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## **Abstract**

### **Social Situational Business Ethics Framing For Engaging With Ethics Issues**

This article considers the problem of how employees and observers of business ethics behaviors often do not know how to safely and effectively engage with business ethics issues and cases. The ameliorative method of social situational business ethics framing was analyzed. Key parts of the related literature from philosophy, sociology, organizational studies, and business ethics are reviewed. A literature gap between general framing theory and business ethics was identified with respect to the need for social situational framing in business ethics at the micro individual, meso organizational, and macro institutional levels. Theoretical propositions for bridging the literature gap and a wide variety of business ethics engagement case examples are developed as illustrations of and support for the propositions. Practical social situational business ethics framing implications for safe and effective business ethics engagement are considered.

*KEYWORDS: Business Ethics –Framing – Resonance - Social situation*

# **Social Situational Business Ethics Framing For Facilitating Ethics Engagement**

## **Introduction**

There can be severe difficulties in doing ethics dialogue and/or ethics persuasion in business situations where it is common for employees to consider the expression of different and/or controversial ethics ideas as relationship, job, and/or career threatening. Hirschman (1970), Ewing (1983), Argyris and Schon (1988), Nielsen (1996), and Palmer (2012) found that this is often the case in hierarchical business organizations where there is fear of negative conflicts and negative career implications from raising ethics issues that might be interpreted as critical of higher level management. However, there are ameliorative methods such as situational business ethics framing that can be used to help build resonance and open dialogic and persuasive opportunities.

Initially, research on framing generally, e.g., Goffman's (1959), has simply taken stock that certain frames – a threat or an opportunity, a loss or a gain, scrubs or street clothes – can evoke predictable audience reactions. Social scientists attributed this effect to the congealment of meanings in norms associated with the use of certain frames, hence hinting at the importance of the broader context in which framing is embedded.

Early social science framing research (Gonos, 1977) has expanded this line of reasoning by looking more closely at the audience of framing, arguing that by taking the audience into consideration, framing can be more effective and better understood. In other words, it is not that certain frames or labels automatically elicit certain reactions, but framing can be effective if it shares and has in common some of the values, needs, expectations, beliefs, ideas, narratives, or ideologies of its audience.

The micro-sociologist, Goffman (1964, 1974) further advanced general framing theory towards greater contextualization and a more nuanced understanding of framing effectiveness as resonance with a specific audience and the social situation in which framing is offered and received. However, this theoretical advance concerning social situational framing is for the most part neglected within the business ethics framing literature.

This article offers an expanded theory and illustrative case examples of interactions between social situations and business ethics framing effectiveness. In this paper we address the gap between the generalized social situational framing literature and the business ethics literature and examine how the social situation in which business ethics framing is offered and interpreted can impact the potential effectiveness of social situational business ethics framing in facilitating ethics engagement.

The motivation for this study stems from a dissatisfaction with much of the current treatment of business ethics framing as a tool that can be generically applied to a variety of situations, without much consideration of the different norms and expectations that particular social situations evoke and require. By proposing a multilevel typology of social situations and their impact on business ethics framing practice and potential, we hope to contribute to a more systematic understanding of the influence of the social situation in guiding appropriate business ethics framing.

Since social situational business ethics framing can be powerful practices for opening and informing people's minds and behaviors, it is important to understand their mechanisms of effectiveness. More specifically and following Goffman's generalized micro, meso, and macro levels sociological typology, situational business ethics framing can be considered across micro individual, meso organizational, and macro institutional levels.

Goffman's micro, meso, and macro levels typology is adapted to levels of business ethics framing situations. Several examples of multilevel archetypical business ethics social situations are identified that can help circumscribe what practices of business ethics framing are appropriate and effective.

While reality rarely falls into neatly defined categories, as Weber (1904, 1952) has explained, ideal types can be useful to advance theory. By no means is this tripartite typology meant to be exhaustive in capturing all the subtle, and not so subtle influences that social situations exert on our ability to use business ethics framing for better communication. It aims at both helping systematize research within business ethics framing theory; and, facilitate business ethics engagement.

The general rationale behind each archetypical business ethics social situation is that a social situation's specific constellation of roles, norms, and practices moderates and can help guide the nature of business ethics framing and the situational interaction between the framer and the audience. For each type of social situation we then developed propositions that link a type of social situation and business ethics frame effectiveness with an audience.

In sum, through this situational business ethics framing typology the aim is to contribute to a more analytical understanding of business ethics framing beyond the simple appeal to the audience's beliefs, interests, and values. By doing so, this framework strikes a middle ground between heroic representations of individual business ethics agency – focused on actors' choices and ability to mix-and-match cultural bits and pieces to achieve their business ethics aspiration – and the traditional and more meso and macro level sociological emphasis on organizational and institutional structure, which brings attention to how individuals can have very little space for ethical engagement and choice within the macro reproduction of meanings. As such, this paper is

meant to complement, rather than contradict existing work on business ethics framing and framing effectiveness.

A significant – and timely – engagement implication of this work for managers, leaders, observers, and change agents is: “know thy situation”, in addition to “know thy audience”. With greater connectivity comes greater responsibility to communicate appropriately and effectively across a variety of business ethics social situations. We believe that this paper provides a step towards a greater understanding of the positive role of contextually informed situational business ethics framing in delimiting the discursive terrain in which effective communication can be crafted and sustained; as well as a step towards helping overcome the problematical perception that engagement with business ethics issues is necessarily adversarial instead of a dialogic and/or mutually persuasive co-discovery, co-construction, and emergence of a contextual business ethics truth.

### **Literature Review**

Four literatures consider the phenomena of situational framing from related, but different perspectives: philosophy, sociology, organization studies, and business/organizational ethics.

#### Framing Theory in Philosophy

There has been a great deal of foundational philosophical and intellectual history work concerning the framing and social construction of meaning that goes back at least as far as Plato. Plato developed the metaphor of knowledge constructed on the basis of different perceptions and interpretations of shadows on the wall of a cave by observers who live in the cave and are separated from the phenomena casting the shadows and observers outside the cave who see what is casting the shadows.

Another philosophy based example of framing is Aristotle's comparative analysis of the framing and social construction of the idea of property in Athens vs. Sparta (Nielsen and Lockwood, 2017) that illustrates differences in framings between societies for different political-economic purposes.

Within 19<sup>th</sup> century German social philosophy of individual and collective praxis there is a great deal of consideration of how larger macro social and cultural factors influence individual, organizational, and institutional social framings, constructions, and interpretations of ethical meaning that can sometimes be influenced by individual change agents and social movements in recurring feedback loops (Bernstein, 1971). Collins' (1998) *Sociology of Philosophies* considers how knowledge is not only discovered but also framed, constructed, and organized by social actors, social groups, and social forces. The postmodern work of philosophers such as Said (1979), Foucault (1979) and Derrida (1997) point out how the frames, voices, narratives, and perspectives of the less powerful are often ignored and suppressed by the more powerful as well as how narrative frames are sometimes used by social elites to rationalize what types of knowledge are more and less important.

### Framing Theory in Sociology

From a sociological framing perspective, Gonos (1977: 861, 866) categorized Goffman (1959, 1964, 1974) as a "micro sociological... structuralist". Goffman, one of the foundational social science scholars of framing theory, considered framing as the act of crafting and employing frames, defined as filters that bring attention to a subset of reality. While his work on framing alignment with the cognitive and emotional characteristics of audiences has received a great deal of attention, his work concerning how the social structural situation is different from both the audience and the frame, and how all three can jointly influence framing effectiveness is also important (Gonos, 1977).

Building on the micro-sociological framing alignment work of Goffman (1974), the sociologists and institutional scholars, Snow and Benford (1988), found that different types of frame alignment processes that are intentionally adjusted to resonate with cognitive and emotional characteristics of audiences can influence organizational and institutional persuasive change effectiveness. Snow, Benford, and their colleagues (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow et al., 1986) first entered the idea of “resonance” into the study of social movements to explain why certain movements’ framings were more effective than others at mobilizing supporters. The argument they proposed is that social framings work more effectively when there is a fit with audiences’ existing beliefs, worldviews, and life experiences. Frames that are congruent and complementary with the audience’s goals and ideology are a “necessary condition for movement participation, whatever its nature or intensity” (Snow et al., 1986, p. 464).

Within organizational settings, resonance is similarly invoked to explain how institutional entrepreneurs successfully legitimate and motivate collective participation by aligning local beliefs with broader cultural accounts (Creed, Scully, & Austin, 2002). As Snow *et al.* (1986, p. 477) noticed, “many framings may be plausible, but ... relatively few strike a responsive chord.” Rather than a simple match or fit with audience interests, beliefs, or expectations, it is argued that framing resonates when it “sounds right” or “feels right” to an audience. Sociological framing research has shown that frames can be powerful tools for shaping understandings and behaviors when they “resonate” with an intended listener, or audience (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Extensive empirical evidence shows that resonance is a key mechanism for a frame to be effective in opening and changing others’ perceptions and evaluations and moving them into action (Benford and Snow, 2000).

#### Framing Within Organizational Studies



Within the organization studies framing literature generally, but with the for the most part exception of the organizational and business ethics literature, there has been some research that suggests that different types of framing can differentially influence beliefs and behaviors depending upon different types of situational factors. That is, there is an interaction effect between different types of framing and different types of situations upon resonance and consequent belief and behavior change and stability.

For example, Hardy, Palmer, and Phillips (2000) found that different types of framing interact with different types of strategic change situations. Similarly, Sonenshein (2010) found that different types of framing interact with different types of strategic management change situations. Building on both Goffman's (1959, 1964, 1974) social structural situation work and the framing alignment work of Snow and Benford (1988), Giorgi & Weber (2015) found that the persuasive effectiveness of framing alignment was related to both audience characteristics and a specific type of generalized social structural situation, the organizational work role.

An extensive literature has also shown that frames are important devices for persuading others (Fiss & Zajac, 2006) because frames act as "filters" (Lamont & Small, 2008) or "brackets" (Zerubavel, 1991) that delimit our perception of reality. By framing to audiences what is salient and worth paying attention to, frames define situations and direct thinking and behaviors. The act of deploying frames, or "framing," is meant to direct audience attention, and by doing so "involves processes of inclusion and exclusion; to frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient" (Giorgi et al., 2015, p. 11).

For example, frames can shape audience's thinking, feeling, and behavior by prompting the processing of connecting cues with existing frames and categories that leads to the creation of meaning (Weick, 1995) (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991, Weick 1993). For example, when faced

with the Mann Gulch fire whose proportions were difficult to ascertain, a group of firefighters accepted the leader's frame of a "10 o'clock fire" as a plausible explanation of what was going on, and such frame influenced their subsequent tactics (Weick, 1993). Similarly, when digital imaging emerged in the 1980s, the traditional photography industry struggled to make sense of this new technology. When Kodak's chief executive officer introduced the frame of a "hybrid imaging system," which combined instant photography and electronics, this frame quickly resonated with top management and guided the company's research and development investments (Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000).

There has been relatively little attention to different types of situational factors in organizational studies that has been extended to social situational business ethics framing, but there are some indirectly related studies and potential applications. For example, Sonenshein (2006) found that framing that included important business economic dimensions in situations where top management considered issues as inappropriate for discussion in a business situation helped facilitate willingness of top management to address the issue. For example, this finding could be extended to situational business ethics framing so as to suggest that in a situation where top management considered an ethics issue too controversial for discussion in a business context, if the problem could be reframed as an issue with an important business economics dimension, then it might better resonate as more appropriate for discussion.

Sillance and Mueller (2007) in the area of business social responsibility, which is related to business ethics, found that different types of social issues framing can be more and less effective in situations where the social issues are considered legitimate or illegitimate with respect to the functional characteristics of the business. Similarly, Sonenshein (2016) found that "[Issue] framing helps position the issue in ways that correspond to the interests, values, and problems of top managers...by selectively

highlighting and concealing meanings to advance a preferred interpretation.” More specifically, Sonenshein (2016) found that framing in situations where issues had high illegitimacy and/or high equivocality, change agents need to frame issues as including benefits to criteria considered legitimate in the organizational business context. Similarly, Himick and Audousset-Coulier (2016) studied the issue of socially responsible investing by pension funds in Canada in relation to organizational structure. They found that the specific pension fund organizational structure situation with respect to active vs. passive and internal vs. external asset management can influence persuasive framing effectiveness. Also, Howard-Grenville and Hoffman (2003) found that framing that included language of economic operational improvements helped facilitate the adoption of higher pollution control standards in a situation where employees were focused primarily on manufacturing efficiency concerns.

In sum, organizational research has documented that framing can move others, garner legitimacy, shape understandings, prompt change, and appease fears. At the core of frame effectiveness is the concept of resonance. The consensus in the literature is that “whatever frames actors use must resonate if audiences are to respond” (Williams, 2004, p. 105).

#### Framing Within Organizational and Business Ethics

Within organizational and business ethics (Nielsen, 1996; Sonnenshein, 2016), framing has been considered both as: (1) a means to facilitate dialogue and through the dialogic process to be mutually persuaded by the insights developed in the dialogic process (Gadamer, 1989; Nielsen, 1996); and, (2) as a means to intentionally persuade others to change behaviors and beliefs in particular directions (Sonnenshein, 2016). That is, framing as an independent variable has been considered as effective with respect to the dependent variables of: facilitating participation in dialog and mutual persuasion through the dialogic process; and, as intentional persuasive belief and behavior change of others by change agents.

Within philosophical treatments of business ethics (e.g., Nielsen, 1996), the dependent variable of participation in dialogic processes of mutual learning has generally been emphasized while in the social sciences, the dependent variable of persuaded belief/behavior change of others by change agents has been the focus. For example, within the latter social science persuasive advocacy category Sonenshein (2016) found that “[Issue] framing helps position the issue in ways that correspond to the interests, values, and problems of top managers...by selectively highlighting and concealing meanings to advance a preferred interpretation.”

As referred to in the Introduction to this article, common reasons employees give for why they do nothing about unethical business and organizational behaviors they observe are that they did not know what they could do that would be effective, they felt powerless, and that they were afraid (Hirschmann, 1970; Nielsen, 1973, 1996; Sharp, 1973; Argyris and Schon, 1988). As referred to above, organization studies has found that framing can be a powerful tool for shaping audiences’ understandings and behaviors when framing resonates with its intended audience’s values, beliefs, and/or interests. Potentially, appropriate framing can both improve business ethics engagement effectiveness and reduce the need to fear engagement.

With respect to a philosophical approach to business ethics engagement, Nielsen (1996) found that six different types of philosophy based dialogic methods that included various types of what in social science has been termed types of framing did facilitate dialogic consideration of ethics issues and subsequent behavior and belief changes. However, the philosophy based dialogic engagement methods were not explicitly linked to situationally appropriate social science framing theory.

With respect to business ethics framing, the emphasis so far has been on the ability of framing to persuade and mobilize audiences and participate in ethics dialogue with relatively little attention to situational ethics framing. This gap is important because the situational framing of an event and/or

issue may profoundly impact, both positively and negatively, both openness to ethical dialogue and subsequent behavior change as well as intentional persuasive ethical belief and behavior change of others by change agents.

There are also some important differences between the philosophical and social science approaches to situational business ethics framing. From a philosophical perspective, that “selectively highlighting and concealing” that the social scientist Sonenshein’s (2016) refers to as an important social science finding can be from a philosophical perspective a Sophistic ethics issue. This difference in emphases may be related in part to the traditional philosophical concern for mutually persuasive Socratic type dialogic inquiry relative to what is often considered within philosophy as manipulative Sophistic persuasive techniques. In philosophy, ethical means are often considered as important ends in themselves even if other unethical means are more effective with respect to achieving the ethical end of ethical belief/behavior change. Often, the social sciences, as a self-conscious form of science, focus more on describing, explaining and predicting with relatively less explicit normative evaluation of the ethics of means-ends processes and outcomes (Hyde, 2011; Arnett, 2011). Both dialogue and persuasion can lead to ethical belief/behavior change. Also, engagement methods that are effective with respect to gaining audience participation in dialogue can be considered to have a persuasive dimension in the sense that people are persuaded to engage in a dialogic process where participants can mutually inquire and learn from the dialogic process.

In this article, we consider both dialogic framing and persuasive framing as related types of business ethics engagement methods. Framing work within business ethics for the most part overlooks the contextual role of the social situational framing in influencing dialogue with and/or persuasion of audiences. To address this gap, in this paper we examine the role of social situational business ethics framing as an engagement method. More specifically, we argue that there can be interaction effects

among types of social structure situations, business ethics framing, and audience characteristic variables that influence how business ethics framing is deployed and received.

Our article: (1) recovers and adds Goffman's (1959, 1964, 1974) finding that it is important to consider multiple types of social situational framing factors; (2) to the audience characteristic based frame alignment processes of Snow and Benford (1988) that can achieve resonance with audiences; (3) to the business ethics dialogic framing of Nielsen (1996) and the social issues persuasive framing of Sonnenshein (2016); and, (4) extends the generalized work role social situation work of Giorgi and Weber (2015) and the organizational structure case of Himick and Audousset-Coulier (2016) to include three different types of generalized micro, meso, and institutional level social situational business ethics framing for engaging with business ethics issues.

### **A Typology of Situational Business Ethics Framing**

To remedy this relative gap in the understanding of situational business ethics framing, we argue for a more contextualized analysis of ethics framing and its outcomes. In recovering the situational framing work of Goffman (1974) and adapting it to social situational business ethics framing, we consider how: the deployment and the reception of business ethics framings are embedded in a social situation; and, how the norms and expectations of the particular social situation can help shape framing's ability to facilitate both ethical dialogue and persuasive ethical belief and behavior change.

To advance our understanding and following Goffman's general social science typology of micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis (Goffman, 1974; Gonos, 1977), we identify three ideal-types of social situations in which business ethics framing can be offered. More specifically, we are recovering what the sociologist Goffman (1959, 1974) from a micro sociological level perspective referred to as casual "everyday" framing and what the sociologist

Selznick (1957) identified and distinguished between the meso organizational level and the macro institutional level.

Three examples of multilevel archetypical business ethics social situations are identified that can help circumscribe what practices of business ethics framing are appropriate and effective within: (1) “informal, everyday” micro-sociological, individual level social situations; (2) more formal meso level organizational sociology “work role” interactions such as presentations and recommendations; and, (3) more macro institutional level oppositional, adversarial controversies or legitimacy crises. While there are many different types of micro, meso, and macro level social situational interactions that apply to business and organizational ethics, these three types follow Goffman and Selznick and are offered as illustration.

More specifically, the examples we are using to illustrate how these three archetypical social situations circumscribe the effectiveness of business ethics framing in fostering dialogic consideration of ethics issues and persuasive effectiveness are: (1) micro level casual social situations (Goffman 1959), such as conversations at the water-cooler and socializing at colleagues’ homes (Goffman’s “everyday framing”); (2) meso level organizational work role related interactions as part of one’s job, such as presentations, reports, and decision making discussions (Gioia, 1992; Martens et al. 2007; Himick and Audousset-Coulier, 2016)) (“work role framing”); and, (3) macro level institutional controversies or legitimacy crises concerning “oppositional institutional framing” (Selznick, 1957; Freeman, 1994; Nielsen and Bartunek, 1996; Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino, 2002; McCammon et al. 2007; Weber et al. 2008; Patriotta et al. 2011; Arjalies, 2012; Sonenshein, 2016).

While reality rarely falls into neatly defined categories, ideal types can be useful to advance theory (Emerson, 1850; Weber, 1904; Mayo, 1933; Nielsen, 1984, 1996; Lamont &

Small, 2008; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). By no means is this tripartite level typology meant to be exhaustive in capturing all the subtle, and not so subtle, influences that social situational business ethics framing can exert on ethical outcomes. However, it aims at providing a tool for making sense of research applicable to business ethics framing.

As referred to in the above literature review, there has been some business ethics framing research around the dialogic and persuasive effectiveness of business ethics framing practices concerning the ethics arguments that resonate with the beliefs and priorities of audiences (Nielsen, 1996; Nielsen and Bartunek, 1996; Howard-Grenville and Hoffman, 2003; Sonenshein, 2006; Sillance and Mueller 2007; Sonenshein, 2016; Desai and Kouchaki, 2017). Our paper contributes to extending research on business ethics framing by offering a contextualized social situational understanding of its effectiveness. Extant research tends to take stock ex post of resonance, without much consideration of the social situation in which business ethics framing unfolds. If the external environment is taken into account (e.g. Benford and Snow, 200; Weber, Heinze, & DeSoucey, 2008; Misangyi, Weaver, & Elms, 2008; Nielsen and Lockwood, 2016), it mostly refers to the broader historical milieu and macro institutional environment and still glosses over the more micro and meso norms and expectations of particular types of social situations – the “environment of mutual monitoring possibilities” (Goffman 1964, p. 135) or the types of particular contexts in which business ethics framing is offered and received.

The paper offers a more nuanced conceptualization of business ethics framing that can further current understandings of resonance. While the phrase of “ethics framing resonance” is currently used across different literatures, we suggest that its conceptualization and effectiveness depend on the particularized social situation in which ethics framing is deployed and received. Empirically, this distinction reflects the lived experiences of organizational members, both intra-



and inter-organizationally, who routinely engage in casual conversations with colleagues, write or present their work as part of their professional role, and communicate with stakeholders in the case of institutional level threat or controversy.

At the practice level, this typology can be useful to managers, leaders, change agents, and observers of ethically problematical behaviors within organizations who need to effectively engage with a variety of audiences and stakeholders across situations with ethical dimensions by bringing attention not only to the values, beliefs, and priority needs of that particular audience (Bitektine 2011), but also the needs and constraints set by each different type of social situation.

### **1. Micro Individual Level Everyday Business Ethics Framing**

Everyday business ethics framing – ethics framing deployed in the course of informal, casual business related conversations and interactions in, for example, socializing at colleagues’ homes, a coffee break, a walk from a parking lot, a child’s little league game – is about labeling an event or situation as informal (Goffman 1959). By doing so, everyday framing offers a common understanding between the framer and the audience about the nature of their at least somewhat friendly, safe, personal relationships that can influence behavior.

Examples of everyday ethics framing include “small narratives” with ethical dimensions that can be shared with fellow employees, customers, and suppliers in casual settings (Martens et al. 2007), informal exchange of opinions (Hecht and Becker 1997), chats on the phone (Schegloff 1968), and conversations in casual encounters in a car pool, on the street, or visits at people’s home (Goffman 1959).

Framing in everyday interactions can have significant consequences for actors’ ability to work together towards the achievement of a goal. Patriotta and Spedale (2009) have shown, for example, that in informal face-to-face encounters people use framing to manage their self-

presentation and make sense of situations. More specifically, in their analysis of a consultancy task force they found that if such informal self-presentations are accepted, a “working consensus” can emerge that promotes ongoing sensemaking. This study shows that people use informal framing to give away clues about themselves, and by doing so, also aim at gaining acceptance and acquiring information about the situation. In a sense, there is a partial merging of private life and public life dimensions.

According to ethnomethodologists, in everyday interactions talk is not scripted or constrained as a courtroom interrogation or a speech to the press or a formal presentation at work; they are more natural and unrehearsed conversations (Molotch and Boden 1985). Everyday framing can occur in “ordinary settings” where we know that we “are dealing with authentic conversation in the sense that what Dean says is a response to what Gurney says and so forth” (Molotch and Boden 1985, p. 275). This informal back-and-forth in the communication and dialogue between a framer and the audience leads almost to a “fusion” of the two roles: turn-taking between the two roles quickly turns the performer into audience and the audience into performer (Goffman, 1959; Gadamer, 1989).

Goffman (1959, 1964, 1974, 2005) first brought our attention to the fact that even in informal interactions people offer frames to open communication and influence others’ perceptions and evaluations concerning friendliness and non-aggression. Extant literature concurs that such framing is effective when it realizes a common ground and overlaps within and appeals to the audience’s ideas, beliefs, values, and expectations (Snow et al. 1986).

At a minimum, it appears reasonable that the general finding that framing is more likely to resonate with audiences when it offers and includes established, valued, and well know categories should also apply to informal, everyday business ethics framing. There is also some

evidence within the business ethics literature that people often compartmentalize ethics behaviors between informal vs. formal organizational social situations (e.g., Butterfield, Trevino, & Weaver, 2000). In addition, it has been found that people are more willing to consider controversial and higher risk issues such as an ethics issue in informal settings (Ellinger, 2005). Therefore, it may be even more acceptable, effective, and even necessary to include established, valued, and well-known categories when discussing controversial business ethics issues related to one's employment in informal settings where audiences accept and expect established, valued, and well-know categories (Butterfield, Trevino, & Weaver, 2000; Ellinger, 2005). More specifically, it is proposed that:

*Proposition 1: In informal social situation, business ethics framing is more likely to resonate with the audience when it offers and includes established, valued, and well-known categories that fit that informal social situation.*

This type of resonance is referred to as informal membership resonance, because by offering and including membership within an established and valued informal category, such business ethics framing allows for an appropriate categorization of a person, issue, or event, leading to more positive audience participation. More specifically, Goffman (1959) noticed that by regularly having dinners and socializing in one's home with colleagues, arranging one's home, and greeting guests according to the conventions of the "village" helped create an implicit informal social framing. In such an informal situation, the situation and host can be perceived as relatively safe and non-threatening settings for discussion of sensitive topics if and when the occasion arises where such a topic would be introduced and that would be more difficult to discuss in more public and formal settings.

For example, a social group of colleagues in a large transnational business company regularly have dinner with their spouses at each others' homes (Nielsen, 2013). Sometimes,

ethics issues about work come up in the conversations. Given the perceived informal setting and framing, colleagues are willing to discuss, when the issue occasionally comes up, what to do about unethical behaviors of employees within their own company and competing companies that make it difficult for their company and themselves to comply with company compliance directives. An effective solution that emerged from one of the informal dinner conversations among the colleagues at a home was adoption of the method of secretly threatening in a mailed letter to the CEO of the competitor company a threat to blow the whistle externally to the press and a regulator in the home country of the competitor company if the CEO did not stop his lower level company employees' unethical business ethics behavior, in this case, making extortion payments to government officials in exchange for contracts. This method was tried and succeeded in stopping the unethical behavior (Nielsen, 2013).

This idea of informal, “everyday” social framing is of course an old idea that goes back at least as far as Plato’s record of the Socratic dialogues that were held in the homes of friends where sensitive matters could be discussed more openly than in more public and formal settings such as a town/city meeting (Gadamer, 1989). There are many historical and current cases of such implicit and effective informal framings in business ethics situations that have, for the most part, not been discussed and theorized in terms of micro sociological “everyday”, informal business ethics framing.

For example, in 18<sup>th</sup> century Pennsylvania and New Jersey there were recurring cycles of conflicts between merchants who lent money, in effect merchant bankers, to farmers who purchased supplies and tools with loans from the merchant bankers (Woolman, 1818; Nielsen, 1993, 1998). When there were poor harvests, the poor harvests would result in a cycle of defaults

on loans which in turn resulted in cycles of increased interest rates and higher costs and more defaults.

The Quaker merchant John Woolman, perhaps most well know for his anti-slavery work, would have regular social gatherings with fellow merchants and farmers in his and others' homes that were primarily social. At several of these social gatherings, the issue of the recessionary cycles and resulting conflicts between merchants and farmers were discussed and potential solutions considered. Woolman believed that it was much easier to discuss such sensitive issues with ethics dimensions in informal social settings rather than in official, public settings such as formal and even legalistic town meetings.

A solution that emerged from one of the informal gatherings was for the local churches to guarantee the loans of the local farmer church members. This was tried and succeeded. With the Church community based guarantees there were few defaults. As a result, the merchants could offer much lower interest rates on loans, costs were lower to both merchant and farmers, and it was easier for the farmers to pay back loans from the merchant bankers.

This situation and informal business ethics social framing was repeated, rediscovered, and reinvented in the Punjab region of Pakistan in the 1950s through the 1970s (Nielsen, 1996). The Muslim textile manufacturer Chaudhry Mohammad Hussain had regular informal dinners at his home most Fridays when he invited both Muslims and Hindus for social gatherings, meals, and conversations. In this region of the Punjab, most of the farmers were Muslims, most of the merchant bankers were Hindus, and there were both Muslim and Hindu textile manufacturers. There were similar recurring recessionary cycles as existed in colonial Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

At one of these informal social gatherings, the sensitive issue of the conflicts between the Muslim farmers and the Hindu merchant bankers was raised. The conflict was particularly sensitive because of the ethnic and religion based civil war between Hindus and Muslims after the independence of India and Pakistan from the U.K. after WWII when hundreds of thousands of people were killed. For the Muslims in particular, the issue was also a religious ethics issue about charging and paying interest being unethical. It was also a practical and political issue as it was for the Quaker John Woolman as well as an ethics issue.

The causes of the recessionary cycles were discussed. However, a different solution emerged from the informal social settings than the one that emerged in colonial Pennsylvania and New Jersey. It was suggested that the Muslim manufacturer, Hussain, ethically should lend money to the Muslim farmers with no interest. Hussain asked about what benefit he would receive from doing as suggested. As the conversation continued he was offered first pick of the cotton the farmers grew in exchange for the no interest loans. Hussain accepted the offer as an experiment and received an advantage in high quality cotton which worked very well both for him and the farmers.

Seeing the success of this experiment, other manufacturers, both Muslim and Hindu, imitated offering no interest loans to the farmers in exchange for first pick of the cotton they grew. Within a generation, the Punjab became a very high quality producer of cotton at the level of Egyptian cotton and manufacturer of textiles and there was relatively little conflict between the Muslim farmers and the Hindu merchants in this area. The Hindu merchants were also happy to be out of the ethically and ethnically charged lending business since it so often resulted in violent conflicts. It appears that informal social business ethics framing played a useful role in this case as well.

In a very different setting and case, Erving Goffman's daughter, Alice Goffman (2014), found in an ethnographic participant observation study in Philadelphia where she was the participant observer that somewhat similar informal, everyday social framing facilitated dialogue and persuasion concerning the illegal business of drug dealing, drug consumption, and abusive behaviors of the drug dealers toward the women in their lives (Goffman, 2014; Van Maanen & de Rond, 2017). According to Alice Goffman, the women would meet informally at each others' homes to both implicitly and informally frame and discuss, among other things ethics problems with their sons and partners involved in the illegal drug business and their abusive behaviors to the women in their lives. These ethics issues could not be discussed in more formal, public settings because of fear of a very active anti-drug police presence.

Alice Goffman (2014; 99) found that: "Many women in the 6<sup>th</sup> Street neighborhood devote themselves to the emotional and material support of their legally compromised partners and kin, taking the protection of their partners and male relatives ... as part of their sacred duty as mothers, sisters, partners, and friends. But these relationships don't always run smoothly. Sometimes men break their promises, sometimes they cheat, in plain view of the neighborhood gossips bringing humiliation to women; sometimes they become violent."

With this informal framing and subsequent discussion of their mutual problems in the informal setting of each others homes, the solution emerged (Goffman, 2014:99) that: "At this point women may find that a man's legal precariousness can come in handy .... In anger and frustration at men's bad behavior, women at times harness a man's warrant or probation sentence as a tool of social control." According to Goffman, this behavior of the women was facilitated by the informal social setting framing and has both changed men's behaviors and saved men's lives in this type of business and situation. For example, sometimes after informal discussions among

the women, a woman was able to persuade her man to turn himself into the police for a minor warrant violation so that he could be safe in jail for a few weeks while a drug gang war was going on.

These cases suggest that in everyday, informal business ethics situations, even in the extreme case of a criminal and violent business, actors tend to favor business ethics framing that alleviates their sensemaking efforts by providing hints to the known, the valued, the non-threatening, the safe, and the familiarly communal. It is expected that this effect is stronger when ethics framing hints at membership in a category that the audience values, because such framing enhances both the credibility of the frame (Cornelissen 2012) and the framer (Benford and Snow 2000; Hovland and Weiss 1951), while fitting existing arrangements, beliefs, and membership. As Hartman (1996) and Eikeland (2008) have pointed out, for many people business ethics is defined for them according to their social group membership and it can be important that ethics issues are framed in a familiar and acceptable membership manner. More specifically, it is proposed that:

*Proposition 2: In informal social situations business ethics framing is more likely to resonate with the audience when it offers and includes membership in a valued category.*

These examples suggest that resonance is more likely to occur when informal business ethics framing indicates inclusion in a valued membership category. It is expected that this effect will hold in particular when a respected status order is well defined and known to the parties involved. When the respected status is not clear, it is reasonable to expect less effectiveness as actors struggle to establish accepted status (Gould 2003).

In sum, everyday business ethics framing is characterized by the role fusion of framer and audience and the relatively high bandwidth of communication afforded by interactions in the context of sensemaking, problem solving and the social performance in the situation of everyday,



informal situations. It is important to emphasize that everyday ethics framing processes are not void of conflict, but that conflict is about local interests and concerns, not primarily about institutional principles (Patriotta and Spedale 2009). The two propositions and cases set forth in this section suggest that informal business ethics framing in everyday situations can be an important tool for opening communications and engaging with ethics issues.

## **2. Meso Organizational Level Work Role Business Ethics Framing**

Within general framing theory, extensive work has theorized about the effects of everyday framing on audience's reactions to issues, situations, or people; but framing at the meso organizational situational business ethics level that is used to formally present one's work when there are important ethical dimensions to the work – “business ethics work role framing” – has not been explicitly theorized. Nonetheless, this social context is quite common and empirical work includes, for example, such areas as framing and work role related recommendations for an audience (Giorgi and Weber 2015) and entrepreneurs' stories to raise money (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001; Martens et al. 2007). In addition, empirical research shows that framing in work role situations can be quite consequential. Work role business ethics framing requires distinct theorization from everyday business ethics framing because it does not aim at defining a situation or collaboratively negotiating a relationship. Rather, it offers a practical, task-related reason to the audience for tuning in and listening to the framer's message including ethical dimensions of that message as they are task related.

The work role social situation in which business ethics framing is used is more scripted and formal than casual conversations. Work role business ethics framing consists of more than a simple label such as this is something we have in common, this is a threat or an opportunity for us. Business ethics work role framing is generally articulated around three main dimensions: a

focus with a business ethics dimension (what the frame is about, such as a firm, an industry, or a particular group with a work related ethics issue such as safety, a goal (what the frame is aiming to deliver, such as improved safety methods and results, and a set of forces that enable or impede the attainment of the goal, such as favorable or unfavorable political conditions, ethical, or unethical behaviors of competitors (Fiol 1989; Martens et al. 2007). These dimensions, which are adapted to the particular communicative needs of the work role situation, organize content and make it intelligible and predictable for the audience (Zerubavel, 1993).

In this work role situational context often there is little back-and-forth between the framer and the audience as there is in “everyday framing” (Goffman, 1959). Rather, the roles of framer and audience are distinct. The framer crafts a message to address an audience of clients, readers, viewers, or listeners who don’t immediately reply back to the framer. As a result, there is a significant difference between the more scripted narratives told within formal presentations to such audiences as lawyers, bankers, managers, consultants, accountants, technology specialists (Martens et al. 2007, p. 1109) and the casual conversations engaged in with employees, customers, and suppliers in their everyday life, with implications for framing effectiveness.

Recent studies that examine framing in these more formal and scripted job related communications have found that work role framing, when effective, influences perceptions of the prospects of a work role recommended alternative and leverages its ability to acquire resources (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001) and similarly, the safety and financial attractiveness of a particular industry or firm for investors (Groysberg et al. 2008). In these social situations the framer formally addresses the audience in the performance of the framer’s professional job to discuss a particular topic with an ethical dimension. It is expected that the audience’s needs and interests relative to the work role of the presenter play a significant part in framing effectiveness.

For example, Dobbin (2009) documents how, after the introduction of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, firms faced the need to modify their ethical and legal practices and structures within the new legal and political environment by offering programs and practices that responded to firms' and environmental needs. Human Resources managers in their specialized roles as human resources managers ended up "inventing" equal opportunity programs and defining anti-discrimination practices in action. The following is proposed:

*Proposition 3: In work role social situations business ethics framing is more likely to resonate with the audience when it is functionally related to such audience's job related needs and interests.*

For example, Robert Greenleaf, the author of *Servant Leadership* (1977), without reference to framing theory but in his work role at the time as a staff Human Resources Vice President of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company was instrumental in the integration of women into management careers at AT&T before the 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed (Nielsen, 1996, 1998).

Greenleaf did not order the nine geographic regional line managers of AT&T to integrate their hiring and promotion practices. For one thing, he did not have the power to do so. The regional line managers were, in effect, the CEOs of very large subsidiaries of AT&T and Greenleaf was, in reality, a lower level staff HR V.P. Instead, he used work role business ethics framing as part of a combination of dialogic and persuasive method that resonated with the line managers.

He framed his requests for meetings with the regional line managers as requests for their helping him to better understanding what he considered a puzzle concerning why AT&T was the largest business employer of women in the U.S., but had no women managers beyond low-level supervisory roles. He asked the line managers for their insights concerning what might be

problems or obstacles within the human resources system that might be, in effect, excluding women from managerial careers.

He did not accuse the line managers of unethical discrimination. Instead, he traced with the line managers cases of women who appeared to have managerial potential, but did not become managers. In this dialogic, problem identification and problem solving method, he found with the line managers that there was an obstacle in the management training program concerning the requirement to rotate through a field management training course where, among many other things, managerial trainees were required to be able to lift and carry 50 pound bales of wire along with the operations workers in the field. That aspect of the training program dated back to the days when crews of men manually lifted telephone poles and heavy bales of wire as a normal part of their jobs. Women were excluded because it was believed by the male managers that they could not regularly do this type of physical work and that field operations work and experience was considered a necessary prerequisite for a managerial career at AT&T.

Greenleaf and the managers designed and conducted an experiment where 25 pound bales of wire were used in a training program. Both the women and the men could lift the 25 pound bales and both preferred the 25 pound bales relative to the 50 pound bales. When it was found that in the revised training programs with the 25 pound bales that the women performed just as well as the men, that both the men and women preferred the 25 pound bales, and that there was little total cost difference between production of tens of thousands of 25 and 50 pound bales, the management training program was changed and women were regularly selected for managerial careers. In effect, the line managers learned from and were persuaded by this job and business ethics related experimental experience that was facilitated by the job related framing.

Similarly, Branch Rickey in his job role as General Manager of the then Brooklyn Dodgers was instrumental in gaining approval of the Board of Directors of the Dodgers to hire the first Black baseball player, Jackie Robinson, for a Major League baseball team. That precedent led to the racial integration of Major League baseball in the U.S. (Austin, 1997).

As in the Robert Greenleaf-AT&T case, Branch Rickey, without reference or awareness of framing theory, nonetheless framed his request to the Board of Directors as an economically motivated part of his job as General Manager to recruit high performance and low cost baseball players (Austin, 1977). He explained to the Board that since the Dodgers did not have nearly as much financial resources as the other New York baseball teams, in order to compete effectively, an economic strategy of recruiting high performance and low cost Black baseball players made great economic sense. Years later, Rickey also indicated that he was personally concerned with the broader business ethics and civil rights issue of racial discrimination, but he thought it was more appropriate and effective to, in effect and at that time, frame his request in relation to his functional cost/benefit work role.

Also, Gioia (1992) in his analysis of the Pinto automobile fires case and Argyris in his analysis of the Challenger explosion case (Nielsen, 1996; Vaughan, 1996), suggested that job related presentations that considered long-term legal costs and reputational risk factors related to the ethics safety issue might have better resonated with the work task related short-run cost/benefit decision making that, at the time, were not explicitly linked and framed as related to work task and ethics issues.

It is proposed that:

*Proposition 4: In work role social situations business ethics framing is more likely to resonate with the audience when it is functionally related to the practical work conditions under which audiences interpret and use such framing.*

Given the specialization of work roles, a specific work role audience does not aim at learning a variety of information from a particular work role presenter; rather it expects to tune in to specific news or advice related to that work role. For example, a recent study of architecture firms' written pitches offers some support to this claim by showing that when an architecture firm would frame the client's problem as not only aesthetic and cost effective, but also building with a safety perspective and framed the presentation as the architectural work role that could solve those problems (Jones et al. 2010, p. 188), it was found that this frame was more likely to resonate with the audience and win client engagement than an unrelated work role. The frame of safety – traditionally associated with part of the professional ethic of architecture – was more effective at persuading clients than frames that attempt to highlight issues of regulatory compliance or business concerns about costs, time, and efficient service delivery that might be perceived as outside the competence of the architect.

Similarly, Gino and Margolis (2011) found that when managers framed an ethics issue as accident loss prevention that was a key part of the presenter's work role, this was more effective in achieving resonance with organizational audiences than not making that functional work role connection. These examples illustrate the impact of the social situation of work role on business ethics framing effectiveness by showing that resonance is not solely about an appeal to any of the audience's needs, values, or beliefs; rather, business ethics framing is more appreciated when congruent with the framer's work role that has a specific relationship to the ethics issue. The following is proposed:

*Proposition 5: In work role social situations business ethics framing is more likely to resonate with the audience when it fits functional expectations of the framer's work role that are related to the ethics issue.*

To summarize, work role business ethics framing is characterized by a clear articulation of framer and audience specialized work roles related to the ethics issue at hand and a focus of communication in the context of an exchange that is more formalized and scripted and job related. Work role ethics framing is a communications practice for making a functional transaction or exchange run smoothly and for satisfying the pragmatic interests of the participants with respect to the specific ethics issue. The work role ethics exchanges are meant to satisfy the work related informational and ethical needs of an audience. Although the motivation for action is also pragmatic and interest-based it is also related to the ethic of the work role, it is suggested that the deployment of a symbolic resource such as business ethics framing can influence audience openness and communication receptivity. More specifically, if a framer fits the expectations of the framer's work role with its specific types of ethical responsibility and can hint at satisfying the needs and constraints of the intended audience with respect to that job related ethics issue, that can then resonate with such audience and garner favorable outcomes.

### **3. Macro Institutional Level Business Ethics Framing**

Unlike the micro level casual settings of everyday framing or the meso level organizational specialized work role framing, macro institutional framing is used in circumstances of change, conflict, or crisis to propose a more macro "worldview" and motivate action for or against a particular ethics or social cause (Benford and Snow 2000). Research has shown that, even within organizations, frames about the external environment and the strategic direction of an organization are often championed and pitted against one another, leading up to "framing contests" that can influence the winning worldview (Kaplan 2008). Also, at the institutional level, there can be conflicting institutional ethics frames and logics that can result in different types of transformational change outcomes (Nielsen and Lockwood 2016).

Similarly to work role ethics framing, oppositional institutional ethics framing is more formally articulated along three main dimensions: the identification of a problematic ethics issue, the definition of a solution to such a problem, and the offering of a motivation for taking action (Benford and Snow 2000). For example, Diani (1996) showed how at a critical economic, social, and political juncture in the 1990s in Italy, the Northern League movement identified the “crony capitalism” political-economic ethics issue of corruption of the central government in Rome with its business cronies as the main problem facing the country, proposed the creation of a federal state as a solution, and motivated action in terms of growing financial difficulties and rising immigration and criminality.

Similarly, Dogme filmmakers in Denmark denounced the artificiality of Hollywood movies as a problem with an important ethical dimension, proposed shooting films with more meaningful scripts without gratuitous violence, sex, and special effects as a partial solution, and justified taking action in the name of increased realism and ethical authenticity (Rao and Giorgi 2006). In some settings, oppositional situations and ethics framing practices can also be highly institutionalized as a way of resolving and/or transforming conflict, for example in courts of law, political debates, or environmental controversies (Patriotta et al. 2011; Nielsen and Lockwood, 2016).

Macro oppositional institutional business ethics framing often goes beyond a definition of the situation or the presentation of a specific content because it aims at providing ethical meaning, instilling passion, and mobilizing others in support of a project of change or a particular vision with an important ethical dimension (Polletta 2006). While conflict is obviously a possibility both in casual and in work role situations (e.g., Patriotta and Spedale 2009), what characterizes this particular type of social situation is a more public, macro-level institutional



involvement in which the parties aim at garnering support for their particular vision with important ethical dimensions (Vaara et al. 2006).

Although social and ethical movements' frames can evolve over time in reaction to other actors' frames (Koopmans 2004), in this social context there is no immediate back-and-forth between the performer and the audience and communication is generally scripted. In fact, research shows that organizations can engage in a long internal debate on how to frame their ethical claims to external audiences (Benford 1993). The scripted nature of the interaction is also due to the fact that oppositional frames serve more than a function of simplifying and interpreting reality (Goffman, 1974); they aim at persuading others of the ethical appropriateness of a project of change (Anteby 2010; Powell and Colyvas 2008).

To emphasize the tight linkage between framing and change, Zald (1996: 262) defined framing as meaning-work, we would also include business ethics meaning work, that includes "specific metaphors, symbolic representations, and cognitive cues used to render or cast behavior and events in an evaluative [normative] mode." Empirical evidence has so far offered extensive support of the normative implications of institutional level frames. Research has shown, for example, that institutional level frames can shape an audience's normative evaluations (Navis and Glynn 2010), of the complex socio-economic ethics issues at play in a country (Diani, 1996), of a new social or ethical entrepreneurial organizational form (Tracey et al. 2010).

In circumstances of contested institutional change or conflict, business ethics framing effectiveness can hinge on resonance with the target audience's normative ethics, ideology, values, and ideas (Benford and Snow 2000; McAdam 1996). In a sense, much if not all contested change involves implicit normative ethics dimensions since there has to be at some level reasons why change alternative 1 is better than alternative 2. For example, the framing of "Gospel

women” was effective at bringing different groups of U.S. Catholic nuns of different traditions together because it was related to and appealed to their common religious ethical beliefs and responsibilities (Giorgi et al. 2014).

The social situation in which the processes of macro oppositional institutional ethics framing and counter-framing occur can further influence resonance because controversies and legitimacy crises often spillover beyond the initial issue cause of the interaction between two organizations. For example, the environmental ethics framing battle between Shell and GreenPeace over the offshore disposal of Brent Spar in the North Sea involved the media, government officials, and the general public. Even if Shell’s ethics framing presented a solution that was technically better for the environment, GreenPeace’s ethical framing prevailed because it was able to connect with broader societal sentiments (Tsoukas 1999). In other words, the existing ethical image and narrative of GreenPeace as a pro-environmental ethics actor led audiences to overlook the empirical fact contents of the two organizations’ solutions and favor GreenPeace’s ethical framing and solution. Similarly, ethical concerns about the rising costs of electricity and declining economic prosperity can lead pro-nuclear framing to take hold even in traditionally “green” countries with high concern for environmental ethics narratives, such as in Germany (Patriotta et al. 2011). This was dramatically illustrated in Ibsen’s 1882 play situated in Norway, *“The Enemy of the People,”* where the medical doctor who blew the whistle about pollution from the main factory and business in the village was ostracized in favor of the short term economic benefits from the polluting factory.

A related case can be found in a teaching hospital crisis case (Nielsen and Dufresne, 2005). The ethics vision of the Dana Farber Cancer Institute and teaching hospital was and is “Compassionate care through research.” In 1994 there was a crisis. Dana Farber was conducting

an experimental treatment for metastasized stage 4 breast cancer. The risky treatment, which consisted of very high-dose chemotherapy and bone marrow stem cell transplants, had been shown to improve life expectancy threefold. The treatments involved five women who applied for and were accepted into the program and involved highly toxic drug dosages. A research fellow miscalculated the dosages for two of the women, resulting in the two women receiving four times the intended and already very high chemotherapy drug dosages. The miscalculation, which slipped past the notice of several doctors, nurses, and pharmacists, led to the death of one of the women, and permanent heart damage in the other women. As a result of these errors, numerous inquiries were mounted by internal and external bodies to investigate the causes of the mistakes. The fallout of this crisis at Dana-Farber was far-reaching. The Institute's bond rating was lowered, casting a cloud over its plan to construct a new research facility. The failure of the quality and safety assurance program became the subject of just the second joint investigation ever mounted by Massachusetts state agencies regulating hospitals, physicians, nurses, and pharmacists. The Institute and the research fellow faced multi-million dollar malpractice and wrongful death suits filed by the families of the deceased and injured women. An external accrediting panel downgraded Dana-Farber's accreditation from "full" to "conditional" pending the results of the investigation.

The investigatory interactions from the outside were highly adversarial. However, the response of the CEO was dialogic (Nielsen and Dufresne, 2005) rather than defensive or adversarial. The CEO framed the situation as a continuing challenge to the ethics mission of the institution of "compassionate care through research" that was continuing to be threatened by a difficult, multi-pressured environment. His approach evoked Giuseppe di Lampedusa's (1960) observation that "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change."

The CEO used a method very similar to Kierkegaard's "Opbyggelig" [upbuilding] dialogic method by framing the ethics dialog with both internal and external stakeholders in a frame of how the hospital might have to change in order to maintain and better adapt its ethics mission to a changing and more difficult environment. Among the changes made were: a strategic alliance with the Brigham and Women's Hospital that had an excellent record of patient care in addition to high level research; a new requirement for future Dana Farber CEO doctors who would henceforth have to have extensive clinical experience as well as research achievements; and, the Dana Farber became one of the first hospitals to the adopt the new profession of physician "Hospitalist" who does little research but a great deal of patient attention and care. This ethics re-framing of the crisis as less oppositional and adversarial than dialogic, and creative transformation of the mission and organization in order to maintain its tradition in a more difficult environment was resonant with all stakeholders and led to a very successful transformation and maintenance of the Institute's mission.

It is suggested that:

*Proposition 6: In social situations of oppositional institutional crisis or controversy, ethics framing is more likely to resonate with the audience when it connects with existing and generally accepted ethics narratives.*

Similarly, the Slow Food movement attracted attention and enjoyed membership growth in Italy in the 1980s and 1990s not only because it resonated with a national love for high quality food, but also because it tapped into growing ethical narratives and fears about the spread of fast food, food frauds such as the methanol wine scandal, and genetically altered food (Rao and Giorgi 2006). An implication of institutional ethical narrative resonance is a tendency for movements and cultural entrepreneurs to categorize in their stories others as either friends or foes of one's project of ethical change. Since oppositional framing is often characterized by the

identification of an enemy (e.g., McAdam et al. 2001) against which forces need to be united and mobilized, the interaction between organizations often turns into a normative framing dispute or contest (Benford 2013).

It is suggested that in these ideologically and normatively fraught adversarial situations not only what is claimed, but also who makes a claim influences frame effectiveness. Extant research has shown that frames that are perceived as in line with their audiences' experiences tend to be more effective at opening dialogue and mutual problem solving (e.g., Benford and Snow 2000). It is further proposed that business ethics framing effectiveness is also influenced by the fit between the identity of the framer and an ethics narrative frame; in other words, when these two elements are aligned, such an alignment should play a significant role in corroborating one's claim. For example and as referred to above, GreenPeace's ethical reputation and narrative as a pro-environmental actor made its claims against Shell more effective independently of the technical quality "facts" of their claims. Similarly, a new identity for U.S. Catholic nuns as "gospel women" resonated with ethics narrative claims about their centrality within the Church, glossing over the differences among different orders of nuns (Giorgi et al. 2014). Hence it is proposed that:

*Proposition 7: In macro institutional social situations of crisis or controversy, business ethics framing is more likely to resonate with the audience when the framer's ethics identity is seen as consistent with an audience's ethics narrative.*

In other words, as these examples suggest, when an actor is seen as epitomizing a cause with an important ethics dimension, business ethics framing relating to that cause are more credible than framing by an actor that is seen as having shifting and opportunistic narratives. In sum, oppositional framing challenges taken-for-granted meanings and justifies alternative institutional arrangements, and exposes the contradictions and ambiguities in the status quo

(Clemens and Cook 1999; Greenwood et al. 2002). To the extent that oppositions take on a binary structure – “us” vs. “the enemy” in the contested narratives– they also allow potential allies to unite and develop a shared identity (Weber et al. 2008). Through oppositional ethics framing practices, actors seek to construct a new social reality “by producing identities, contexts, objects of value, and correct procedures...that shape what can be said and who can say it” (Hardy et al. 2005, p. 60). It is proposed that such business ethics framing is more likely to resonate when it can connect with existing institutional ethics narratives and interpretations of salient events and is in line with the framer’s identity and related institutional ethics narratives.

### **Conclusions**

An important problem in business ethics is that employees and observers are often afraid and do not know how to effectively and safely engage with business ethics issues and cases in hierarchical business organizations where engagement might be interpreted as critical of top management and/or colleagues. However, there are ameliorative methods such as social situational business ethics framing that can help open opportunities for ethics dialogue and persuasion.

The article reviewed key parts of the framing literature from philosophy, sociology, organization studies, and business/organizational ethics. The literature review revealed that general framing theory and research found that framing that aligned with audience characteristics helped framing effectiveness. The literature review also found that this type of relationship held across micro individual, meso organizational, and macro institutional levels. Further, framing theory and research found that framing alignment with audiences that produced resonance with the audience increased effectiveness.

A literature gap was found that indicated that while general framing theory found that appropriate social situational framing at the micro individual, meso organizational, and macro institutional levels further increased framing resonance and effectiveness, there was relatively little application in the literature to social situational business ethics framing. Our article developed propositions about how to apply social situational framing at the micro, meso, and macro levels to social situational business ethics framing. In addition, several cases from a wide variety of business ethics contexts and levels were offered as illustrations and support for the propositions.

In particular, it was suggested that micro everyday business ethics situational framing is more effective at resonating with its audience when it offers hints to the known, the familiar, and the non-threatening rather than the reverse. This effect is stronger when business ethics framing references a valued category, belief, or membership.

Meso level organizational work role business ethics framing, a less theorized area in business ethics, but a quite common type of business ethics situation, occurs in more formalized and scripted situations. Since the motivation for action is mostly pragmatic and job related, it is suggested that it resonates with its intended audience when it appeals to audience's job related needs and interests, shows an understanding of its work demands, and fits expectations of the framer's specialized work role, competence, and relevant work role related ethics dimensions.

Further, macro level institutional business ethics framing can inform a worldview with ethical dimensions and garner allies to translate this vision into a reality. In situations of institutional level controversy or conflict, business ethics framing is more effective and ameliorative when it shows a correspondence with existing institutional ethical narratives or

interpretations of salient events at the time and when the audience perceives a congruence between the business ethics framing and the ethics identity or reputation of the framer.

In sum, through this situational business ethics framing typology we contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of resonance, beyond the simple appeal to the audience's beliefs, interests, and values. By doing so, this theoretical framework strikes a middle ground between heroic representations of individual business ethics agency – focused on actors' choices and ability to mix-and-match cultural bits and pieces to achieve their ethical aspiration – and the traditional and more macro sociological emphasis on structure, which brings attention to how individuals have very little space for choice within the macro reproduction of meanings. As such, this paper is meant to complement, rather than contradict existing work on business ethics framing and framing effectiveness.

A significant – and timely – engagement implication of this work for managers, leaders, observers, and change agents is: “know thy situation”, in addition to “know thy audience”. With greater connectivity comes greater responsibility to communicate appropriately and effectively across a variety of social situations. We believe that this paper provides a step towards a greater understanding of the positive role of contextually informed situational business ethics framing in delimiting the discursive terrain in which effective communication can be crafted and sustained; as well as a step towards helping overcome the problem that engagement with business ethics issues is necessarily adversarial instead of a persuasive and/or dialogic co-discovery, co-construction, and emergence of a contextual business ethics truth.



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