. Making it cheaper to work together by building trust.
4. Setting rules that help people from diverse groups work together.

This new view does not change the Strategic Analysis theory but adds to it by explaining the values that help people work together over time. However, it is important to consider how different organizational cultures may challenge the implementation of these ethical principles and to develop strategies to manage these barriers and ensure consistent application across diverse settings.

6.4 Contribution to Theory

This study adds three ideas to the fields of organizational sociology and business ethics:

1. Changing how we see ethics as something that makes things happen: The study changes how we think about ethics from being a list of rules to something that helps people work together in big and complicated organizations.
2. Creating an idea called relational uncertainty: The study introduces the idea of relational uncertainty, which is about not knowing what other people will do and not about technical problems or the environment.
3. Showing that ethics is a kind of power: The study says that being fair and ethical is a way to have power that is not based on money or position, which adds to ideas about power and authority.

These ideas connect how organizations work with ideas about how people should act.

6.5 Contribution to Managerial Practice

For leaders and people who manage organizations, these results give ways to make the organization work better:

- **Changing how we look at ethics:** Organizations need to see ethics as something that helps them do their work well, not just as something to avoid problems. Ethics should build trust, stay flexible, and hold up when things go wrong.
- **Being real, not saying things:** Leaders need to make sure what they say and what they do match up, especially when things are hard. Saying things without doing them erodes trust.
- **Trust is a deal:** When people trust each other, it is easier to manage and makes the organization feel more secure and optimistic about overcoming challenges.

6.6 Practical Managerial Framework

The results from the study are put into a step-by-step way to help organizations stay together:

Professional Ethics → Ethical Legitimacy → Trust → Reduced Relational Uncertainty → Cooperation → Organizational Cohesion

Although it is shown as steps, this model works as a loop in which each part supports the next. When ethics is strong, it builds trust, which makes people feel secure and helps the organization stay together.

6.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the data closely. It compared it with what others have written before. It also used ideas from Crozier and Friedberg's 1980 work, Strategic Analysis. The conversation showed that professional ethics is an important part of keeping organizations together. It creates a sense of right and wrong, builds trust, makes people feel more secure with one another, and helps manage conflicts.

By adding uncertainty and ethical legitimacy to Strategic Analysis, this research addressed some of the problems in the original theory. Chapter 7 discusses the study's limitations, including methodological constraints, and suggests how future research can build on these findings to deepen understanding of professional ethics' role in organizations.

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CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This closing chapter brings together the findings of this study, which examined how professional ethics functions as a force that holds groups together. Using the Strategic Analysis framework developed by Crozier and Friedberg (1980), the research examined how professional ethics, trust across different areas, informal influence (power gained through personal credibility rather than formal authority), relationship uncertainty (unpredictability in interpersonal interactions), and organizational unity connect.

This study shows that professional ethics is more than rules; it influences how people build trust and stay connected, directly impacting organizational cohesion and stability. It also shows why professional ethics matters for maintaining organizational stability and helping people feel confident.

7.2 Answers to Research Questions

7.2.1 Primary Research Question

How does professional ethics function as a force that holds people in an organization together?

This study argues that professional ethics directly affects how people in the organization relate to each other. It helps build trust and unity. This suggests managers should view ethics as a factor that helps the organization stay stable and perform well.

The evidence from the study shows that being united does not come from official rules. It comes from how people behave. As some leaders say, employees judge an organization's values by what leaders do under pressure, not by what the company says. Professional ethics helps manage the organization by aligning how people act.

7.2.2 Research Question 1

How do people in the organization see ethics in their daily work?

People in the organization see ethics mainly through what they see others do and the decisions they make daily. Highlighting these relational behaviors can make the audience

feel more connected to and trust the message, emphasizing that ethics is about everyday interactions, not just rules.

In all cases, people rarely discuss systems or rules when talking about ethical behavior. Instead, they see ethics as part of the organization's daily life. This is shown in how leaders behave, how people are honest in their studies, and how they treat employees fairly. People make meaning through their interactions and everyday work experiences.

7.2.3 Research Question 2

How does professional ethics influence organizational cohesion and trust, and why is understanding this relationship important for researchers and leaders?

Professional ethics builds trust between people and institutions, helping them work together. Emphasizing how ethical behavior increases confidence in others' reliability can reassure the audience and motivate them to uphold these standards.

The findings show that ethics helps people work together by stopping people from acting in their own interest and creating a safe environment. Trust is part of this: when people show they are ethical, trust grows, helping the organization work and collaborate.

7.2.4 Research Question 3

How does professional ethics control the way people in the organization have power and deal with uncertainty?

Professional ethics shapes how people in the organization behave in two ways: by creating ethical approval and reducing uncertainty in relationships. The study found that leaders who show they are ethical gain informal influence that can be stronger than their official position, fostering respect and stability.

Ethics also reduces confusion in the organization by setting rules for how people should act. When regular rules are not enough in situations like dealing with customers, arguments in school, or discussions with people who matter, professional ethics provides a way to make decisions and keep things predictable.

7.2.5 Research Question 4

How does professional ethics help the organization stay together?

The organization stays together in four ways: building trust, gaining nonmaterial moral approval, reducing uncertainty in relationships, and helping people work together across different areas. Emphasizing shared ethical values as a source of stability can make the audience feel more secure and committed to the organization's cohesion.

Crucially, professional ethics does not make the organization stay together by removing disagreement. Instead, it helps the organization manage differences constructively. It gives a clear way to manage trade-offs without breaking long-term relationships.

7.3 Summary of the Findings from the Study

The study looked at different cases and found five main conclusions:

1. People look at how leaders act, not what is written about ethics.
2. Trust is the way that people stay together. It connects behavior with working together.
3. Being ethical gives people a kind of influence that is not based on their job title.
4. Shared ethical values make people's actions more predictable, which makes people feel less anxious about what others might do.
5. Being together comes from how people trust and believe in each other. Work together, not by strict rules.

7.4 Theoretical Contributions

This study adds three things to the field of how organizations work and how ethics is part of business:

First, it extends the Strategic Analysis framework from Crozier and Friedberg (1980) by including professional ethics as a factor that helps groups work together. The study shows that ethical thinking directly influences how people manage power, depend on one another, and maintain stability.

This research introduces the idea of uncertainty and shows that ethical thinking can be a new way to gain influence. It encourages people to see ethics as something that can help an organization in useful ways.

Third, the study finds that ethical power does not come from money or a higher position. This adds to ideas about power by showing that influence can come from being honest and doing the right thing.

7.5 Practical Contributions and What This Means for Managers

For people who are in charge and those who work in big organizations, this study gives some important things to think about:

- Recognize ethics as a vital component of organizational stability: Leaders should see ethics not just as compliance but as essential for building trust, enabling quick responses, and maintaining strength within the organization.
- Leaders need to be real and match what they say with what they do: The company's trust depends on leaders ensuring their actions match the values they claim, especially when things get tough.
- **Building an ethical culture:** Creating an organization where people do the right thing takes daily habits, people helping each other, and leaders showing the way. It is not about giving out rules.
- **Handling uncertainty:** When the company is changing or facing problems, keeping ethical standards helps keep people committed and builds trust in the company.

7.6 Limitations of the Study

This study admits that four things could be better:

1. The study used a method that focuses on understanding details and being able to use what was learned in situations, not on proving things with numbers.
2. The people who were studied were mainly leaders and top managers. Future studies should also include people who work on the lines.
3. This early idea of 'relational uncertainty' and 'ethical legitimacy' could use testing with numbers to help managers use them better and make the organization more trusting.
4. The study looked at five industries but did not plan to compare them.

7.7 Ideas for Future Research

To add to what this study found, future researchers should think about the following areas:

- **Making the ideas clearer:** Create and test ways to measure uncertainty and ethical legitimacy in various kinds of organizations.
- **Looking at industries:** Conduct detailed studies of how different industries, with their own rules, shape the link between ethics and collaboration.
- **Looking at work:** Study how working from a distance or in mixed settings affects how people learn and pass on ethics and trust.
- **Doing long-term studies:** Conduct studies over time to see how ethical approval, trust, and being together change during major changes in the company.

7.8 Final Thoughts

This study shows that professional ethics fosters organizational cohesion by building trust, gaining informal approval, reducing uncertainty, and supporting collaboration, all of which are key to organizational success.

By linking business ethics with the Strategic Analysis framework from Crozier and Friedberg (1980), this study shows that ethics is part of how organizations work. Ultimately, professional ethics helps organizations endure, gain acceptance, and run well.

References

Crozier, M., & Friedberg, E. (1980). Systems: The politics of collective action. University of Chicago Press.

APPENDIX A

Interview Summaries

A.1 Purpose of the Appendix

This appendix presents a series of participant profiles and interview summaries developed to demonstrate how the interview protocol, coding framework, and conceptual model adopted in this study apply. The cases are constructed examples intended to show how the principal concepts underpinning the research may manifest across different organizational contexts.

The appendix serves a methodological rather than evidential purpose. The cases show how qualitative inquiry can identify and interpret themes associated with professional ethics, trust, organizational legitimacy, cooperation, uncertainty management, and organizational cohesion.

The material presented herein, including interview summaries, illustrates how the coding framework and analytical methods reveal relationships between ethics and organizational cohesion, strengthening methodological transparency and supporting the findings reported in Chapters 5 and 6.

A.2 Participant Profiles

A.2.1 Participant H1

Regional Operations Director | Hospitality Sector

PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

Sector	Hospitality
Position	Regional Operations Director
Professional Experience	18 years
Organizational Context	International hotel group
Primary Responsibilities	Operational governance, service quality, multi-property management

ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

The participant views ethics as fostering fairness, transparency, accountability, and responsibility, emphasizing a shared relational nature that builds trust and cohesion and may resonate with the audience's understanding of collective responsibility.

From an organizational perspective, ethics facilitates cooperation by strengthening interpersonal trust and reducing communication barriers between operational units. Ethical behavior is also associated with enhanced managerial credibility, thereby extending influence beyond formal authority structures.

The participant further suggests that ethical principles play an important role in managing operational ambiguity and supporting decision-making when formal procedures provide insufficient guidance. Organizational cohesion is consequently interpreted as emerging from shared behavioral expectations reinforced through ethical leadership and organizational culture.

STATEMENT

> *"Employees do not follow policies every day; they follow the behavior they observe in their leaders."*

A.2.2 Participant E1

Executive Dean | Higher Education Sector

PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

Sector	Higher Education
Position	Executive Dean
Professional Experience	22 years
Organizational Context	Private university
Primary Responsibilities	Academic governance, faculty leadership, quality assurance

ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

Professional ethics is closely linked to academic integrity, fairness, transparency, and responsibility toward students and faculty. Ethical behavior is viewed as fundamental to institutional legitimacy and educational credibility.

The participant emphasizes that cooperation in academic environments largely depends on trust and professional respect rather than hierarchical authority. Ethical consistency enhances leadership credibility and facilitates collective engagement with institutional objectives.

Ethics also stabilizes organizations during periods of change by providing normative guidance in uncertain situations with competing stakeholder expectations.

STATEMENT

"Without academic integrity, trust in the institution cannot exist."

A.2.3 Participant T1

Chief Executive Officer | Tourism Sector

PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

Sector	Tourism
Position	Chief Executive Officer
Professional Experience	20 years
Organizational Context	Tourism development organization
Primary Responsibilities	Stakeholder relations, partnership development, strategic planning

ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

The participant interprets professional ethics as a responsibility to balance economic objectives with obligations toward a broad range of stakeholders. Ethical conduct is a prerequisite for establishing and maintaining productive collaborative relationships.

In this context, ethics builds stakeholder confidence, facilitates strategic cooperation, and strengthens organizational credibility. Ethical reputation is also seen as a source of influence, particularly in negotiation and stakeholder engagement.

Ethical principles guide decision-making in contexts marked by regulatory complexity and competing interests, supporting organizational alignment and collective action.

STATEMENT

"Partnerships survive because of trust long after contracts are signed."

A.2.4 Participant R1

Corporate Human Resources Director | Retail Sector

PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

Sector	Retail
Position	Corporate Human Resources Director
Professional Experience	17 years
Organizational Context	Multinational retail company
Primary Responsibilities	Organizational culture, employee relations, leadership development

ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

The participant associates professional ethics with fairness, accountability, consistency, and respectful treatment of employees. Ethical principles are described as essential to building trust-based employment relationships.

Ethical organizational environments are seen as promoting transparent communication, facilitating knowledge sharing, and encouraging collaborative problem-solving. Ethical consistency is also viewed as an important source of informal managerial authority, contributing to employee commitment and organizational engagement.

In addition, ethical communication practices are considered particularly important for reducing uncertainty associated with organizational change, career progression, and performance evaluation.

STATEMENT

> *"Employees accept difficult decisions when they believe the process was fair."*

A.2.5 Participant L1

Vice President, Brand and Client Experience | Luxury Sector

PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

Sector	Luxury
Position	Vice President, Brand and Client Experience
Professional Experience	21 years
Organizational Context	International luxury brand
Primary Responsibilities	Brand reputation, client experience, strategic communication

ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

Professional ethics is understood primarily through authenticity, integrity, responsibility, and respect for stakeholders. Ethical conduct is regarded as a critical determinant of organizational reputation and long-term stakeholder trust.

The participant emphasizes that ethical credibility facilitates collaboration across organizational functions and enhances executive influence. Ethics also serves as a decision-making framework when commercial objectives conflict with reputational considerations.

Shared ethical standards reinforce organizational cohesion by strengthening collective identity and commitment to organizational purpose.

STATEMENT

> *"Reputation is sustained by ethical behavior long before it is reflected in business results."*

A.3 Cross-Case Comparison

The cross-case analysis reveals consistent patterns across diverse sectors, demonstrating the framework's robustness and reinforcing the audience's trust in its broad applicability and validity. A comparison of the five cases shows strong convergence on the organizational significance of professional ethics.

Ethics and Trust Formation

A second recurring theme concerns the relationship between ethics and trust. Participants consistently identify ethical behavior as a condition that builds confidence in colleagues, managers, institutions, and organizational processes.

Ethical Legitimacy and Organizational Influence

The cases suggest that ethical credibility functions as a source of organizational influence. Participants repeatedly associate ethical behavior with enhanced legitimacy, increased acceptance of decisions, and greater capacity to mobilize cooperation.

Ethics and the Reduction of Relational Uncertainty

A key pattern across cases is ethics' role in reducing relational uncertainty, providing behavioral expectations that increase predictability and foster confidence in organizational relationships, reassuring the audience about stability.

A.4 Conceptual Implications

The cases provide support for the conceptual relationships proposed in Chapter 3. Specifically, they suggest that professional ethics may contribute to organizational cohesion through four interrelated mechanisms:

1. The generation of ethical legitimacy;
2. The development of interpersonal and organizational trust;
3. The reduction of relational uncertainty;
4. The facilitation of cooperation and collective action.

These relationships may be represented as follows:

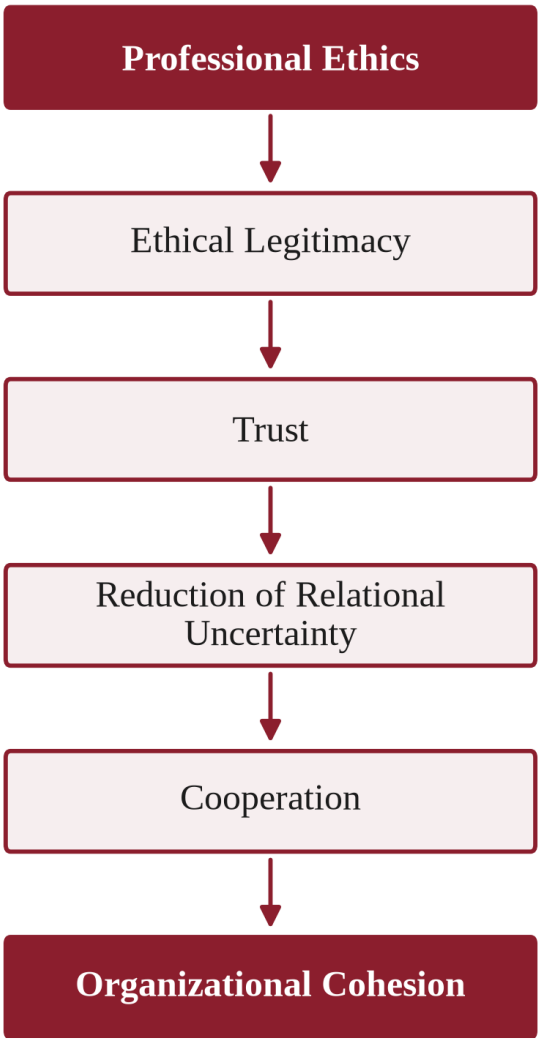


Figure A.1. Conceptual Relationships

A.5 Concluding Remarks

The participant profiles in this appendix show how professional ethics can be examined across diverse organizational environments. Although sectoral contexts differ, the cases reveal a common tendency to associate ethics with trust, legitimacy, cooperation, and organizational integration.

These are intended solely to demonstrate the practical application of the research framework and should not be interpreted as substitutes for empirical evidence. The study's findings and theoretical conclusions must be derived exclusively from data collected and analyzed in accordance with the methodological procedures outlined in Chapter 4.